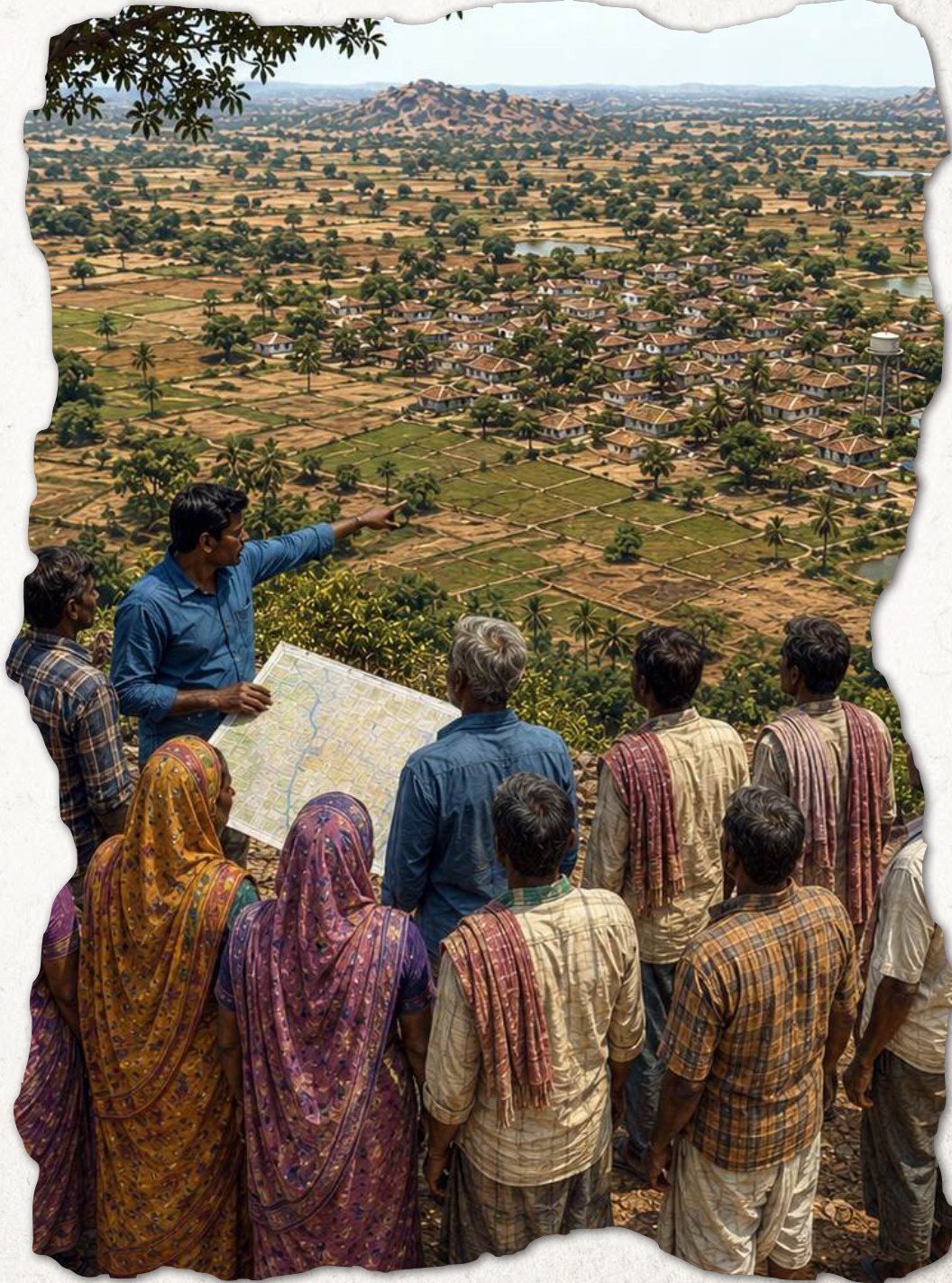


UNDERSTANDING A LANDSCAPE TO PLAN ITS RESTORATION



This playbook is intended for field practitioners, community mobilisers, village elders, frontline officers of different government departments and leaders of community-based organisations.

