CIRCULAR BIOECONOMY ALLIANCE
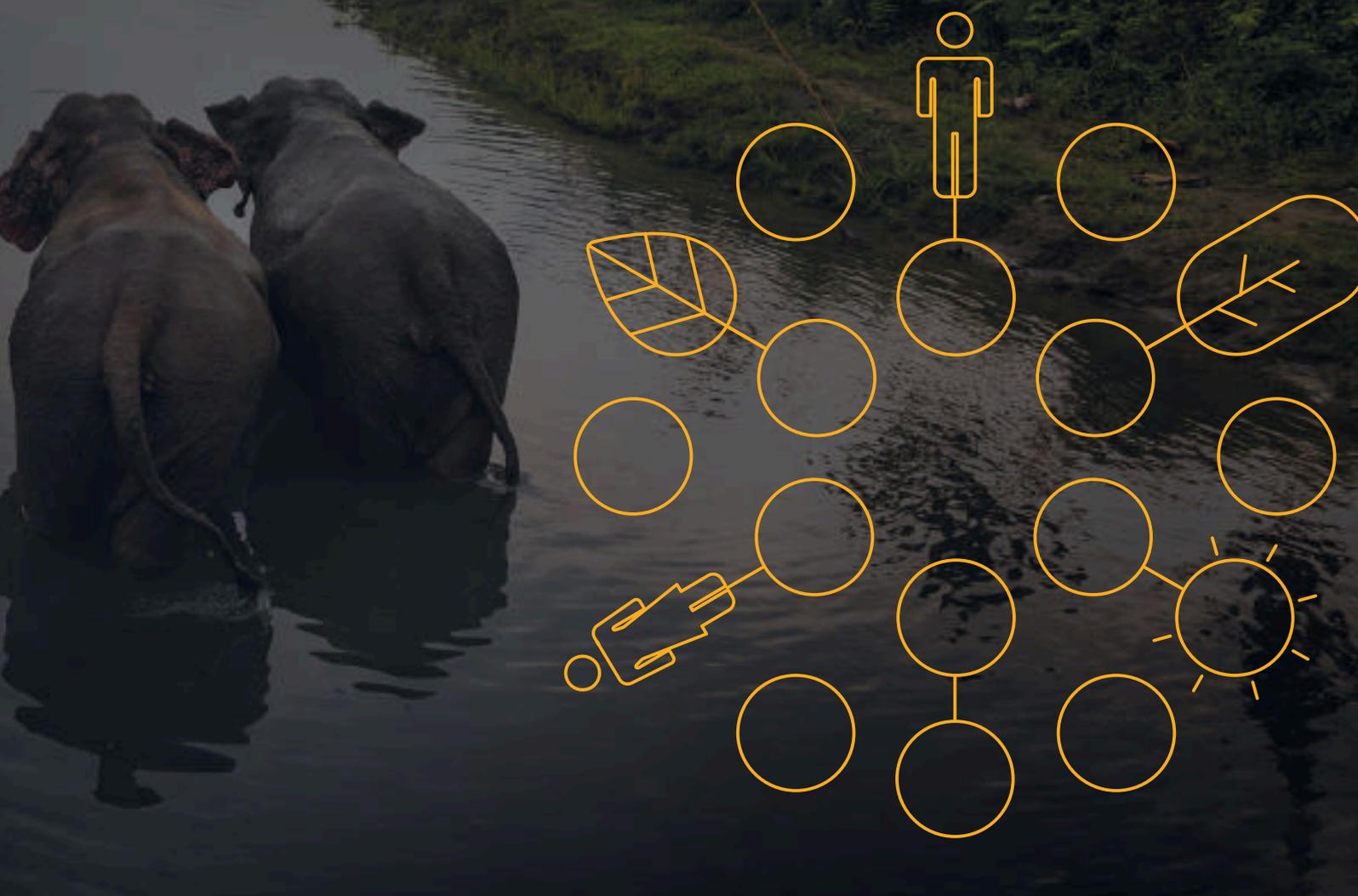