All Things Shared

MAY- AUGUST 2026

Common Ground

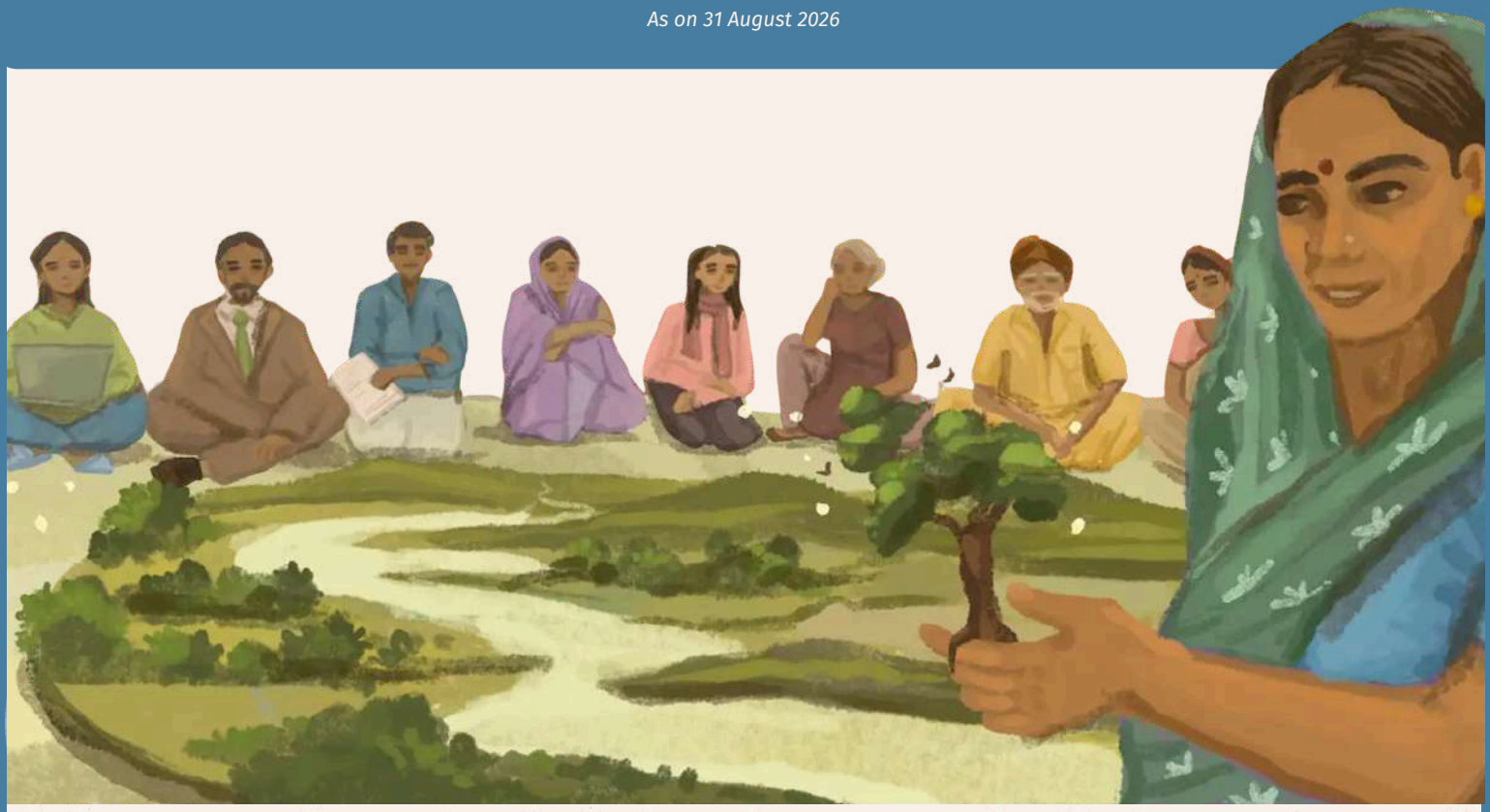
A periodic update from across the Common Ground Initiative, this edition of All Things Shared reads four months of work together to trace how the pieces connect, and what they add up to: how methods travel between landscapes, how work moves from pilot to policy, how finance reaches the ground, and how digital and non-digital tools and methods take shape alongside each other.

