

Common Ground

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026

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LETTER FROM THE CONVENOR

Dear friends,

The year gone by has been an important one for Common Ground. Not because we have solved the problems we set out to address, but because some of the relationships and initiatives we have been building over the last few years have begun to show results in different ways. It has also helped us understand better what it takes to work across communities, organisations, and initiatives towards a common purpose.

Our work is rooted in the Commons that serve both critical ecological functions and the communities that depend on them for agriculture, livestock, water, and forest produce. During the year, we saw some of these efforts move beyond individual initiatives towards influencing larger systems. In Jharkhand, the promulgation of the PESA Rules, greater devolution of resources to Panchayats, and the formal recognition and resourcing of the Gram Panchayat Help Desk model were important developments. The work around CAMPA also contributed to public resources being directed towards restoration. In Meghalaya, the work with the government and partners on bamboo moved towards a model that could potentially be expanded to several parts of the state. In Koraput, Odisha, we began testing new ways of connecting finance with ecological and livelihood outcomes. Alongside this, initiatives such as KaBhumM!!! in Kerala began making the lived experiences and realities from landscapes more visible, leading to some of these conversations entering wider policy discourse.

This year also showed us that relatively modest interventions can sometimes influence much larger flows of public resources. The recognition and budgetary support for the Gram Panchayat Help Desks, the use of CAMPA resources for restoration, and the District Mineral Funds are examples of this. In these efforts, Common Ground brought together ideas and evidence from the ground, the experiences and connections of partners, and relationships with the government to help existing resources respond better to community and landscape priorities.

The Common Ground Collaborative itself has also grown. We are now 91 partners strong. But the number is less important than what is happening between them as well as how the organisations are influencing others in their ecosystem. We have seen more partners initiate work together, bring different capabilities to a problem and take on responsibilities beyond their own organisational mandates. At the same time, this experience has shown us the limits of the model. Partners have different capacities, priorities, and ways of working. Some Working Groups have found it easier than others to sustain collective action, and Living Landscapes continues to play a larger role in convening and orchestration than was originally intended.

Moving from a collection of organisations working around a common purpose to a genuinely distributed Collaborative with several orchestrators will take time, but we are on a sound footing.

We have been conditioned to look at parts and miss the whole – whether in education, public administration, or the wider solutions ecosystem. As Common Ground forges ahead, we must continuously and consistently try to embrace 'systems thinking' – sometimes as a gestalt switch in perspective, and at other times by building bridges between dominant domains, mindsets, and behaviours, but always bending the curve.

Across the broader ecosystem, we are seeing mixed signals. On the one hand, public programmes are being reorganised and the funding landscape is turning more uncertain. On the other, there are signals of growing interest in climate action, technology, and innovative financing. These shifts make it essential that we remain clear about what we are trying to achieve. For Common Ground, the key question is not merely how to bring more resources into the sector, but how resources – both existing and new – can strengthen the socio-ecological systems that rural and tribal communities thrive on.

This leads us to several questions we want to address in the coming year. How do we make the models that are emerging more accessible and adaptable? How do we make the voices and agency of women and other marginalised communities more central to the way the Collaborative works, and not only to the outcomes we seek? How do we become better at recognising, early enough, what is working, what is not, and where our efforts are best placed? And how do we build a Collaborative where leadership and initiative are more distributed, where Living Landscapes does not have to be at the centre?

We do not have complete answers to these questions. But perhaps that is also part of what Common Ground is becoming – a space where we can work on difficult questions together, learn from what is happening across different places, and change course when the evidence tells us that we need to.

I am grateful to all our partners, colleagues, communities, and supporters who have contributed to this journey. I look forward to continuing to learn and work together.

Jagdeesh Puppala
Convenor

THE COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

> **Common Ground is a collaborative of diverse actors working across initiatives, organisations, and sectoral boundaries aimed at strengthening collective stewardship of landscapes – with the predominance of Commons (shared forests, pastures, water bodies), and self-regulating institutions. Living Landscapes convenes this initiative, providing backbone support and fostering collaboration, shared infrastructure and learning, and amplified impact through distributed orchestration.**

Common Ground responds to the triple crisis of rural poverty, climate-induced vulnerabilities, and widening social inequalities through a system-wide collaborative action framework that brings together representatives of local community networks, Panchayati Raj Institutions, civil society organisations, government agencies, technology and market initiatives, academia, and think tanks to promote community-led planning and action for thriving landscapes and resilient rural livelihoods.

The initiative leverages the Commons – spaces where people's lives, traditions, livelihoods and self-regulating institutions intersect with ecosystems. Commons, public lands, private parcels, and the communities who inhabit them are seen as an interconnected landscape – one in which communities are the primary custodians and institutions of self-governance. Through rules, regulations, and norms – some locally evolved, others introduced – they collectively steward and conserve these lands at the village, inter-village, and Panchayat levels. This integrated approach helps in understanding and managing landscapes in ways that are ecologically sound, economically rewarding, and socially just.



SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COMMONS



Population Dependence

Over 350 million rural poor in India rely on the Commons for their livelihoods. But Commons sustain many more life forms – from livestock, birds, insects, and wildlife, to the trees, plants, and soil organisms that underpin the entire system.



Value

Commons hold immense, multi-dimensional value. Their economic contribution alone is estimated at INR 6.6 lakh crore (USD 90.5 billion) annually to rural poor households. Beyond this, they carry cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and countless other forms of value, much of which are yet to be identified and quantified.



Extent

Commons in India cover approximately 205 million acres. Seasonally, fallow lands open up as shared grazing grounds; seed varieties are also held as Commons. Groundwater flows beneath many land holdings as Commons. Commons, thus, are not just measured in acres, but in what a community chooses to hold together.



Self Governance

Commons are managed and governed through local self-regulatory institutions such as Gram Panchayats, Forest Rights Committees, Van Suraksha Samitis, and Gram Sabhas, alongside traditional arrangements of locally evolved rules, norms, and regulations passed down over generations.

