Common Ground Monthly Factsheet

September 2026 | Alignments & Shifts

A monthly update from across the Common Ground Initiative, this factsheet offers a snapshot of emerging shifts across Common Ground. These aren't isolated actions but part of a broader effort to realign how people, policy, and place intersect - led by local communities, supported by institutions, and grounded in context.







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Cover Photographs: SEWAK (top left and top right), Socratus Foundation for Collective Wisdom (bottom)

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ADVANCING COMMUNITY-LED GOVERNANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Landscape level platforms and multi-actor coordination

- A new Multi-Actor Platform is taking shape in Balisankara block, Sundargarh, Odisha, around the shared concern of the cultural identity of Kanhakund, a popular tourist destination in the block. Kanhakund holds significant meaning to a diverse set of stakeholders, and to address this shared priority collectively, a meeting was convened this month, presided over by the Chairperson of Balisankara block. It was attended by the Block Development Officer, the Additional Block Development Officer, line department officials, farmers, members of Van Surakshan Samitis and Forest Rights Committees, and representatives from Panchayati Raj Institutions and Self Help Groups.

  Participants collectively identified the need for a core committee to carry coordination and issues forward, resulting in the formation of the *Kanhakund Vikash Manch*, named after the destination itself. The committee will provide a common forum for stakeholders to discuss local priorities, strengthen coordination, and work toward community-led action across the block.

Strengthening ecological governance and social inclusion through cultural practices

- A cultural practice from one village in Odisha has begun to spread through the Multi-Actor Platforms. Nuakhai, one of the state's major festivals, was celebrated this month to mark the new harvest and express gratitude to the soil, farmers, and nature. While traditionally observed at the household level, the Jhurimal village community in Sundargarh, comprising 163 families, has celebrated the festival as a community for the last 14 years – cooking, sharing, and eating together irrespective of caste, religion or social differences. They also follow a tradition in which men serve food to the women first, acknowledging their dedication, care, and contribution to the family through the year. The festival, thus, has expanded into a celebration of community, women's dignity, and unity.

  Jhurimal's story was shared in Multi-Actor Platform meetings across blocks, following which three villages – Balangibahal in Lephripada block, and Nuamunda and Pithabhuin in Tangarpali block – have adopted a similar practice this year.



A glimpse into the Nuakhai festival at Jhurimal, Odisha. Photo credit: SEWAK

Gearing up for Climate Week India 2026

- Climate Week India 2026 brings the country together for decentralised climate action over a week, with neighbourhood groups, students, scientists, artists, business owners, and policymakers participating to exchange ideas and move climate solutions faster. Common Ground partners across three states – Jharkhand, Karnataka, and Odisha – signed up to organise local events with tribal and rural communities, to encourage multi-stakeholder dialogue and community-led landscape action. Themes span changing weather patterns, rising temperatures, water conservation, Jal–Jungle–Jameen, biodiversity, traditional food systems, and indigenous knowledge.

CREATING ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR POLICY AND FINANCIAL FLOWS

Building institutional capacity for policy and programmatic implementation

- In Jharkhand, the PESA Training Needs Assessment was completed across selected districts – Kanke in Ranchi, Anandpur in East Singhbhum, and Littipara in Pakur – with findings highlighting significant capacity and awareness gaps that require sustained, localised training beyond one-off sessions.

  Based on this, 22 videos were developed to support the functioning of Gram Sabhas according to the PESA rules promulgated by the state. Themes covered in the videos range from the PESA architecture, guidelines to facilitate Gram Sabhas, and convergence between different planning instruments, to the role of traditional and customary institutions, resource governance, women's participation, social audits, and conflict resolution procedures.

  This builds on the assessments that began in August 2026, and turns its central findings into context-specific knowledge products that can support village-level actors in undertaking informed planning and action.

- In Odisha, Common Ground took part in the Training Needs Assessment sessions for PRI representatives organised by the State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj. The findings highlighted considerable gaps in Ward members' understanding of their statutory roles and powers, as well as in committee functioning and administrative processes. It also highlighted that most of them lack clarity on the objectives of Gram Sabhas and Palli Sabhas, with many asking for capacity building on activities under the Gram Panchayat Development Plan alongside financial oversight and monitoring of works.

  Following this, Common Ground participated in a Module Development workshop organised by the State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, for the induction and training of Ward members. The workshop focused on developing practical, participant-centric training content based on the earlier assessment's findings.