The purpose of this playbook is to build a common understanding of rural landscapes to help restore them.

DEFINING THE LANDSCAPE

Landscape is a clear, defined extent of area, visible to the naked eye.

A landscape is not just land. It is a socio-ecological system where nature and humans interact. The landscape is influenced by distinct ecological, historical, economic, and socio-cultural processes and activities.

FACILITATION TIP

Use the bird's eye view exercise. Ask participants to imagine they are an eagle flying over their village. What do they see? Where does the forest end and the farms begin? This helps transition from my field to our landscape.

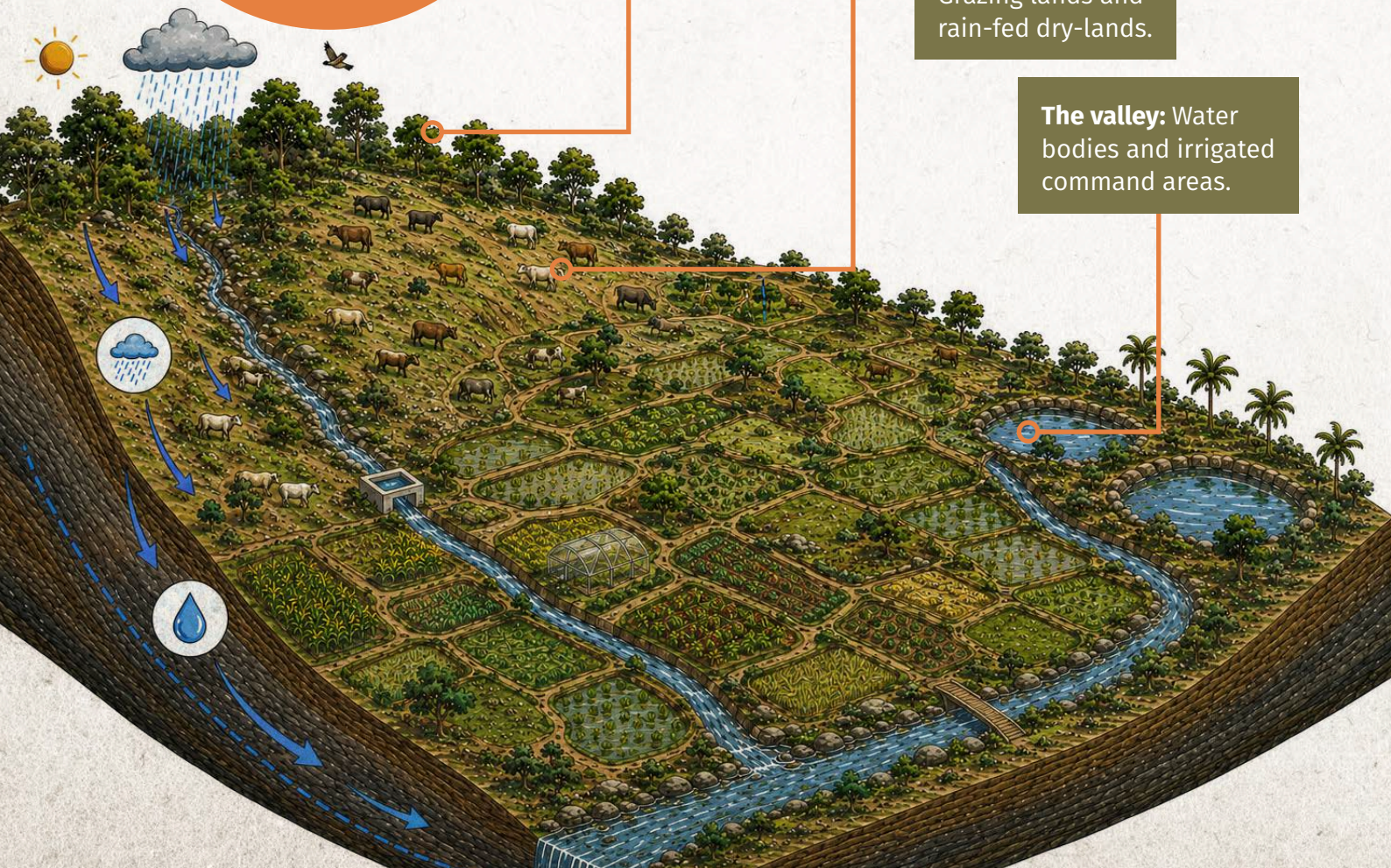
MAPPING THE INTERLINKED ECOSYSTEMS

The topography of most landscapes in rural India usually follows the Ridge-to-Valley transition.

The ridge: Usually the Commons (forests/scrub).

The mid-slope: Grazing lands and rain-fed dry-lands.

The valley: Water bodies and irrigated command areas.



WHAT IS A DEGRADED LANDSCAPE?

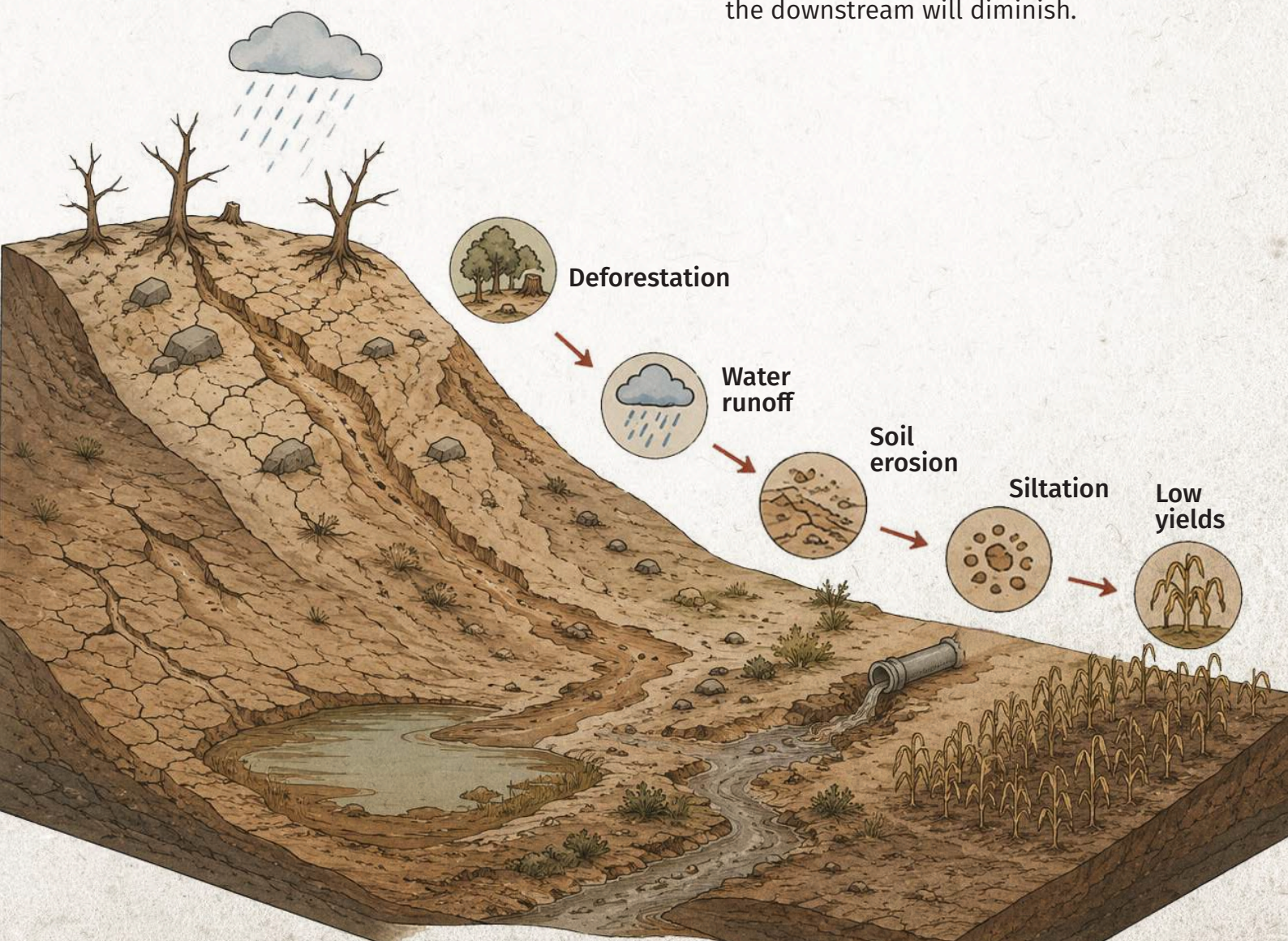
A degraded landscape is an area of land that has lost its natural productivity, biodiversity, or usefulness due to human activities or natural processes. It represents a decline in the quality and functionality of an ecosystem.