120
LANDSCAPES

80
INITIATIVES

94
PARTNERS

As on 31 August 2026



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From May to August 2026, landscape partnerships across Jharkhand, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu moved from facilitating multi-actor dialogue towards ensuring that coordinated action translates to tangible ground-level outcomes. This included an explicit focus on building the capacity of local actors to anchor and facilitate community-led landscape governance and action planning. PESA implementation in Jharkhand advanced from Cabinet approval to a functioning Project Management Unit spanning 100+ villages and 10 districts. In parallel, community-led planning matured into finalised guidelines for integration of Village Poverty Reduction Plans with Gram Panchayat Development Plans across Jharkhand, Karnataka, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu.

The transition from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G prompted a collective effort to understand and navigate the programme in favour of communities and landscapes. In the landscapes where the bamboo village initiative has taken root, the period brought concrete financing through concerted efforts, including a USD 42.2 million facility from the Asian Development Bank for the Northeast via the National Bamboo Mission. Within that envelope, the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority proposed USD 12.8 million for village-level bamboo-based processing centres, set out in a Detailed Project Report developed with the support of Common Ground.

Partners advanced work on the governance of digital systems, through the lens of data and information as a knowledge commons and embedded in socio-economic and ecological realities.

The Collaborative also turned its attention to evolving the collective governance and improving ways of working both within Common Ground and the larger ecosystem. An internal exercise on the Collaborative's narrative infrastructure surfaced where partners align on values, where the gaps lie, and where they diverge on how the Collaborative itself is defined. The results of the third Annual Partners' Survey offered a similarly candid read: strong trust and a clear value proposition, alongside clearly articulated priorities. It reveals a relationally strong network that increasingly acts as a force multiplier for impact. While diversity, trust, and peer convening remain core strengths of the initiative, adaptive learning and strategic agility need to improve, highlighting a need for more responsive mechanisms and learning-action loops.

Together, these strands show the Collaborative deepening its models, developing approaches to work at scale, and unlocking new financing mechanisms while asking important questions of how we work together.

Landscape level platforms and multi-actor coordination

In June, partners met in Bangalore to collectively understand how multi stakeholder processes actually get built. Atmashakti's community networks, Jharkhand's legal activation under PESA, FEVOURD-K's civil society federation, and the Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies' (CRISP) state-led action were set side by side and worked through. What the comparison established is that the difference lies in the anchor, i.e. who initiates and holds the process, while the operating conditions each approach is building toward are the same: multiple actors holding the landscape together, a knowledge system the community owns, and a community-led planning process. Since then, each partner/ network has been engaged to sharpen its landscape approach, with the support shaped around the context each operates in.

July answered a different question about *what* a multi stakeholder process produces once it exists. In Kalahandi, Odisha, dialogue around women's agency initiated through the district Multi Actor Platform led to the establishment of a self-managed Women Resource Centre in Nuamunda village. Supported by Seba Jagat, the centre now serves as a community platform for accessing entitlement information, exchanging traditional seeds, and renting farm equipment. The learning is being carried into block-level Multi Actor Platforms and shared among landscape partners as a template for strengthening women's voice in local governance.

The approaches for multi stakeholder processes are being socialised in multiple ways across the states. The Centre for Youth and Social Development and Common Ground co-facilitated a three-day workshop in August for participants from four diverse landscapes on the 'Purpose-People-Process' framework, as a way of moving from village-level projects to interconnected Landscape Community Action Plans. In the Sundarpahari–Littipara landscape (Santhal Pargana region), Common Ground convened four local partners, working as the "synapse" that facilitates information sharing, joint field visits, and resource pooling. Abhivyakti Foundation, Badlao Foundation, PRADAN, and Sarva Seva Samity Sanstha (4S India) have planned a joint Yatra to better understand the needs of local communities in the coming month, and enable informed and coordinated action among partners and other stakeholders in the landscape.

Multi-stakeholder processes also took shape beyond the landscape scale during this period. In Jharkhand, a state-level coalition led by Abhivyakti Foundation, Welthungerhilfe, and Common Ground brought diverse stakeholders together to enable cross-sectoral coordination across the agroecology and food system space. The dialogue saw participation from government departments, NGOs, Farmer Producer Organisations, community groups, and allies from the hospitality sector, legal fraternity, and media.

A dedicated Climate Cafe was also organised to engage youth in the dialogue. These efforts resulted in the collective mapping of cross-sector stakeholders into a living document, and an agreement to establish a centralised virtual library covering research, Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials, and policy guidelines.