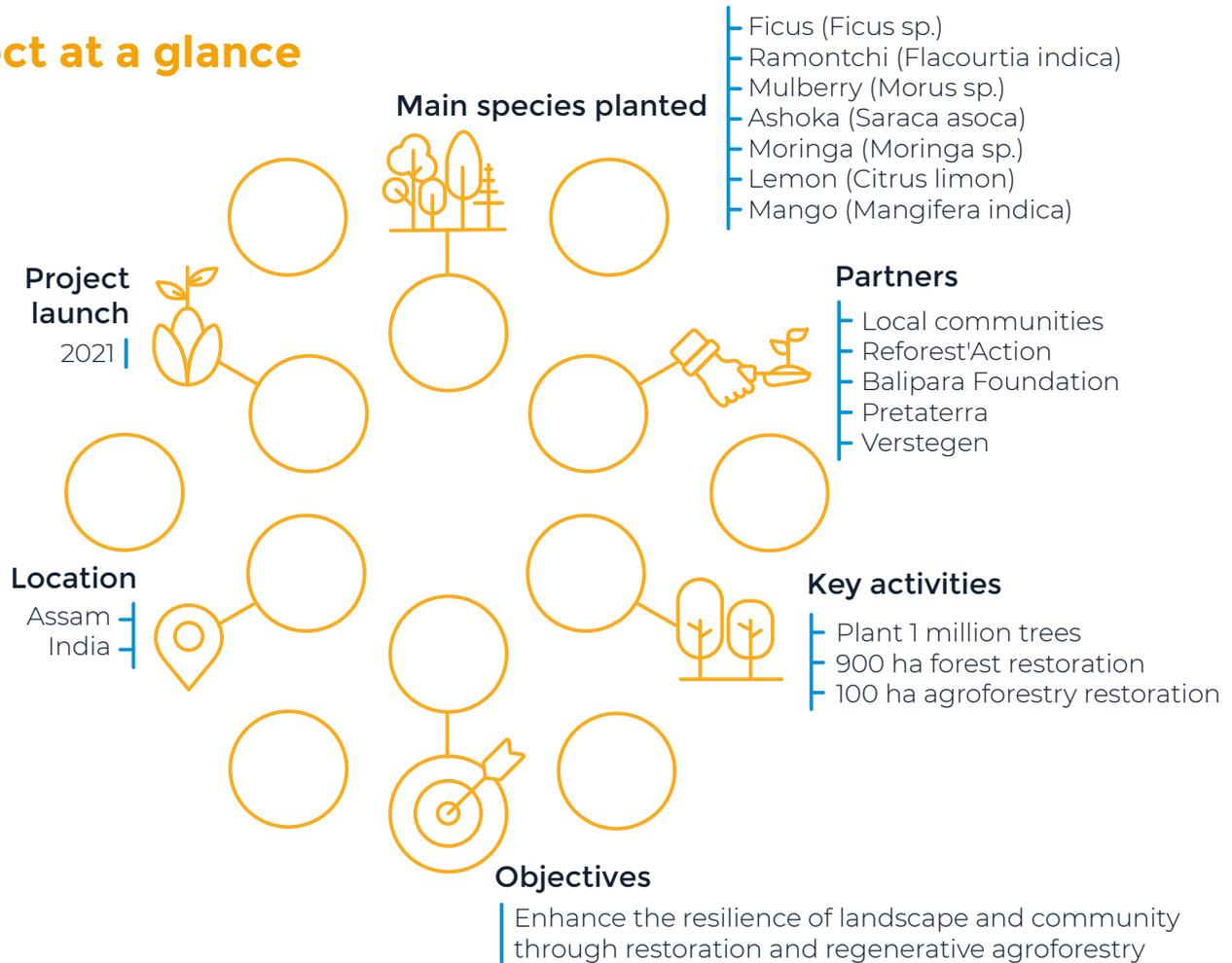
Living Labs for Nature, People and Planet