The Common Ground initiative took shape through 2022 and 2023, as a seed group of 23 organisations coming together to identify the barriers and opportunities, and to co-design the strategy and ways of working needed to drive change at the structural level. Since 2024, the initiative moved from design to implementation – testing and refining its approach across community mobilisation, policy, markets, digital public goods, shared knowledge infrastructure, and communications, while exploring geographies and laying the foundations for structured collaboration. Over the past two years, the Collaborative expanded from 23 to 91 partners, and from 8 to 75 partner-led initiatives, as its strategic pathways took root across landscapes. As momentum grew and foundational frameworks took hold, results have begun to take tangible form – showing that a distributed Collaborative, working through relationships, shared evidence, and complementary strengths, can engender structural change.

VISION

Thriving Commons for ecological, social, and economic well-being.



MISSION

Collaborative action for thriving Commons in rural India.

THE STRATEGY

Common Ground's response is two-pronged:

- It engages with the structural barriers embedded in government, civil society, and market systems; and
- Builds the connective tissue that allows actors across these domains to act together.

The Collaborative focuses on building the collective capacity of the ecosystem, by bringing together the leadership and their rich experience, enabling dialogue and evolving a sense of collective resolve, besides co-creating knowledge products and spaces for lateral exchange that strengthen diverse actors in the field, and unlock the barriers to entrepreneurial action.

Landscape partnerships – collaborations between representatives of local communities, Panchayati Raj Institutions, NGOs, government functionaries, and others – serve as a critical interface for interlocution of local priorities and developments in the ecosystem. This civic architecture enables a bi-directional strategy: i) taking favourable global, national, and state tailwinds – such as policy moments and market signals – and grounding them in local capacity to leverage them; and ii) surfacing local voices and priorities to help shape policy and market engagements, as well as drawing out what is replicable from local action and moving it into new contexts and broader implementation.

Common Ground is currently 91 partners strong, each bringing different capabilities, long-standing relationships and credibility, building off one another's strengths, and leveraging complementarities.



THE PATHWAYS

Common Ground pursues four interconnected pathways to change. Each confronts a distinct structural barrier, and each is designed to strengthen the others.

1. **Advancing community-led governance of natural resources:** Building the agency of local communities and improving the coordination of community organisations, traditional community institutions, NGOs, and local functionaries, so that landscape governance becomes more rooted and inclusive, and local voices find expression in the implementation of large scale initiatives.

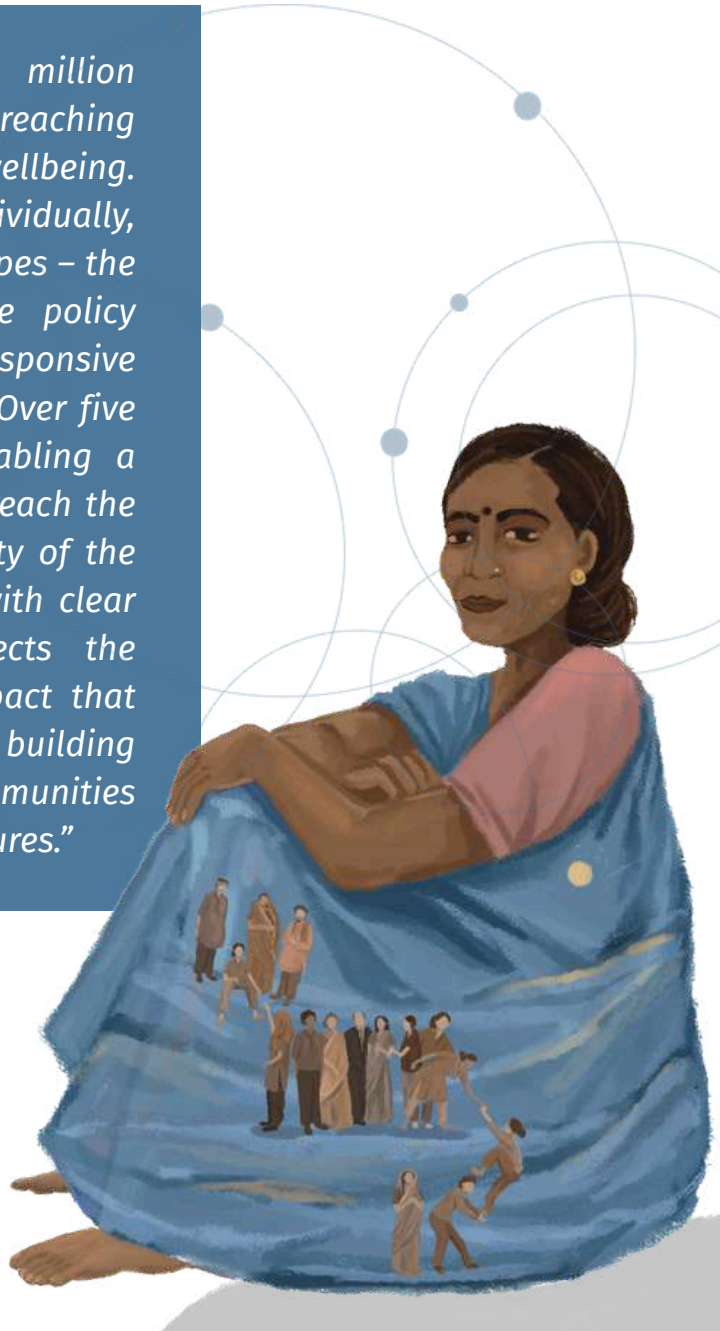
2. **Creating enabling conditions for policy and financial flows:** Aligning policy, practice, and finance flows towards ecologically sound rural development, and translating policy implementation to context-specificities and local realities.

3. **Creating spaces for equitable negotiation between communities and markets:** Creating the structural spaces for communities to negotiate with markets on fairer terms, opening up value chains for forest produce, and building the case and the necessary frameworks for financing the restoration and management of landscapes, Commons in particular.

4. **Catalysing collaborative action among and across civil society, government bodies, and tech initiatives:** This is the connective thread, focused on building the responsive social infrastructure of relationships, shared platforms, knowledge, learning, communications, and coalition governance. It enables actors to align across sectors and domains, as much as building synergy between the above three pathways.

Taken together, the pathways accelerate one another, while collaborative action is the connective tissue that holds the whole system in motion.