Working with community and civil society networks

In Meghalaya, a reflection workshop with the Syrwet U Barim federation, representing communities from landscapes of the Living Roots Bridges, surfaced their priorities from an institutional standpoint: stronger collaboration with the Department of Planning, and the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority, and the revival of a centre for learning. A facilitated conversation between the federation and the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority followed, aligning priorities on both sides. MegREAP, a cell established under the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority for regenerative economy-based enterprises, is working with the federation to build a joint action plan and a detailed roadmap for institutional strengthening.

In collaboration with FEVOURD-K, a federation of civil society organisations in Karnataka, Common Ground worked with the member organisations to design a landscape action framework owned by local communities and anchored by civil society organisations. Federation partners from every district in Karnataka contributed inputs anchored in a landscape approach and co-developed contextually grounded District Action Plans, bringing the landscape thinking and practical approaches to integrate it into their efforts across the state.

In Kandhamal, Odisha, Common Ground is working with the Antaranga Network towards institutional strengthening by building linkages within the landscape. Jagruti, a local NGO already working in proximity to the network, agreed to serve as its Resource Support Organisation, mentoring the network and acting as a resource hub.

Across multiple landscapes in Jharkhand and Odisha, peer-to-peer exchange was facilitated among catalysts: landscape-level actors, often field team members of civil society organisations, who work closely with local communities and enable community-led action around landscape governance. Through spaces like the *Addas* and Solver Jams, catalysts were able to engage in peer learning and joint solutioning for community and civil society actions. These spaces and dialogues are being aligned with seasonal calendars to facilitate timely and relevant action. For instance, catalysts across landscapes were able to share how they work to prevent forest fires in peak summer, sharing locally adaptable models for others to learn from.

Strengthening ecological governance through cultural practices

In Kolhan, Jharkhand, Kalamandir facilitated the *Jal Yatra* initiative along the Ro Ro River system. Through river walks, hamlet-level consultations (tola sabhas), and Gram Sabha dialogues, local communities collectively mapped pressures on grazing lands, forests, and biodiversity, establishing a low-cost, relationship-based template for community-led landscape restoration, that spotlights traditional ecological knowledge.

Similarly, the *Vrukshya Rakshya Bandhan* campaign facilitated by SEWAK expanded from a local village practice into a multi-district movement linking cultural tradition with community-led environmental governance. The initiative originated during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in Jhurimal village, Odisha, where women who were unable to travel to maternal homes planted trees instead and tied *rakhis* around them as a symbol of life-long care. This year, the campaign scaled across seven districts in Odisha, reaching 178 villages, and mobilising over 3,000 women and girls to pledge lifelong care for their Commons.

ENABLING POLICIES AND FINANCIAL FLOWS TOWARDS EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Embedding community priorities in planning processes

In Jharkhand, forest governance was brought into the purview of the Panchayats' annual planning instrument. A workshop on the integration of PESA and Gram Panchayat Development Plan hosted in May by PRADAN and the Foundation for Ecological Security introduced the Panchayat Advancement Index as a data-backed planning tool, and laid out steps to embed Community Forest Resource management into Gram Panchayat Development Plans. This integration enables forest management to garner Panchayat funds and attention on the same footing as roads and infrastructure.

Further contributing to such integration, the Anandpur (Odisha) pilot facilitated by the Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP) on strengthening convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions and Self Help Groups produced a consolidated study, alongside guidelines for reparing Village Poverty Reduction Plans and protecting the Commons through Gram Panchayat Development Plans. In the same month, Odisha developed its own guidelines to integrate the Village Poverty Reduction Plans and Gram Panchayat Development Plans, and Karnataka finalised participatory Village Poverty Reduction Plan guidelines alongside operational modalities.

In June, the Directorate of Rural Development in Tamil Nadu approved extending the initiative to localise Sustainable Development Goals from a 34-Panchayat pilot to 370 Panchayats across 15 districts. In parallel, the Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP) supported the operationalisation of the Government Order on convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions and Community-Based Organisations across the same Panchayats. Towards this, they designed processes for constituting resource panels, defined selection criteria, developed training curricula, and recruited Block, District, and State Resource Persons.

Building institutional capacity for policy and programmatic implementation

The Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP) and the Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS) co-hosted the *Decentralised Governance Learning Series* – capacity building programmes for local functionaries covering topics such as the Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals, and the 16th Finance Commission and its application to local governance to ensure grassroots action aligns with state policy priorities.

To view the sessions, click here.