Strengthening convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions and Community Based Organisations

- In Jharkhand, the Guidelines for convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions and Self Help Groups (PRI-SHG) were finalised and a state-level Action Plan prepared, covering the training of resource persons on Mahila Sabhas, Village Prosperity Resilience Plans, identification of eligible individuals and households for entitlements, and SHG representation in Standing Committees. This follows the July state-level writeshop that refined the convergence guidelines.

- Similarly in Odisha, efforts advanced through preparations for the Writeshop on convergence between Village Prosperity Resilience Plans and Gram Panchayat Development Plans. This was carried out in coordination with the State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, with the Field Report, Guidelines, Training Module, and Action Plan having been submitted to the concerned departments.

- In Tamil Nadu, the Centre for Research in Schemes and Policies (CRISP) continued to support the operationalisation of the Government Order on convergence between Panchayati Raj Institutions and Community-Based Organisations. The PRI–SHG Partnership Training Module was finalised, and Block, District, and State Resource Persons recruited earlier in June were trained during this month. Further, Local Resource Persons were identified across all 15 districts where the Order is being operationalised, and training sessions for them are being planned in the coming month.

Aligning financing systems with social-ecological priorities

- Engagement with UNDP on the Sustainable Finance Facility continued, including exploration of a proposed bamboo debt instrument and discussions on its launch and fundraising. A clarification meeting between Common Ground and the UNDP team was followed by a visit to Meghalaya to understand the bamboo sector and explore financing opportunities. The aim is to open financing pathways for community-led bamboo value chains and sustainable livelihoods, and to strengthen longer-term landscape investment beyond conventional grant financing.

CREATING SPACES FOR EQUITABLE NEGOTIATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND MARKETS

Scaling agroecological transitions through blended finance: Boipariguda MAP, Koraput

- A Detailed Project Report was submitted to secure an INR 10 crore credit facility from the State Bank of India (SBI), to scale the Multi-Layer Natural Farming model to 1,000 farmers in Koraput, Odisha. Following a field assessment by SBI's DGM, the facility has entered final due diligence. The initial farmer cohort completed its first phase of full repayments with a 94% early repayment rate, enabling the Farmer Producer Organisation to repay the lender on time.

  Building on that record, WASSAN was engaged to formalise the credit structure into a unified Common Finance Facility for the Boipariguda Multi-Actor Platform, with a first-loss cushion extended to mitigate lender risk. Due diligence is progressing with Friends of Women's World Banking (FWWB) for a further 100 farmers, and FWWB has approved INR 48 lakh across three Farmer Producer Organisations for disbursement to the next 80, targeted for completion by late October. Together with real-time tracking of 25 stakeholders on the digital monitoring dashboard, this offers institutional lenders early evidence that rainfed natural farming can be de-risked at scale.

- To translate the model into systemic public goods, WASSAN and Vrutti have begun co-developing a strategic playbook on deploying blended finance instruments within Integrated Landscape Management (ILM), for publication on the Outcomes Accelerator and UBS platforms. UBS is a multi-national investment bank and financial services firm that has supported the operationalisation of the ILM framework on the ground.

Advancing community-centric NTFP value chains across geographies

Meghalaya

- Institutional preparedness advanced with the submission of a detailed Standard Operating Procedure for Rapid Rural Appraisals, setting out how potential Bamboo Village geographies are identified. Further screening of the earlier 133 GIS-mapped geographies narrowed the pipeline to 30 shortlisted locations, from which the Rapid Rural Appraisals will identify 15 locations for the implementation supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Four have been confirmed so far through field visits and preliminary assessments: Ganol, Nongstoin, Umling, and West Garo Hills.

- In the same month, the Meghalaya State Bamboo Mission's (MBSM) field teams initiated Rapid Rural Appraisals across four to five of these candidate geographies; to support the rollout, 26 of their personnel across all districts were oriented.

- On the ground in Umling and Umsning Bamboo Villages, 31 farmers completed bamboo planting across roughly 28 hectares in close consultation with the local Champion Bah Malai. Champions are private entrepreneurs who form an integral part of the bamboo value chain, entering as business partners alongside the community. Plans advanced for a six-hectare central nursery of 50,000 seedlings covering local species such as *Bambusa tulda*, *Bambusa balcooa* and *Dendrocalamus giganteus*.

- In parallel, groundwork in Umling following the Seven Enabling Conditions assessment progressed through community orientations, institutional scoping, an Integrated Village Cooperative Society membership drive, and onboarding plans for expanding into neighbouring villages.



Orientation and Planning Workshop for MSBM staff, Meghalaya. Photo credit: MSBM

Odisha

- A sal seed stakeholder meeting convened actors from across the value chain to share perspectives on ecological, social, market, and institutional challenges. Sattva introduced an integrated landscape-to-market approach and a four-stage intervention framework aimed at improving and stabilising income for local collectors, built around strengthening community institutions so they can negotiate collectively: through working capital, market intelligence, direct buyer linkages, and decortication mechanisation to resolve first-mile bottlenecks.