"Common Ground envisions India's 350 million people dependent on ecological Commons reaching the summit of economic and social wellbeing. Rather than carrying each person individually, Common Ground is fixing interconnected ropes – the collaborative infrastructure of favourable policy initiatives, market incentives, alongside responsive citizen platforms and knowledge systems. Over five years, these ropes will be in place, enabling a sizeable but smaller portion of people to reach the summit, while positioning the vast majority of the remaining at well-equipped base camps with clear pathways forward. This approach reflects the Collaborative's work ahead: enduring impact that comes not from scaling delivery, but from building the systems infrastructure that enables communities to chart their own paths to regenerative futures."



THE YEAR THAT WENT BY

Through the year, Common Ground established foundational building blocks that set us on the path to impact – showing that a distributed Collaborative, working through relationships, shared evidence, and complementary strengths across organisational boundaries, can engender structural change. The 'ropes' that India's Commons-dependent communities need to reach 'the summit' of economic and social wellbeing are now more or less in place. The work ahead is to anchor and make them accessible in ways that will tip the system – ensuring the communities most dependent on the Commons can climb the ropes, and that enough hands are present in support.

PATHWAY 1: ADVANCING COMMUNITY-LED GOVERNANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

During the year, landscape partnerships expanded from 52 to 120 blocks across Jharkhand, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu. These landscapes encompass forests, rainfed agricultural lands, community pastures, and water bodies that support farming, livestock rearing, and forest-based livelihoods. Through these partnerships, an estimated 56 lakh people can potentially access inclusive platforms for natural resource governance, including the conservation and management of land, water, and forest resources.

In Meghalaya, the landscape partnership took the form of institutional integration in a state-wide bamboo programme, co-designed and co-implemented with the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority, linking local inclusive governance practices with bamboo-integral landscape restoration.

In parallel, the *Grameen Charcha* in Rayagada, Odisha, brought together networks of tribal leaders from six states for multi-actor dialogue, community-led solutioning, and joint planning and action to leverage markets and public finance.



A women-led *Sankirtan Mandali* in Odisha used traditional songs to communicate messages on forest fires, poaching, and environmental protection across villages around Atei Reserve Forest. This was recognised and mentioned in the *Mann Ki Baat* address by the Prime Minister. It also found resonance with the Forest Department of Jharkhand and resulted in its adoption across several forest divisions.

To support several such initiatives, the Collaborative continued to invest in strengthening community voice and collective leadership. Community-led listening processes created platforms for documenting ecological knowledge, lived experiences, and local priorities, while bringing greater visibility to issues such as forest rights, community stewardship, agro-ecology, and landscape governance. These insights are now informing bioregional and agro-ecological planning processes and collaborative solution-building across landscapes, creating avenues for more effective use of public investments and market opportunities.

IN FOCUS: *Grameen Charcha* – listening to rural voices and local leadership

Bisam Cuttack, Rayagada, Odisha

The *Grameen Charcha* brought together over 1,000 participants from approximately 40 *sangathans* (community networks of tribal leaders) across six states.

The dialogues and discussions created conditions for shared learning across regions and generations, where community members shared stories from lived experiences, surfacing challenges they face and the socio-economic realities they navigate. The story-sharing was facilitated by independent communicator Rakhi Ghosh, and the stories were documented by students and faculty from the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Dhenkanal. The *Charcha*, thus, provided a platform for a vibrant exchange of not just best practices but also shared challenges and concerns.

These exchanges culminated with the identification of a set of shared priorities such as resilient village economies, decentralised infrastructure, stronger community governance through Palli Sabhas, and youth and women's leadership.

The formation of the Indigenous Leadership Council – a body of sangathan leaders from across the participating regions, gave institutional expression to this purpose.

Mentored by adivasi filmmaker and researcher Deepak Bara, the Council created a structure through which tribal leaders across regions can continue to support, exchange, and coordinate action well beyond the *Charcha*.



The *Charcha* was co-organised by the Odisha Shramajeebi Manch, the Mahila Shramajeebi Manch, the National Consortium to Combat Malnutrition, Atmashakti Trust, Foundation for Ecological Security, Socratus Foundation for Collective Wisdom, and Common Ground.

Partners collaborating on advancing community-led governance of natural resources:

Abhivyakti Foundation, Antaranga Network, Atmashakti Trust, Badlao Foundation, Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), Collaborating for Resilience (CoRe), Consortium for Agroecology Transformations, Dasra ClimateRISE Alliance, EcoAgriculture Partners, Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Urban and Rural Development in Karnataka (FEVOURD-K), Gramya Vikas Sanghatan (GVS), Harsha Trust, Institute for Rural Development, Jagruti, Kalamandir - The Celluloid Chapter Art Foundation, Landstack, Manav Adhikar Seva Samiti (MASS), Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA), M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Mulbagal Champions Network, Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS), NIRMAN - An Initiative for Sustainable Development, North East Network (NEN), Pragati, Koraput, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), Puttannaiah Foundation, Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network (RRAN), Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS), Sarva Seva Samity Sanstha (4S), Seba Jagat, Self Employed Workers' Association Kendra (SEWAK), Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD), Society for Upliftment of People's Organisation and Rural Technology (SUPPORT), Syrwet U Barim, Tagore Society for Rural Development (TSRD), Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN), WELL Labs, Women's Organisation for Socio-Cultural Awareness (WOSCA), and Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS).

PATHWAY 2: CREATING ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR POLICY AND FINANCIAL FLOWS

The Jharkhand Cabinet's approval of the PESA Rules created a statutory framework for recognising the Gram Sabha's authority over natural resources in Scheduled Areas. In a parallel move, the 5th State Finance Commission in Jharkhand allocated approximately INR 790 crore annually to Gram Panchayats; this devolution created a recurring fiscal flow that Panchayats can direct towards conservation and livelihoods.

In Tamil Nadu, a Government Order was issued to strengthen the operational efficacy of convergence processes between Panchayati Raj Institutions and Community-Based Organisations, enabling better planning and governance at the Panchayat level. Separately, the Jharkhand Forest Department enabled a thrust towards landscape restoration through a catchment area treatment planning across 26 forest divisions, unlocking approximately INR 83 crore of CAMPA restoration funds. This was accompanied by a circular mandating at least 20% native forest species in state afforestation programmes.