FACILITATION TIP

Perform a muddy water demonstration. Pour water on a bare slope of soil and show how the topsoil washes away. Then pour it on a patch with grass/roots to show how the water stays clear.

Characteristics of a degraded landscape

- If the Commons on the ridge are destroyed or degraded, the relationship between soil and the roots breaks and when it rains, top soil washes off and gets translocated into other ecosystems downstream
- Same is the case with farmlands devoid of field bunds and tree cover
- All the top fertile soil gets washed off and accumulates in the water bodies, eventually reduces water holding capacity and Crop yield in the downstream will diminish.

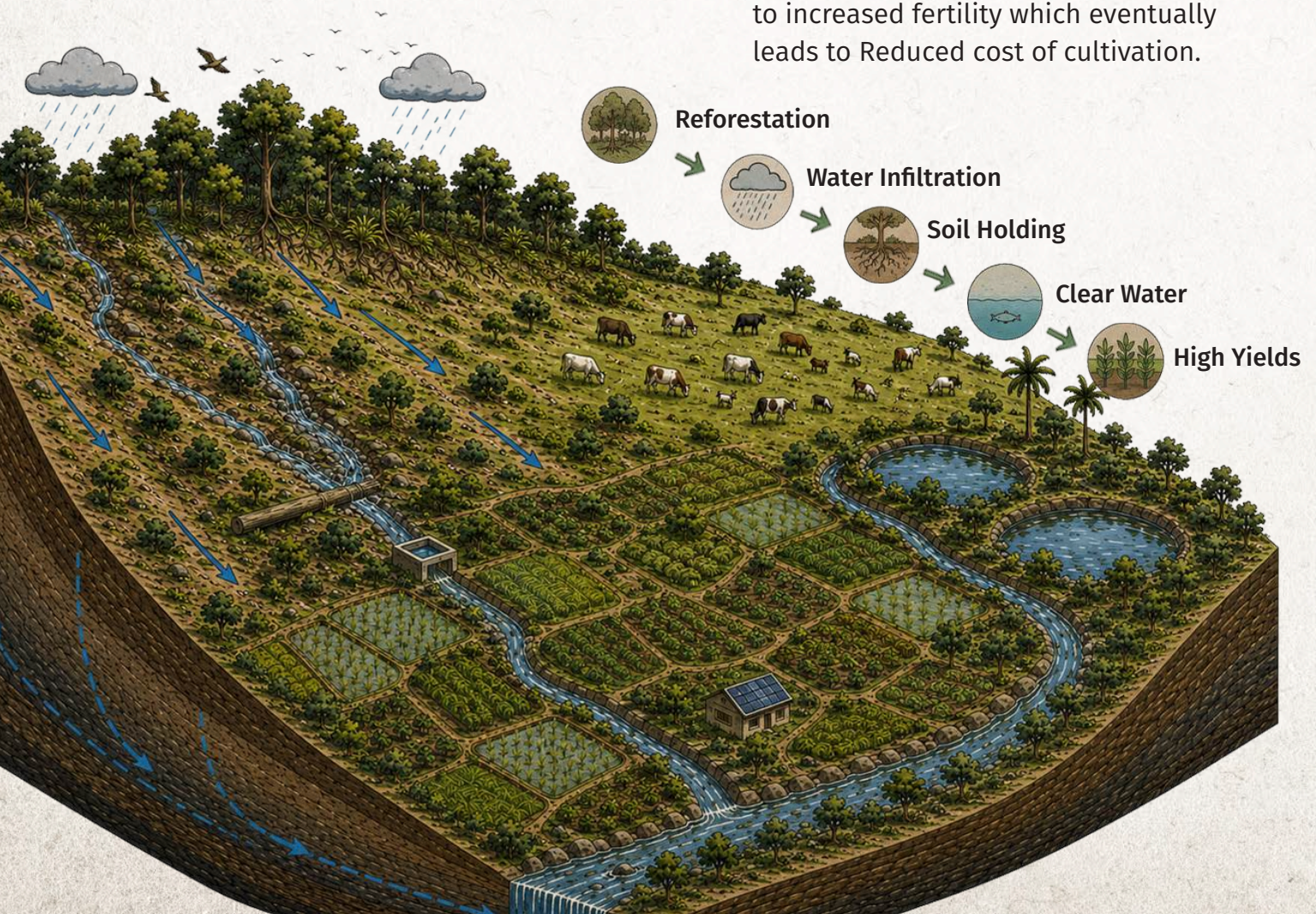


WHAT IS A RESTORED LANDSCAPE?

A restored landscape is a land area where the biological and physical processes have been restored so the ecosystem functions effectively again. In simple terms, it means the soil, water, and plants are working together to sustain life without needing constant human intervention.

Characteristics of a restored landscape

- Rich biodiversity of flora and fauna in Commons
- Increased availability of water in tanks and other water bodies that ensures water security for livestock and domestic needs
- Recharge of groundwater and safe drinking water throughout the year
- Enough fodder for the livestock. During drought, rearing of livestock becomes a more secure source of livelihood in the form of liquid cash than crop production
- Increased fodder availability translates into more dung and urine which goes back to the farm lands as manure aiding in enhanced crop yields (circularity)
- More greenery will make available enough Green Leaf Manure that adds to increased fertility which eventually leads to Reduced cost of cultivation.



