

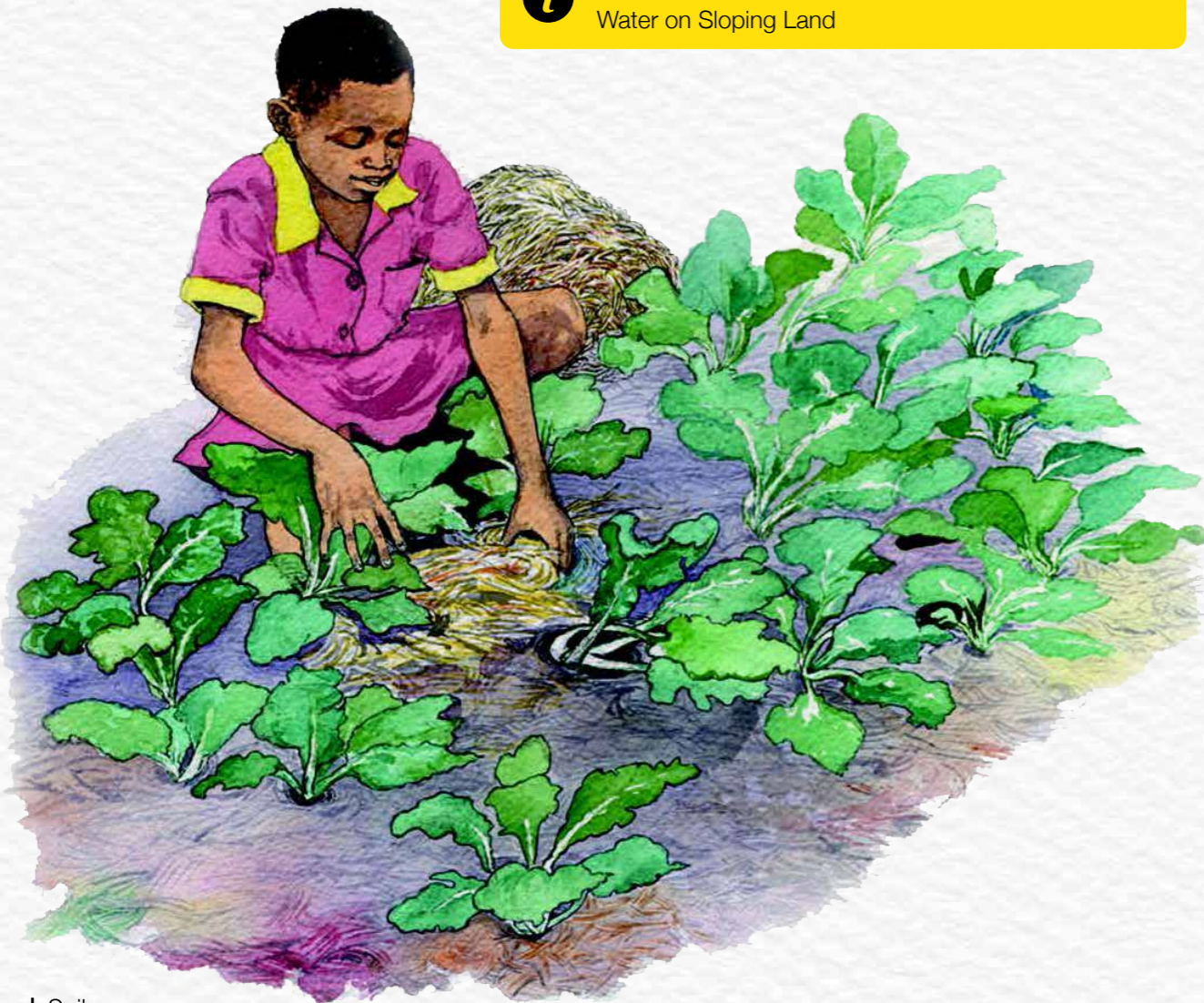
SHELTERING THE SOIL

The soil never wants to be naked. Sheltering soil means keeping it covered and disturbing it as little as possible.

Mulch occurs naturally in forests. It is made of decaying forest leaves, twigs and branches and in it lives a huge diversity of fungal, microbial and insect life. Natural mulch is like a “bank”, storing the nutrients contained in organic matter and slowly making these nutrients available to plants. Without mulch, the living soil is robbed of its natural nutrient stores, becoming leached and dry. In nature, most environments without natural mulch are deserts. This girl from South Africa is mimicking the forest, covering the soil using leaves or straw or other cut organic matter. You can even mulch using newspaper! Mulching not only feeds the soil, it shelters it from sun, wind and rain, slowing down soil erosion.



ACTION SHEETS - 34: Mulching, 42: Saving Soil and Water on Sloping Land



Contour Farming

On sloping ground water runs off faster, gathering momentum to bring soil with it. In Zambia and Malawi, farmers ridge up the field with a hoe or with oxen-drawn ridgers. When the ridges run down the slope, the furrows in between act like drains. Tonnes of topsoil are washed off the ridges and carried away. Ploughing parallel to the mountainside prevents all of these problems. This picture shows farmers in Kenya working on terraces which break up the slope of a hill into levels which catch water and soil to prevent erosion.