Following an executive order from Jharkhand's Department of Panchayati Raj, the PESA Project Management Unit, anchored by the Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP) and Common Ground, progressed from initial setup to securing formal Departmental approval for the State Action Plan. The initiative operationalised a pilot across 100+ villages, 50 Gram Panchayats, and 10 districts, supported by a real-time tracking dashboard, Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials, and a training curriculum. Alongside this, Azim Premji University committed to developing PESA and local-democracy training curricula, orienting civil society organisations statewide, sensitising 2,000 community cadres (*Abua Sathis*), simplifying PESA Rules into Hindi and tribal languages, and identifying community champions as local facilitators.

The PESA Project Management Unit in Jharkhand conducted Training Needs Assessments in Kanke and Pakur with Panchayat Secretaries, Mukhiyas, Gram Pradhans, and Block Development Officers, which established a clear feedback loop. It generated evidence on the institutional and capacity barriers affecting PESA implementation, such as limited Gram Sabha awareness and tensions between customary and elected governance structures; these findings are set to inform a more targeted Gram Sabha capacity-building design.

FROM COLLECTIVE LEARNING TO COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Unpacking a policy transition and opportunity: VB-G RAM G

In July 2026, the VB-G RAM G Act replaced MGNREGA, changing how much work is guaranteed, who funds it, how it is allocated and how it is delivered. This change lands on every partner working in rural India at once, and has necessitated collective learning and joint strategising to enable all of us to navigate the new landscape effectively and coherently.

Common Ground's survey of partners helped establish related concerns, which then set the agenda for a Dialogue co-hosted with Libtech under the *Common Ground Knowledge Series* that brought together voices from research, policy, and grassroots implementation to unpack the new rules. The purpose was not to brief partners on what had changed but to work out collectively what civil society organisations can do to keep rural communities at the centre of this transition.

Six roles emerged from the Dialogue. Tracking the impact on the ground with independent data was identified as a critical role, in order to understand whether and how employment is affected in terms of numbers of people who are able to get work.

The next role that civil society organisations are well-positioned to undertake is building the capacities of four key functionaries who will carry the transition on the ground: the Gram Rozgar Sahayaks, the mates, the block-level technical officers and the associate programme officers. Their understanding and buy-in is key to ensuring that local communities are well-supported and that the plans prepared under the new Act continue to address local needs and priorities. Further, supporting accountability on the ground by working with social audit units to undertake regular audits and report ground realities back to the government can serve as a timely feedback loop. Another equally important role is engaging with rural communities directly to help them navigate what has already changed, and enable them to take informed action. Alongside this, building evidence of the durable ecological assets the programme creates would ensure that the narrative goes beyond "digging work". Underpinning all of these is the opportunity to help shape and engage the system itself, through these initial phases of design and operations.

One of these roles is already visible in practice. PRADAN had been using the Commons Connect tool to build community-designed project reports and file them into the Yuktdhara portal, VB-G RAM G's core GIS planning tool, shaping how the community demands are centred and meeting the "scientific data" requirements of the system.

The full recording of the session is available here.
The note with key takeaways is here.

Enabling stronger governance and financing systems

In Jharkhand, following the initial draft guidelines for Own Source Revenue being submitted for expert review, the rules were then redrafted to align with the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act and Rules, the PESA Rules, the 16th Finance Commission recommendations, the Model Gram Panchayat Bye-laws and practice from other states. Written beside the statutory architecture, these would have been another set of rules; but by embedding it within, they open a credible pathway for Panchayats to access 16th Finance Commission performance grants.

In conjunction with the PESA Sahayaks mandate of ensuring population- wide entitlement access in Jharkhand, Common Ground and SETU launched a Community of Practice on the iECHO platform, creating a foundation for capacity building of Panchayat functionaries and frontline workers on effectively delivering entitlements to local communities.

CREATING SPACES FOR EQUITABLE NEGOTIATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND MARKETS

Developing and mobilising landscape finance mechanisms

The feasibility study with the Centre for Youth and Social Development, Harsha Trust, and NABARD identified three routes for climate-smart agriculture financing: direct lending by the State Bank of India, community-led lending through the corpus held by Mission Shakti's Cluster Level Federations, and SBI's Swayam Siddha scheme. By August, SBI's senior technical leadership completed a field assessment that validated local partners' capabilities, and an initial cohort of farmers had repaid in full, following which the bank expressed interest in extending the framework to 1,000 farmers. A dashboard tracking the initiative reached 25 stakeholders across seven civil society organisations and Farmer Producer Companies, putting the monitoring system into active field use.