Across states, these efforts are creating the implementation architecture needed to ensure that enabling provisions translate into village and household level impact. This is further grounded by concurrent work on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act. In Odisha and Jharkhand, progress was made on advancing Community Forest Resource Rights claims, and supporting Gram Sabhas whose claims were recognised in operationalising management rights. This included constituting Forest Rights Committees, developing management plans, and linking recognised rights to organised Non-Timber Forest Produce collection and restoration.



IN FOCUS: From two-woman help desks in 35 Panchayats to every Panchayat in the state

Jharkhand

In its continued effort to ensure that welfare schemes reach every citizen, the Government of Jharkhand took a significant step to strengthen last-mile institutional apparatus – particularly for tribal households, women, and the most marginalised in remote areas, for whom accessing entitlements has long been a challenge.

The Gram Panchayat Help Desk was first piloted across 35 Panchayats in East Singhbhum by the Tagore Society for Rural Development (TSRD) and Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN). It operates from the Panchayat premises, and is run by two women from local Self Help Groups who help citizens find information, file applications, and track entitlements for livelihoods, forest rights, and rural infrastructure. For a woman who once made repeated trips to a distant block office, it now means filing a claim in her own village and knowing exactly where it stands.

Recognising the model's promise, the state government made an institutional commitment of INR 52.14 crore per annum to establish these Help Desks and deploy Panchayat *sahayaks* across every Panchayat in the state. The initiative was aligned with Jharkhand's Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan, framing it as a practical way to achieve the state's capacity-building goals. The model also received endorsement from the Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj as a vital bridge between the government administration and communities.

On the ground, this means trained, supported people in every Panchayat, interlocuting between several government departments and local communities so that the benefits the government provides reach the citizens they are meant for.



Partners collaborating on creating enabling conditions for policy and financial flows:

Alliance for Conserving Freshwater Ecosystems, Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF), Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS), Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP), International Land Coalition (ILC), Kanchi Kohli, Landstack, National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF), Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM), Partnering Hope Into Action Foundation (PHIA), Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI), Impact Catalyst Foundation India (SETU), State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Odisha, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India, Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN), WELL Labs, and Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS).

PATHWAY 3: CREATING SPACES FOR EQUITABLE NEGOTIATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND MARKETS



During the year, towards advancing the market pathways that recognise communities as active stewards and economic actors in landscape restoration, the Bamboo Village model progressed from concept stage to execution in both Meghalaya and Odisha. In Meghalaya, the model is being supported through the state-notified MegREAP Cell (Regenerating Economies through Accelerated and Inclusive Enterprises in Meghalaya) under the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority, with Common Ground as a member.

The Odisha Bamboo Development Agency is supporting the establishment of a similar initiative in Koraput. Both efforts build on existing community institutions, local entrepreneurship, and traditional knowledge. In Meghalaya, this builds on the Integrated Cooperative Village Societies, and the Living Root Bridges or Syrwet U Barim network, and in Odisha, on the Baunsa Parab community's efforts around the Non-Timber Forest Produce value chain.

The Collaborative also developed innovative financing and market mechanisms that align investment with community-led landscape outcomes. In Koraput, a blended finance architecture was designed for multi-layer natural farming that combines public finance with outcomes-based payments and risk-sharing mechanisms to support smallholder farmers transitioning to climate-resilient natural farming and agro-forestry. This design of multi-layer natural farming integrates trees, crops, and in some cases livestock, within a single production system, reducing external input costs while improving year-round income and ecological health of the landscape.

In Odisha, the conceptual design of the sal seed value chain focused on strengthening community institutions, processing capabilities, and market linkages to foster rural economies and steward forest health.

Work also advanced on exploring finance models for ecosystem services, including carbon-linked approaches, while ensuring that community institutions, transparent governance, and ecological safeguards remain central to designing such models. Complementing these efforts, initiatives aimed at developing a digital information system to enable better awareness of market prices of forest produce are now underway.

IN FOCUS: Landing the Bamboo Village initiative through a multi-stakeholder partnership

Meghalaya and Odisha

The Bamboo Village initiative is a community-led restoration and enterprise model that integrates endemic bamboo species in the efforts of ecological restoration and local livelihood creation. It builds community-led enterprise models to improve returns from bamboo and a mix of compatible agricultural crops. Each Bamboo Village is designed as a 2,000-hectare social forestry asset, with approximately 500 households organised into a village-level institution.

Bamboo is processed through local-level factories into poles, strips, slivers, slats, and other products, creating opportunities for local employment and new entrepreneurial initiatives. The processed products are further refined into pellets, panels, etc. for markets. During 2025–26, this model was grounded in potential sites across Odisha and Meghalaya.

In the Koraput district of Odisha, four Gram Panchayats in the Boipariguda block – Haldikund, Chipakur, Ramgiri, and Dandabadi – undertook exercises to assess feasibility. In Meghalaya, two Bamboo Villages namely Umling and Umsning were selected in Ri-Bhoi district, and similar feasibility studies were completed.



As a preliminary step, the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority supported the communities here in raising nurseries, and a dedicated Bamboo Project Management Unit was established. In a step towards expansion, the state government has planned for 20 such Bamboo Villages spread across Meghalaya, and has already secured financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank.