Stakeholders validated the framework and agreed on immediate priorities of working capital access, price assurance, and direct market connectivity, while pointing to the potential for local processing to retain more value within Odisha. Sattva will now support landscape partners exploring specific interventions by sharing resources, case studies, and research.

Developing and mobilising landscape finance mechanisms

- A note on onboarding Champions for landscape financing in Meghalaya was finalised, recommending a Joint Venture model alongside the state's Community Public-Private Partnership framework across three investment bands: up to INR 10 lakh, INR 10 lakh to 1 crore, and INR 40 crore to 50 crore. The note also establishes a transparent legal structure to anchor Champions while safeguarding community equity. Champions are private entrepreneurs who form an integral part of the bamboo value chain, entering as business partners alongside the community. The note has been submitted to the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) for review.

- Also in Meghalaya, UNDP has committed INR 50 lakh to INR 1 crore in technical assistance for the Special Purpose Vehicle design and operationalisation, aimed at mobilising large-scale bamboo investment. A detailed draft Expression of Interest was submitted to the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) to formalise requirements; this advances the Special Purpose Vehicle architecture aligned among core partners at the June review meeting in Bangalore.

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

Building shared knowledge infrastructure

- India Development Review is building on its pioneering use of AI with IDR Answers, which made its extensive repository of stories easier to access and discover. They are now extending that work into the Climate Knowledge Commons: a collaborative repository of verified climate knowledge contributed by partner organisations and made accessible through an LLM-powered interface, intended as a dedicated resource of nuanced, contextual knowledge on climate and related issues in India. Living Landscapes is joining as a partner on behalf of the Common Ground Initiative, creating the potential for a unified platform through which members' knowledge on commons, ecology, and livelihoods can reach practitioners, researchers, funders, and policymakers.

Sustaining shared learning across the ecosystem

- A two-part co-learning exercise was conducted with civil society organisations and community networks to make sense of the evolving Gram Panchayat Development Plan ecosystem and the VB-G RAM G. The first part situated the Gram Panchayat Development Plans within the changing policy and institutional landscape, particularly the 16th Finance Commission. The second part, anchored by CoRE Stack, focused on the Viksit Gram Panchayat Plan workflow under the VB-G RAM G. It included a step-by-step walkthrough of the planning process and explored how digital tools such as the Know Your Landscape dashboard and Commons Connect can support different stages of planning.

- To complement the session, a suite of communication assets was developed and adapted for partners, to help cadre and field-level functionaries navigate the planning process. These include multilingual explainers and posters alongside explainer videos in English, Hindi, Kannada, and Odia. The assets aim to clarify key concepts, priorities and institutional linkages, and to support the practical application of digital tools at village level.

Click here to view the session and download the resources:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1qjj8oNUvSKyk5C-35dNGuxbzWHAi1Ay0?usp=sharing

- Updates on system-level dialogues, workshops, and partner initiatives were carried through Common Ground's social media channels, including insights from the VB-G RAM G Knowledge Series dialogue, updates from the workshop on the Multi-Actor Platform approach for mentor-facilitators, and SEWAK's Brukshya Raksha Bandhan initiative.

Networking with the ecosystem to align initiatives

- Common Ground participated in and co-facilitated the Convening on Landscape of the Future in Odisha, convened by Socratus Foundation for Collective Wisdom, Energiva Ventures, and Rainmatter Foundation, attended by more than 60 actors from non-profit, corporate, academic, and start-up ecosystems. Common Ground's Multi-Actor Platform initiative, the Kendrapara Nature Club case, and Energiva's state-level action helped set the context for the dialogue. An innovation pitch by the Bhubaneswar Circle Knowledge Innovation Centre and its incubated entrepreneurs helped participants imagine diverse possibilities for building solution infrastructure for landscape-level needs and aspirations.

  Participants voiced the need for an operational framework in which philanthropy backs new ideas and orchestration, CSR supports evidence building, government schemes bring scale, and commercial capital grows enterprises that already work, with pooled platforms such as UNNATI bringing these together around shared goals.



A glimpse of the convening. Photo credit: Socratus Foundation for Collective Wisdom

For partnerships or to join the Collaborative, write to: collaborative@commongroundinitiative.in

We would also like to feature photos from different partners each month, so please share photos of your ongoing activities at: comms@commongroundinitiative.in

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https://commongroundinitiative.in/