Infrastructure capital for the Bamboo Village initiative was secured in the Northeast. In June, the Asian Development Bank's Board approved a USD 42.2 million Small Expenditure Financing Facility for inclusive and sustainable bamboo value chain development across Northeast India, structured as a sovereign loan to the Government of India and routed through the National Bamboo Mission. Within that envelope, the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority has proposed USD 12.8 million for village-level bamboo-based processing centres through a Detailed Project Report that Common Ground supported in developing, aligned with the Bamboo Village model. A high-level review in Bangalore the same month aligned Bamboo Village Trust, Human Ventures, Vrutti, Catalysts, and Living Landscapes on the architecture of a Special Purpose Vehicle for large-scale bamboo investment. Further, discussions with UNDP's Sustainable Finance Facility (SFF) team progressed to support the Special Purpose Vehicle's design, formation, and establishment in Meghalaya, with UNDP ready to move ahead.

Partners also tried to solve the question of how communities can cover the years before bamboo returns arrived; this was pursued by exploring public and philanthropic finance mechanisms in parallel during the period. A structural answer has begun to emerge: an agroforestry model developed for Boipariguda that brings Individual Forest Rights and Community Forest Rights lands into a complementary frame, opening bamboo-based activity on farm boundaries while retaining shared lands under Community Forest Rights for sustainable Non-timber Forest Produce management. Work is underway to address the institutional and legal requirements to anchor this model within existing community planning processes.

In parallel, the work on risk cover closed a learning loop. The Non-Timber Forest Produce Parametric Insurance initiative secured an IRDAI-registered commercial term sheet under the Param Mitra Suraksha Policy, with United India Insurance as underwriter and Howden as broker, establishing a framework of weather triggers, satellite indices, and premium structures that pays out on measured conditions rather than on assessed loss. Field consultations in Koraput then surfaced affordability and demand realities that are now shaping a more accessible product for forest communities.

Advancing the bamboo value chain across geographies

The Seven Enabling Conditions framework of the Bamboo Village model, originally developed for the Ramgiri cluster in Odisha, was field-tested in July for the first time in the Ganol catchment in Garo Hills, Meghalaya. The framework helps develop a detailed plan by assessing the essential conditions for a Bamboo Village, mapping risks, and planning mitigation strategies. The field assessment in the Ganol catchment helped further shortlist two sites, by confirming the availability of viable bamboo species, existing community bamboo reserves, and strong community interest. This was a clear instance of a method developed in one landscape traveling to and supporting decision-making in another. The next step is running a Rapid Rural Appraisal, and, if shortlisted, a detailed 7EC assessment in these two sites.

By August, the work in Meghalaya moved to institutionalising the model. A detailed implementation process was submitted to the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority for adoption, and a standardised operational blueprint is being developed for the 10 prioritised geographies, while the Umling pilot produced a resource assessment and scaling plan with an identified local champion, Mr. Sylvious Malai. The work also began reaching outward, through exploratory Meghalaya–Maharashtra technical linkages, and engagement with the with different industry chambers such as the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, the Mahratta Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA), and the Indian Merchant Chambers (IMC) on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) growth and domestic manufacturing. Efforts were undertaken to bring the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority into these discussions, alongside other important institutions such as Association of Furniture Manufacturers & Traders, India (AFMT), SBI Foundation, Tata Trusts, and Reliance Foundation.

In Koraput, Odisha, the work was built on different ground, where the bamboo sits on Community Forest Rights land held by communities rather than on sites selected for development. In June, taxonomic documentation of local bamboo species began, establishing what is actually growing there. By August, nursery operations had moved into active sowing.

The Champion model is now being tested in both bamboo landscapes. In Meghalaya, a draft Expression of Interest to onboard Bamboo Village Champions went under review by the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority and the State Bamboo Mission. In Koraput, Odisha, conversations with potential Champions from the paper industry, bamboo entrepreneurship, and agroforestry sectors indicated strong interest in community-champion partnerships, benefit sharing, and sustainable harvesting.

Alongside the grounding work for the Bamboo Village model, a preliminary Bamboo Market Opportunity Assessment spanning agarbatti, paper pulp, biochar, and carbon finance sharpened the commercial argument, and a practitioner-led Solutions Circle worked through bottlenecks and viable business models. Early buyer discussions followed, including ITC, Bamboostan, AkvoTransiro etc.

Strengthening community institutions and market-enabling ecosystems

In Koraput, Odisha, community-led governance was strengthened across 22 Community Forest Rights areas, with a dedicated management committee established, a Training of Trainers completed for village leaders, and taxonomic documentation of local bamboo species underway. Alongside this, in June, the *Jangala Katha* convening in Koraput, organised by SPREAD, brought together 200 participants including the Bonda, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, and produced a declaration calling for recognition of forests as cultural heritage, implementation of Community Forest Rights, fair pricing for Non-timber Forest Produce, and greater leadership of indigenous women.