The Eastern Himalayan Living Lab:
Rural Futures Through
Natural Capital

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Project at a glance

Main species planted
- Ficus (Ficus sp.)
- Ramontchi (Flacourtia indica)
- Mulberry (Morus sp.)
- Ashoka (Saraca asoca)
- Moringa (Moringa sp.)
- Lemon (Citrus limon)
- Mango (Mangifera indica)

Project launch
2021

Partners
- Local communities
- Reforest'Action
- Balipara Foundation
- Pretaterra
- Verstegen

Location
Assam
India

Key activities
- Plant 1 million trees
- 900 ha forest restoration
- 100 ha agroforestry restoration

Objectives
Enhance the resilience of landscape and community through restoration and regenerative agroforestry

Why?

Assam is located in the eastern tip of India, between Bhutan, China and Bangladesh.
Since 2000, **this region** of the eastern Himalayas **has lost more than 9.5% of its vegetation cover**, due to the increasing conversion of natural primary forests to agricultural plots, and the invasion of exotic species that thrive at the expense of native vegetation.
The result is a decline in the health of natural ecosystems, including soil degradation, increasing land desertification and the depletion of water tables. Faced with a degraded environment, local populations are confronted with decreasing agricultural yields, which goes hand in hand with the collapse of their food security - in the state of Assam, only 8% of young people between the ages of 6 and 23 benefit from a healthy and balanced diet.

What?

Action on the ground

This Living Lab is a 3-year community-based project, which aims to restore natural forests and degraded lands to create corridors for elephants, while fostering the resilience of local community livelihoods. Through forest restoration linked incomes, those local communities will be better able to access universal basic assets such as healthcare and education.

The project will use agroforestry to create diverse and stable income streams for rural and forest-fringe communities, while enhancing their food security and improving watershed recharge through restored biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Restoring the landscape

The project generates income through community forest restoration. Multiple species of endemic trees will be planted in deforested areas to regenerate the soil and restore the forest cover that populated them only a few decades ago. Prime focus will be given to the restoration of key habitat corridors, to facilitate the migration of Asian elephants and other wildlife, mitigating human-elephant conflict.

Developing agroforestry

Local farmers will be trained in agroforestry, to enable trees to be included as an integral component of agriculture. This improves soil quality, reduces soil erosion and increases crop yields while making agriculture more sustainable and diversified. A variety of fruit species, including moringa, lemon and mango, will be planted on farmers' plots to protect the underlying crops and provide local people with additional income from the sale of their fruits and seeds. Black myrobolan will also be planted to provide sustainably managed wood resources to the community.

Integrating and training local communities

The Living Lab aims to integrate and closely work with local communities and farmers, training them in agroforestry techniques and the long-term maintenance of the planted trees. They will also be equipped with the skills to restore forests and monitor biodiversity.

Expected benefits

The project directly contributes to the achievement of 9 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, which provide a roadmap to a better and more sustainable future.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

| 1 NO POVERTY | 2 ZERO HUNGER | 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | 4 QUALITY EDUCATION | 5 GENDER EQUALITY | 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION | 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES |

| 13 CLIMATE ACTION | 15 LIFE ON LAND |

What is a Living Lab?

The Circular Bioeconomy Alliance (CBA) is building a global network of Living Labs for Nature, People and Planet.

They demonstrate how harmony can be achieved by empowering nature and people in a concrete territorial context, integrating traditional knowledge, capitalizing on new research and innovation and based on public-private partnerships that place local communities at their centre.

Each Lab uses a landscape restoration project as the starting point to catalyse the development of circular bioeconomy value chains while restoring biodiversity and local livelihoods. They are the start of a journey towards more resilient communities and landscapes.

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