TWO COMPONENTS OF LANDSCAPE RESTORATION

Mere laying of earthen or concrete check dams is not landscape restoration. It is a holistic process that requires the simultaneous restoration of:

1. **Social processes:** The institutional architecture (people, rules, and governance).
2. **Ecological processes:** The biophysical infrastructure (soil, water, and biodiversity).

If you neglect the social processes, the ecological structures will not be maintained. If you neglect the ecological processes, the social interventions will have no resource base to govern.

Key government programmes requiring an understanding of landscapes

- Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP)
- Desert Development Programme (DDP)
- National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC)
- National Biodiversity Mission

For more details, please also refer to the playbooks on Integrated Landscape Management (ILM).



Common Ground

Common Ground is a collaborative systems change initiative in the domain of environmental governance and rural livelihoods in India, jointly led by several organisations and anchored by a secretariat organisation, called Living Landscapes. Common Ground leverages the unique opportunity presented by the Commons to address three interconnected crises of our time – livelihoods, climate, and social equality – by integrating a socio-ecological narrative into mainstream development models. Through a collaborative action framework, Common Ground focuses on ‘field setting’, so that entrepreneurial action by multiple actors is accelerated and multiplied, seeding the ecosystem with institutional apparatus and a distributed network of change leaders, to set the stage for sustainable impact beyond the scope of any single initiative or organisation.

Scan here to know more.