The same month, a diagnostic of 17 Farmer Producer Companies across Jharkhand and Odisha gave partners a clear read on gaps in governance, financial systems, and operational readiness, while value-chain mapping for Non-Timber Forest Produce identified production volumes and linkages that could support collective aggregation.

The ecosystem around those producers was being assembled in parallel. Collaborations with Human Ventures and Krishikan enabled integrated models combining crop-specific practices, agronomy support, traceability, direct procurement and financing, focused on turmeric and ginger intercropping alongside commercial cultivation of Coleus, a high-value medicinal plant suited to Koraput's climate. A joint field visit with Krishikan across three Farmer Producer Companies promoted by the Centre for Youth and Social Development, Pragati, and SPREAD secured off-take commitments across turmeric, ginger, pulses, groundnut, and specialty Kala Jeera rice. Negotiations moved close to agreement on a major procurement arrangement with Pragati's Farmer Producer Company.

The work on price information was sharpened through feedback loops. A pilot completed by Ecociate with WOSCA in Keonjhar and SEWAK in Sundargarh tested price alerts regarding dried mahua flower and tamarind shared with Non-Timber Forest Produce collectors. This surfaced actionable feedback, including a limited data baseline, high manual effort, and government bodies already committed to existing Minimum Support Price reporting channels. Consequently, the Ecociate team is pairing continued field evidence with systemic engagement, taking the case to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Centre for Youth and Social Development, and developing a Standard Operating Procedure and modular toolkit so the approach can be replicated by new partners. By August, a comprehensive toolkit was released for review by anchor organisations and local partners.

CATALYSING COLLABORATIVE ACTION AMONG AND ACROSS CIVIL SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT BODIES, AND TECH INITIATIVES

Mainstreaming the co-creation and adoption of public goods

The Panchayat Advancement Index, a Ministry of Panchayati Raj framework, was introduced to partners in May as a data-backed planning tool, during the workshop on PESA–Gram Panchayat Development Plan Integration. By June a first version of a dashboard built on it had been developed to sharpen landscape-level understanding of localised Sustainable Development Goals, and tighten alignment between policy, programme, and practice. Block and district authorities across Odisha and Jharkhand are now using that dashboard to assess Panchayat performance under localised Sustainable Development Goals and aspirational district programmes, so it serves partner planning and government assessment at once.

The Know Your Landscape tool coverage reached 404 tehsils and in parallel, 50+ stewards across the Centre for Youth and Social Development, NIRMAN, and Reliance Foundation were trained on CoRE Stack's tools, taking the total number of stewards trained on CoRE Stack tools to 557 across 9 states. Further, CoRE Stack demonstrated the Commons Connect tool to the Ministry of Rural Development, with integration into the Yuktdhara portal under discussion. In parallel PRADAN is already using Commons Connect to build community-designed project reports and file them into the Yuktdhara portal; 280+ such reports have been filed so far. Further work is underway to strengthen the integration of Commons Connect with the VB-G RAM G processes. The goal is to streamline it and increase adoption through NGO partners and potential endorsement from the government.

Common Ground partners continued the foundational work of building the frameworks for governance of data and digital information systems as knowledge commons. Defining practical approaches that centre the agency of communities in design and the use of tools and data are important elements of building the field and ensuring that rapidly advancing technologies continue to serve communities and their needs and don't merely treat them as users and subjects. CoRE Stack took its proposed Data Sharing and Governance Norms to the Community of Practice for partners to work through and deliberate on. In parallel, Aapti Institute in collaboration with Common Ground published a report *'Reclaiming Digital Infrastructure for the Commons: Community Participation and Data Governance.' (see highlight).*

To view the Community of Practice session by CoRE Stack, click here.

Additionally, in this period a joint study was initiated by Common Ground with the Boston College School of Social Work, the International Food Policy Research Institute, and Dharinya Systems Change to examine how communities, local NGOs, Gram Panchayat members, and government officials engage with and adopt digital tools and knowledge systems, and whether these enable or hinder community-led governance of landscapes, with a particular focus on interrogating women's access to these tools and whether or not it has any bearing on their voice, agency and effective participation. This study will help surface opportunities and challenges in adoption of digital tools by communities and governance institutuions.