Partners collaborating on creating spaces for equitable negotiation between communities and markets:

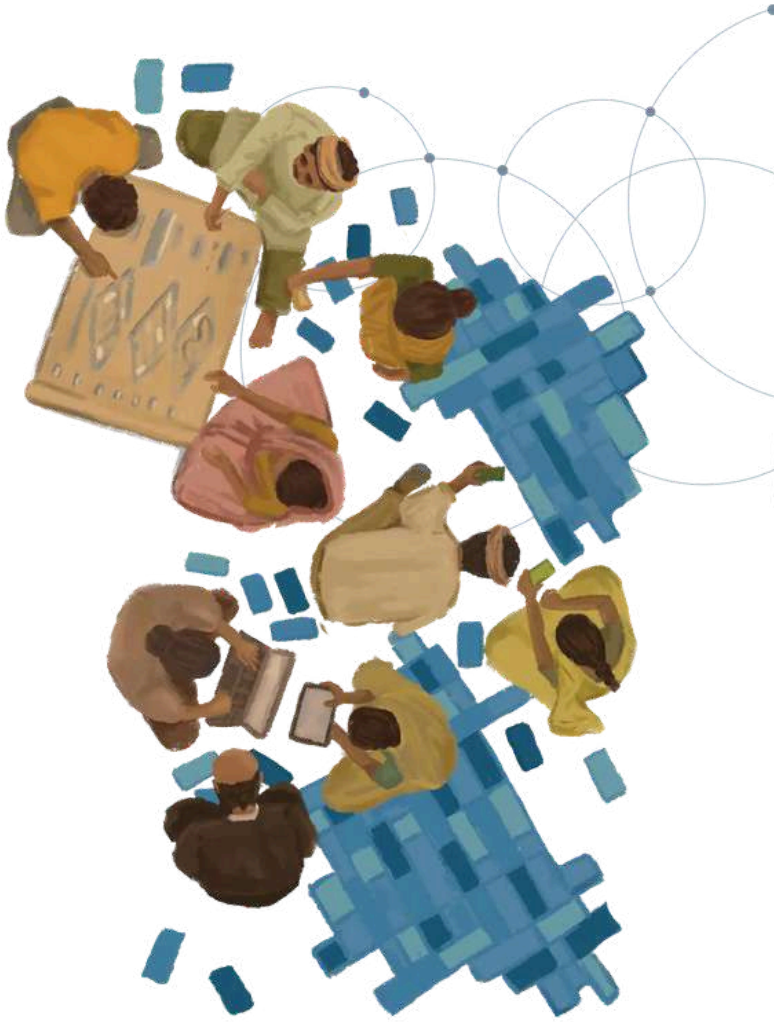
Bamboo Village Trust (BVT), Catalyst Management Services (CMS), Covenant Centre for Development (CCD)/ Gram Mooligai Company Limited (GMCL), Dakshin Foundation, Ecociate, Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA), Sattva Consulting, Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD), and Vrutti.

PATHWAY 4: CATALYSING COLLABORATIVE ACTION AMONG AND ACROSS CIVIL SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT BODIES, AND TECH INITIATIVES

Over the past year, a growing suite of interoperable digital public goods continued to make ecological, social, and economic data more accessible for participatory planning and landscape governance. Investments in common data standards, open APIs, interoperable data dictionaries, and federated digital architecture – supported by principles of community governance – laid the foundation for multiple organisations to build and adapt solutions while reducing duplication of effort.

Towards building a more distributed exchange network, an open-source protocol as a shared foundation for intermediary-free transactions and many-to-many communication was also initiated. The prototyping focused on lateral exchange of local voices across geographies, distributed creation and contextualisation of knowledge products, and creation of a 'digital twin' of a landscape to support village- and Panchayat-level planning.

The past year also saw the strengthening of narratives as infrastructure, and a shift toward more distributed storytelling. KaBhumM!!!, an art for coastal commons initiative in Kerala, brought together community voice, art, and science in a multi-stakeholder engagement, contributing to the state government's declaration of tidal flooding in coastal areas as a state disaster. In a separate initiative, listening campaigns surfaced community voices, priorities, local practices, traditions, and stories, which are now being analysed to design a listening architecture that consistently captures and mainstreams local voices to inform programme design and public discourse.



A network of 300+ communicators continued sharing locally grounded stories about landscapes and community governance. In the past year, one such story about a *Sankirtan Mandali* folk troupe in Keonjhar, that had repurposed its 15th-century performances to raise awareness about forest fires, was subsequently cited by the Prime Minister in his *Mann Ki Baat* broadcast. The example illustrates how locally rooted stories can travel across platforms and contribute to wider public understanding of landscapes and community stewardship.

Most importantly, the Collaborative invested in building the connective tissue between and across landscapes. Mentors and facilitators, documented landscape partnerships, and peer exchange through Solver Jams, Addas, and weekly sessions, enabling lateral, peer-to-peer learning across regions.

IN FOCUS: Bringing digital and non-digital infrastructure together for community-led natural resource governance

Jharkhand and Odisha

CoRE (Commoning for Resilience and Equity) Stack is an open-source digital infrastructure for community-led natural resource governance. Commons Connect, one of the tools built on it, helps local communities make informed landscape decisions and produces planning-ready outputs – combining pre-loaded geospatial layers with field validation, where community members geo-tag assets on the ground. In the Ramgarh district of Jharkhand, teams of Rozgar Sewaks, Junior Engineers, and Panchayat functionaries used it to engage communities across 237 villages and identify 9,318 village-level demands/ priorities regarding natural resource management.

Demands were captured in a standardised form, consolidated to the Panchayat level, and uploaded to the Yuktdhara portal (used by local authorities to plan, visualise, and verify rural development works under MGNREGS/VB-G RAM G). Backed fully by the district administration, the engagement enabled a demand voiced in a village meeting to travel intact and traceable into the system.

While digital workflows address one part of the problem, spaces for collective problem-solving become the critical infrastructure that allow for shared priorities, challenges, and opportunities to be identified and acted upon. Through the year, Solver Jams and *Addas* facilitated by Reap Benefit continued building catalysts' skills in collective problem-solving and community engagement.



One Solver Jam in Odisha, timed to the monsoon calendar, focused on planting and restoration preparedness. Anchored by Self Employed Workers' Association Kendra (SEWAK), it helped catalysts think through how they can mobilise different actors such as community members, school teachers, youth groups, and Panchayat institutions to prepare for the seasonal activities. It also helped them compare approaches across landscapes, and adapt them to their context. The digital and social infrastructure are two halves of the same one, and each makes the other stronger and more meaningful.

