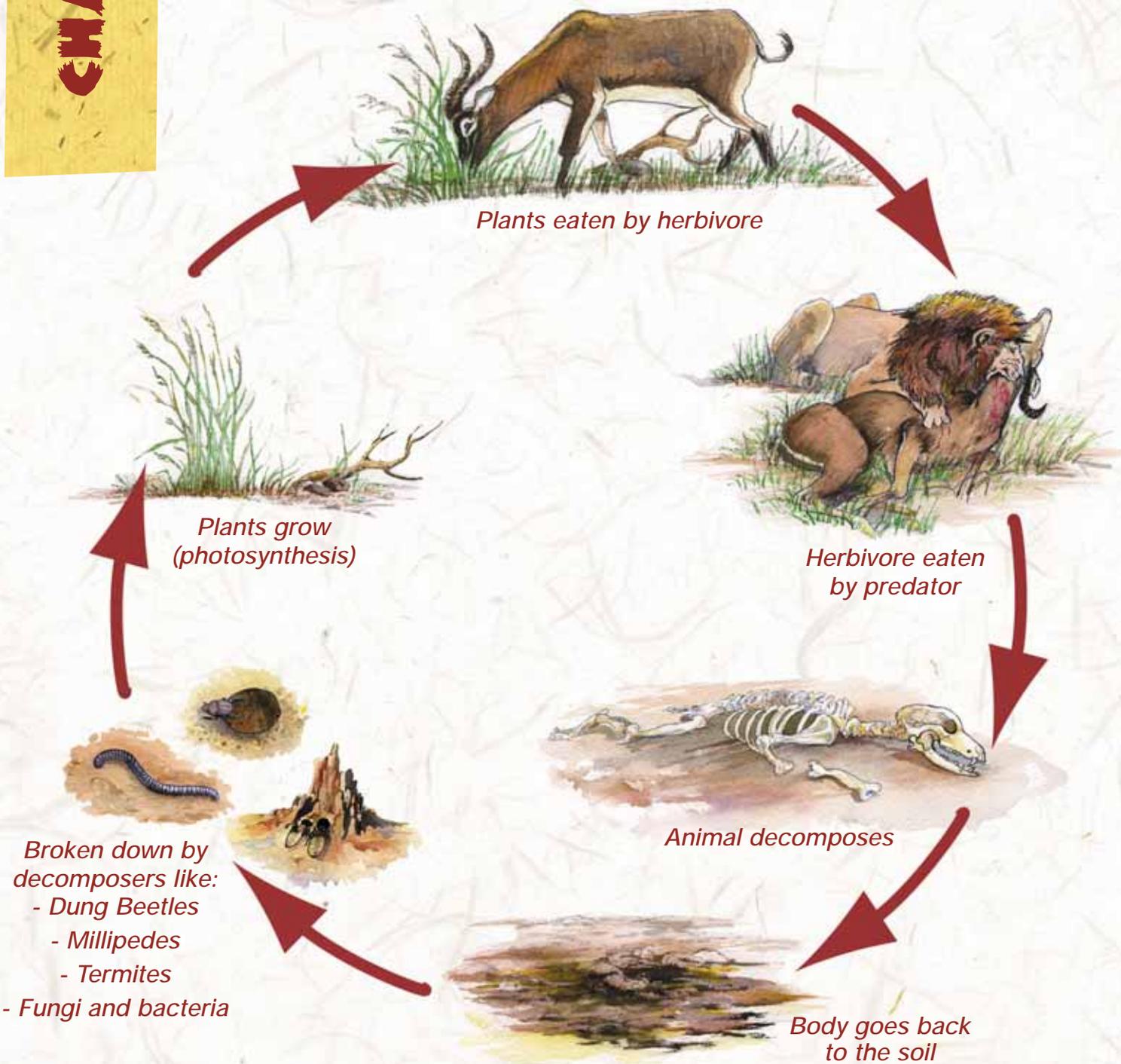


HOW THE SOIL IS MADE

If soil is the mother of our food, the sun is the father. Through a process called photosynthesis, plants harness the sun's energy to make their leaves, flowers, fruits and woody stems, taking the raw materials they need from the soil. Herbivores, plant-eating animals, eat grass and other plants, converting them into muscle and skin and all the different parts of their bodies. Then carnivores, meat-eaters, eat the herbivores. This is known as a food chain.

Nature recycles everything. Plants drop their leaves or die, animals leave their droppings or fall dead to the ground and rot, but nothing is



lost. All the left-over organic matter is processed by the soil creatures, turned back into raw materials ready to be used again by the plants.

The most direct way to get energy is to eat plants. At each step in a food chain, energy is lost as animals use up energy to grow and move and reproduce. Therefore, land can support many more human beings if people eat plants, rather than eating grazing animals. The number of people in the world is growing all the time, and some say that it would make sense for humans to eat more plants and less meat. Despite this, global meat consumption grows at 4% each year. Some people of course have no choice but to eat meat, or their culture is based on it. Around a billion people derive a livelihood from animals. More than three quarters of these are the world's rural poor.