BUILDING A NEW PARADIGM FOR DATA GOVERNANCE

Designing digital infrastructure for the commons

Existing public datasets need to be made accessible and interpretable by local communities who live within these landscapes. The knowledge and data that already reside within communities need to become part of how these systems understand the landscape, alongside the more formal, technical understanding built through mapping and monitoring. The knowledge and data collected and created by the various NGOs working in this space also need to be integrated into these systems. At the same time, the interests of communities have to be protected: their rights over their own data, and their ability to govern the systems built around it, cannot be an afterthought.

To help the field navigate this challenge, Aapti Institute, in collaboration with Common Ground, mapped the approaches that already exist globally for public interest technologies. The report, 'Reclaiming Digital Infrastructure for the Commons: Community Participation and Data Governance,' examines digital public infrastructure, free and open-source software, and data cooperatives and collectives, drawing out the best practices, challenges and opportunities of each from global precedents.

There are many important insights in the report for anyone looking at creating digital infrastructures for scale:

- Governance belongs inside the system. It has to manifest in the access controls, consent mechanisms and licensing that put local rules into effect.
- Scale through federation, not uniformity. Shared standards can coexist with local variation, letting systems grow without forcing one approach onto every context.
- Design for the lowest common denominator – offline and mobile-first, and collection of essential data points only.
- Data control needs to be collective, not only individual. In Commons governance, the risks and benefits of data use are shared, and individual consent doesn't address it.

- Shift authority from centralised coordination to distributed, community-anchored authority as local capacity grows – with community representation built in from the start.
- Intermediary institutions, particularly CSOs, play a continuing role in translating between community priorities, technical design and policy, and that role needs sustained support.
- Establish legitimacy through small pilots before scaling. Start with well-chosen pilots, and measure success by sustained use and trust rather than reach or adoption numbers alone.

What we are learning is that this path has to be built one step at a time, guided by a clear set of design principles, and by the critical questions we will need to keep asking ourselves as a Collaborative as we design digital systems meant to serve local communities. We may not have all the answers yet, but asking the right questions and agreeing on some common principles and rules is where this critical work begins.

The report was launched online in conversation with Astha Kapur (Co-founder, AApti Institute), Aaditeshwar Seth (Professor, IIT Delhi, and Co-founder, Gram Vaani & CoRE Stack), Chiranjit Guha (Manager, Foundation for Ecological Security), and Vinod Sankaranarayanan (Head, Digital Health and DPI, Thoughtworks).

View the full report here.

Sustaining shared learning across the ecosystem

A growing number of Structured Communities of Practice running on the Common Ground iECHO Hub have been a recurring mechanism the Collaborative has used to build shared understanding and capacity among partners, cadres, and NGO and government functionaries.

The learning sessions co-facilitated by the Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP) and the Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS) evolved into the *Decentralised Governance Learning Series*. They hosted multiple sessions on the Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals and on the newly accepted 16th Finance Commission's recommendations, to work through what they mean for local governments and how they can strengthen village-level governance.

To view the sessions, click here.

The same recommendations were shaping the Own Source Revenue redraft in Jharkhand in those weeks, so partners were informed of this developing opportunity. The other session is the Community of Practice on social protection being organised by SETU that has been running to strengthen entitlement systems and institutional coordination. One of SETU's sessions on social protection also helped gather partners' experience on entitlements that fed directly into SETU's report for NITI Aayog. Living Landscapes in collaboration with Libtech hosted a dialogue for CSOs on the VB-G RAM G policy and its implementation. This dialogue helped participants think through what civil society organisations can do to keep rural communities at the centre of the transition from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G. The insights from this session are helping inform the next steps in engaging with the policy.

To view SETU's session, click here.

These 3 examples cater to the growing need to convene dialogue and learning platforms and carry the insights forward into collective strategy, capacity enhancement, and implementation. In parallel, Badlao Foundation, Seba Jagat, and SEWAK continue to use Common Ground's IECHO Hub for conducting ongoing capacity building for their teams spread across districts.

Strengthening collaborative orchestration

Two distinct exercises gauged the Collaborative itself across these months, from different lenses. First, on understanding and strengthening narrative infrastructure (the narrative underpinnings of the Collaborative), anchored by Jennifer Strachan and facilitated by Dalberg Catalyst. Second, the third Annual Partners' Survey was completed, throwing light on key areas of alignment, highlighting the Collaborative's strengths, and surfacing specific areas for more concerted action.

The former exercise began with in-depth interviews with partners to several consultations and workshops that discussed the findings of the report and identified next steps. Effort is now underway to identify specific tracks that can address these priorities, and strengthen action at the landscape level as well as across the Collaborative.