Partners collaborating on catalysing collaborative action among and across civil society, government bodies, and tech initiatives:

Aapti Institute, Apurva.ai, ASAR Social Impact Advisors, Ashank Desai Centre for Policy Studies, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT-B), Center for Land Governance, Centre for Research in Regions and Development (CRRD), Collaborating for Resilience (CoRe), CommonsTech Foundation for Participatory Technologies, CoRE (Commoning for Resilience and Equity) Stack, Dalberg Catalyst, Dasra ClimateRISE Alliance, Dharaniya/ Desta LLP, Dots, EQUINOCT Community Sourced Modelling Solutions LLP, Governance Counts (Aarti Madhusudhan), Gram Vaani, IDOBRO Impact Solutions, ECHO India, India Climate Collaborative, India Development Review (IDR), Indian Commoner (CeNSE India), Land Conflict Watch, LandMark, OneWorld Colab, Policy and Development Advisory Group (PDAG), Platform Commons, Reap Benefit, Social Accountability Forum for Action and Research (SAFAR), SYLVA, Tarkam, The/Nudge Institute, and World Resources Institute (WRI).



ORCHESTRATING A DISTRIBUTED ECOSYSTEM FOR SCALE

This year has seen a significant growth in the number of partners from 58 to 91 and the strengthening of initiatives – both in terms of depth of engagement, and diversity in areas of work, thematically and geographically. Over the year, the value of collaboration in creating conditions for change was tangibly visible across policy, institutions, markets, technology, and community action. While each partner brought deep expertise and longstanding relationships within their respective domains, it was the synergy between initiatives and the convergence of these efforts that enabled outcomes extending beyond the contribution of any single organisation.

Partners are increasingly taking up joint initiatives, embedding the Commons framework into their own strategies, and raising funds for the Collaborative's activities. Signals such as Communities of Practice anchored by partners, an evolving governance architecture being co-designed across the Collaborative, more robust learning, monitoring and evaluation practices, and a growing push for cross-pathway convergence to produce non-linear impact all point towards a Collaborative developing the distributed ownership needed to make its work outlast any particular project or funding cycle.

Through the year, partners spent time learning from one another, collectively assessing what is working and what is not, and co-developing common frameworks to bring greater clarity to the governance structure within the Collaborative. Underlying this was a central question – what forms of culture, accountability, leadership, autonomy, and institutional stewardship are required for a multi-partner initiative to remain agile and adaptive while moving towards shared outcomes?



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. Many describe the Collaborative as a force multiplier that helps them achieve more together than they could have achieved alone.

The survey 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. Partners are keen to see reflections and learning emerging from the dialogues within the Collaborative translate to adaptation.

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.

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 in the coming year.



Working Groups (Landscape Partnerships; Landscape Partnership Facilitation; Policy to Practice; Markets; Digital Public Goods; Strategic Communications; Learning, Measurement, and Evaluation) remain the primary units of ideation in the Collaborative. They provide a consistent space for sense making, iteration, prioritisation, tracking of external ecosystem developments, and identifying collective ways to respond. They also form the soft relational infrastructure of the Collaborative, helping build understanding and trust among the partners.

The year also saw a growing number of Communities of Practice evolving within the Collaborative. These consistent dialogue and engagement spaces are showing potential to strengthen the ability of partners to respond collectively to challenges and opportunities, forming and training the collaborative muscle. The partner survey pointed to the need to keep strengthening such spaces for both learning and adaptation as well as to promote a culture of joint learning, reflexive adaptation, and agility.

As planned, during the year, the Collaborative transitioned the function of Learning, Measurement, and Evaluation from design to implementation, embedding an 'improving, not proving' philosophy. To ensure peer rigour, a Learning, Measurement, and Evaluation Hub was established alongside the Dots learning platform, which tracks local realities and system-level shifts in real time to generate directional intelligence. Change-tracking frameworks have been developed to aid the Collaborative in gauging what is working and not working.

A methodological backbone for documenting contribution claims to systems change efforts was developed, helping visualise 'results chains' that show how efforts add up across actors and contribute to or catalyse other ongoing processes in the ecosystem. Graduated rubrics were also developed for the Landscapes and Markets Working Groups to trace the shift from initial coordination phase to systemic transformation.

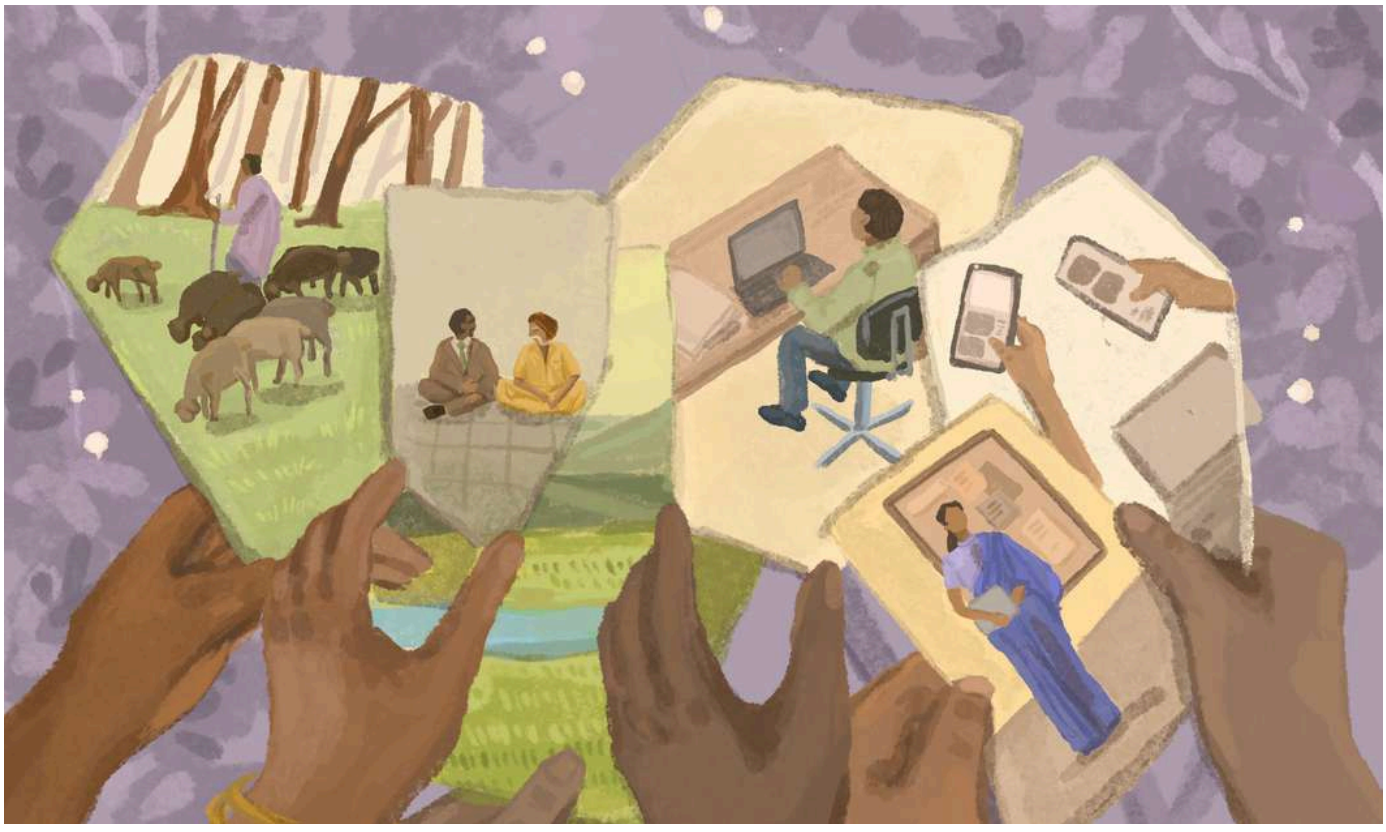
Another significant shift has been within the Collaborative itself. Increasingly, partners are not only contributing to Common Ground's shared agenda but are also adapting its principles within their own institutions and networks.

> *"The Common Ground association improved the systemic thinking within our organisation; we've introduced systemic thinking and the Multi-Actor Platform approach across our thematic work." – Landscape partner*

> *"We are very invested in its success and the truly transformative potential for such a collaborative to be 'successful' – big wins for rural livelihoods, inclusive Commons governance, policy, and climate finance." – Facilitation partner*

> *"The trust-based and flexible nature of the ecosystem (Collaborative) created space for experimentation, relationship-building, and locally rooted initiatives to emerge organically." – Technology partner*

As these foundations continue to mature, the Collaborative's role is increasingly to help these efforts land at the community level. In doing so, it aims to strengthen the institutional apparatus that fosters informed collaborative action at landscape level for resilient ecosystems and communities. In parallel, the coming together of various actors and initiatives is aiding the imagination of an architecture that enables scaling through a 'many-to-many' approach rather than one-to-many.



LOOKING AHEAD

The advances made over the past year have laid necessary foundations for the next phase of Common Ground's journey. The ‘ropes’ needed to reach the summit have more or less been woven. What keeps us awake is how these ropes can be effectively laid out for all to use – landscape partnerships replicated widely enough; the policy developments followed up with the channels, feedback loops, and local capacities needed to leverage them; the ecologically-aligned markets models demonstrated at sufficient scale; and the digital infrastructure animated with information and saturated with adoption, including the processes for co-creation, communication, and narrative shaping needed for these to be mainstreamed.

At the landscape level, the focus will be on supporting the implementation of the institutional and fiscal architecture that are beginning to fall in place – strengthening local capacities, enabling convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions and community institutions, and supporting more responsive planning and investment for Commons. At the same time, Common Ground will continue to advance locally rooted market pathways by demonstrating scalable models for farm- and forest-based livelihoods, expanding blended finance approaches to new landscapes, and supporting communities to realise the potential of Community Forest Resource Rights through improved stewardship, value chains, and financing opportunities.

The coming year also presents an opportunity to deepen collaboration across complementary initiatives. By working alongside ecosystem partners, resource support organisations, and place-based networks (such as youth federations, tribal community platforms, and NGO collectives), Common Ground seeks to expand landscape stewardship across diverse geographies. Alongside this, the Collaborative will continue advancing landscape-based approaches to development planning, exploring open digital infrastructure that supports knowledge exchange and community-led innovation, and strengthening the network’s own capabilities for collaboration.

The road ahead is a mix of challenges and opportunities for the ‘field’ and the Collaborative. Shifts in public financing and reorientation of public programmes pose fresh challenges, while developments in technological advancement, new finance instruments, and a growing awareness among youth offer opportunities. A quieter challenge runs alongside these – the connective work of weaving together actors, efforts, and relationships is easily overlooked, and often under-appreciated; yet, it is precisely what holds a distributed collaborative together. While the Collaborative has been reasonably sound in developing both the shared infrastructure as well as the connective tissue, its agility, co-learning, and adaptation would shape its role in serving the ‘field’.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

A
Aapti Institute
Abhivyakti Foundation
Alliance for Conserving Freshwater Ecosystems
Antaranga Network
Apurva.ai
ASAR Social Impact Advisors
Ashank Desai Centre for Policy Studies, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT-B)
Atmashakti Trust

B
Badlao Foundation
Bamboo Village Trust (BVT)
Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation (BRLF)

C
Catalyst Management Services (CMS)
Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS)
Centre for Climate Change and Sustainability, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai
Centre for Land Governance
Centre for Research in Regions and Development (CRRD)
Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP)
Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD)
Collaborating for Resilience (CoRe)
CommonsTech Foundation for Participatory Technologies
Consortium for Agroecology Transformations
CoRE (Commoning for Resilience and Equity) Stack
Covenant Centre for Development (CCD)/ Gram Mooligai Company Limited (GMCL)

D
Dakshin Foundation
Dalberg Catalyst
Dasra ClimateRISE Alliance
Dharinya/Desta LLP
Dots

E
ECHO India
EcoAgriculture Partners
Ecociate
EQUINOCT Community Sourced Modelling Solutions LLP

F
Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Urban and Rural Development in Karnataka (FEVOURD-K)
Foundation for Ecological Security (FES)

G
Governance Counts (Aarti Madhusudhan)
Gram Vaani
Gramya Vikas Sanghatan (GVS)