With regard to the latter exercise, the highlight on the next page provides a summary of the findings and insights.

Listening and learning together: insights from the third annual partners' survey

Partners point to tangible value from being part of the Collaborative – citing opportunities for networking and peer exchange, platforms for engaging with government and policy, access to innovation, tools and shared public goods, and a growing sense of avenues for scale and reach. 97% of the respondents see Common Ground as a force multiplier (up from 87% in 2025), and 66% credit it with driving improvements in voice, agency, and inclusive governance.

The survey also shows that the Collaborative is relationally strong. Trust, diversity, and convening are consistently named as strengths, and cross-partner dialogue and access to shared knowledge stand out as what's working best. 80% of the respondents cited this as distinctive, with iECHO, Communities of Practice, and the monthly/quarterly factsheets named as valued channels of learning and communication.

Partners who experience the Collaborative as agile also tend to trust one another more – the two reinforce each other. Notably, a partner's sense of achieving broader impact through the Collaborative holds largely independent of trust, and of how partners rate the backbone organisation's (Living Landscapes) coordinating role. This suggests that a shared sense of impact is a defining strength of the Collaborative in its own right.

Adaptive learning surfaced as a space that can be strengthened; partners are keen to see reflections and learning emerging from the dialogues within the Collaborative translate to adaptation. Engagement with markets and with governments on community-led natural resource management is still taking shape, and partners see considerable scope to build and shape this together. Governance within the Collaborative is seen as participatory, and most partners feel able to raise disagreements, though several noted this rests on individual relationships more than on institutionalised processes. Partners also want more deliberate attention to whose voices shape strategy, with women's leadership in landscape-level processes being specifically flagged.

An encouraging sign is that a handful of partners are emerging as orchestrating nodes – an early, welcome sign of a maturing, more distributed Collaborative.

Alongside this progress, a few important signals are emerging that merit close attention – whether the support functions are keeping pace with the Collaborative's growth, matching it in rhythm and agility; and whether results are so far confined to the enabling conditions being created, or are beginning to percolate down to the ground. Attending to these signals stands out as an area to collectively prioritise moving forward.

Growing the Collaborative

The Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), previously a partner in the alliance, strengthened its role in the Collaborative through an MoU. Further additions to the Collaborative include Boston College, Dharinya Systems Change, and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

Strengthening the narrative around Commons, commoning, and community stewardship

India Development Review published "Why the commons need community-led data" in English and Hindi, examining how community-generated data can strengthen Commons stewardship, by supporting decision-making, enabling communities to assert their rights, and making visible the customary ecological knowledge that formal systems rarely recognise. The piece concluded an eight-part series by India Development Review in collaboration with Common Ground on Commons governance.

Read the full series here.

Land Conflict Watch launched 100 Stories of Commons, an initiative documenting how communities across India protect, govern, and sustain shared landscapes, through collective stewardship, traditional knowledge, and local governance.

Read the stories here.

The Living Root Bridges in Meghalaya reached the national conversation following their mention in the Prime Minister's Mann Ki Baat. Seven pieces across six national and regional publications (English and Hindi, print and digital) reached an estimated ~46 million people. Coverage spanned the Times of India (national print, all editions, plus digital), major Hindi titles (Dainik Bhaskar, Prabhat Khabar), and South India outlets, consistently framing the story around community-led stewardship with government as an equal partner.

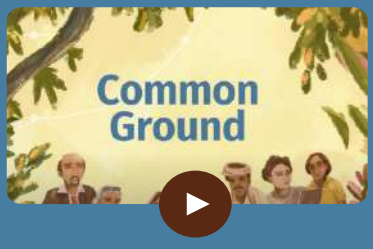
A two-part podcast series curated and launched by Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies featured Common Ground Convener Jagdeesh Puppala in conversation about a lifetime of work on stewardship of the Commons. The conversations delved into his upbringing in rural India, his connection to nature, and what it takes to build collaboration between communities, researchers, technology, and government.

Listen to the full podcast series here.

The Common Ground Annual Report 2025-26 launched — a look back at a year the Collaborative shaped together. It was an important one, not because we solved the problems we set out to address, but because the relationships built over time began to show results in diverse ways, and taught the partners more about what it really takes to work across communities, organisations, and initiatives towards a shared purpose. The report serves an account of that journey: what began to shift, what we collectively learned, and what questions we are still holding as we move ahead.

Read the 2025-26 Annual Report here.

Common Ground



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