H
Harsha Trust

I
IDOBRO Impact Solutions
Impact Catalyst Foundation India (SETU)
India Climate Collaborative
Indian Commoner (CeNSE India)
India Development Review (IDR)
Institute for Rural Development
International Land Coalition (ILC)

J
Jagruti

K
Kalamandir - The Celluloid Chapter
Art Foundation
Kanchi Kohli

L
Land Conflict Watch
LandMark
Landstack

M
MS Swaminathan Research Foundation
Manav Adhikar Seva Samiti (MASS)
Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA)
Mulbagal Champions Network

N
National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF)
Network for Enterprise Enhancement and Development Support (NEEDS)
NIRMAN - An Initiative for Sustainable Development
North East Network (NEN)

O Odisha Livelihoods Mission (OLM)
OneWorld Colab
Partnering Hope Into Action Foundation (PHIA)
Platform Commons

P Policy and Development Advisory Group (PDAG)
Pragati, Koraput
Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN)
Puttannaiah Foundation

R Reap Benefit
Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network (RRAN)
Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS)

S Sarva Seva Samity Sanstha (4S)
Sattva Consulting
Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI)
Seba Jagat
Self Employed Workers' Association Kendra (SEWAK)
Social Accountability Forum for Action and Research (SAFAR)
Society for Promoting Rural Education and Development (SPREAD)
Society for Upliftment of People's Organisation and Rural Technology (SUPPORT)
State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Odisha
SYLVA
Syrwet U Barim

T Tagore Society for Rural Development (TSRD)
Tarkam
The/Nudge Institute

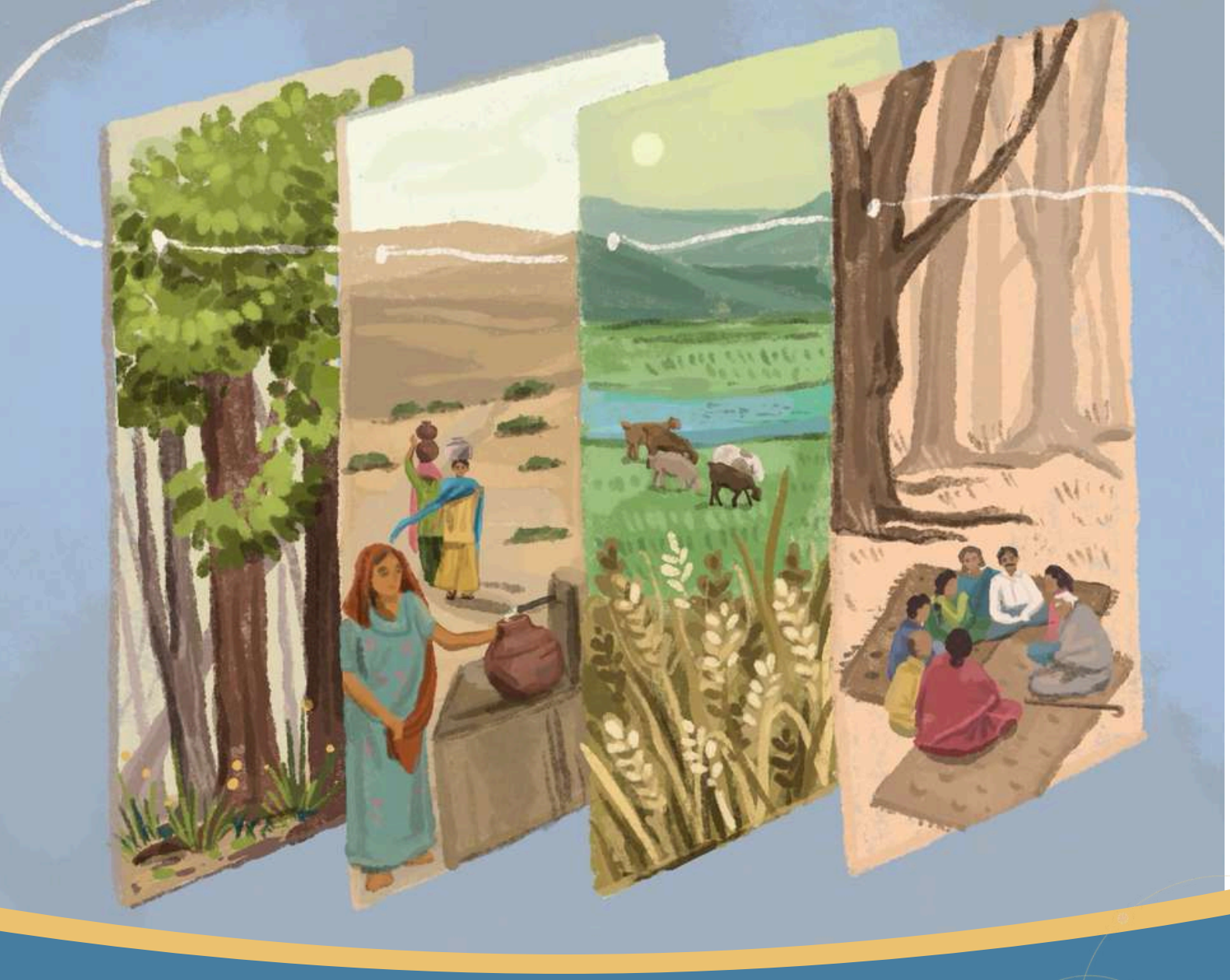
U United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), India

V Vrutti

W Watershed Support Services and Activities Network (WASSAN)
WELL Labs
Women's Organisation for Socio-Cultural Awareness (WOSCA)
World Resources Institute (WRI)

X Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS)





PREPARED BY:

Common Ground

LIVING LANDSCAPES

Illustrations by Athulya Pillai

Living Landscapes, a dedicated and agile backbone organisation, anchors the Common Ground initiative. It provides facilitative support for collaboration, direction, and strategic coherence, nurturing relationships with a wide network of partners, including decision-makers, philanthropy, and other ecosystem actors. Through these partnerships, actors aligned with the Common Ground vision for change will collaboratively expand spheres of influence, spur innovation, and create exponential impact.

collaborative@commongroundinitiative.in / contact@livinglandscapes.in

https://livinglandscapes.in/common-ground / https://commongroundinitiative.in/