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*Creating a Better Environment for Life*

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'Learning from the Root' in  
Wenago Woreda, SNNPR

'Learning from the Root' in  
Sofi Wereda, Harar

Keep Yourself & others safe by washing your hands frequently, Social distancing & wearing a mask

# 'Learning from the Root' in Wenago Woreda, SNNPR

ISD's 'Learning from the Root' programme-2021, an innovative process whose objective is to help students and teachers understand, value and utilize local knowledge and practices, took place in Jemjemo Kebele in Wenago Woreda, Gedeo Zone in SNNP Regional State. Wenago was selected for its wealthy, traditional agro biodiversity practices, indigenous knowledge and rich cultural values of the various communities. The woreda would also be hosting the 10th Annual Cultural Biodiversity (CB) celebration. The programme was undertaken over a 6-day period in April and involved 6 schools and 36 participants. In a preliminary visit to the area, consultations on the details of the programme were held with some 14 persons, including woreda authorities, community elders and cultural leaders.

After 13 host families were selected by the woreda education office, Wenago Secondary and Preparatory School and Jemjemo Kebele administration, ISD commenced orientation of the host families. The objective was to familiarize them with the 'Learning from the Root' programme, provide them with information on the background of the participants they would be hosting, and make them aware of the responsibilities they would have during the four-night stay by the participants. The Chairman of Jemjemo Kebele Ato Tesfaye Mekonnen opened the proceedings by voicing wholehearted support for the programme.

ISD, in cooperation with Wenago Wereda Education Office and Wenago Secondary and preparatory School's CB club welcomed the participants, with traditional elders explaining the culture and important aspects of the woreda's demography and socio-economy. Ato Shimelis Tegegne from ISD then oriented the participants on how they should behave during their stay with host families. For instance, they were expected to: respect the culture of the community and host families; learn from experience by participating in all activities host families undertook; inquire about the community and traditions of the area; critically observe their environment; and spend most of their time with their hosts. On the other hand, they

were told not behave in ways that tended to contradict community norms, or say things that might offend their hosts.

Once the orientation was completed the participants traveled to their various host families to undertake the 'experimental learning' phase of the programme. Formats were prepared to guide participants during interaction with their host families. These mainly dealt with questions relating to agricultural practices, social/marriage ceremonies, local foods, manner of dress, and family/home management. Male participants spent whole days with male members of the host family, participating in farming activities, in order to get a 'feel' of the daily routine of farmers. Likewise, female participants did just about everything that female members of the host family did, including fetching water and firewood, cleaning their environment and preparing food. Participants spent nights listening to local stories and traditional sayings and engaging in cultural role play. ISD staff visited the host families to check whether participants were taking part in the activities according to the orientation and guidelines provided.

At the end of the programme a half-day feedback session was conducted with all participants, host families, local government authorities and Wenago school teachers and students. During the meeting the purpose of the 'Learning from the Root' programme was again reiterated so as to strengthen the understanding of the programme by all. Participants expressed very positive emotions and feelings regarding the programme and were grateful for the opportunity to engage in such an exercise. They particularly appreciated the affection and respect they were shown by host communities and had attempted to reciprocate in kind. The programme was deemed a success as participants emphasized that they had now been sensitized on various traditional and cultural values they had previously been unaware of, and also fully understood the importance and value of cultural exchanges. On a practical level they also felt they had learned a great deal about important agro forestry farming methods.

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## ‘Learning from the Root’ in Sofi Wereda, Harar



ISD’s ‘Learning from the Root’ programme-2021, an innovative process whose objective is to help students and teachers understand, value and utilize local knowledge and practices of rural communities, took place in Sofi Kebele, Sofi Wereda, Harari Regional State from May 28 – June 3, 2021. In this innovative process, students and teachers from selected schools traveled to various villages to stay with elders and traditional community members in their homes and learn firsthand about timeless but much valued cultural practices in the communities. Harar was selected due to its abundance of rich cultural values and strong community bonds.

The “Learning from the Root” process also created an opportunity for students and teachers from Cultural Biodiversity (CB) partner schools to share their experiences with each other and with local authorities, communities and other stakeholders. Awumujahidin Primary School in Sofi Woreda hosted the programme in collaboration with Sofi Woreda education office. ISD oriented them on selection of the host kebele and host families. The school authorities were, in turn, oriented on selection of the host kebele and host families and, after consulting community leaders, proceeded to select host families. In a preliminary visit to the area, consultations on the details of the programme were held with some 20 persons, including woreda authorities, community elders, cultural leaders and host families.

Once the host families were selected, ISD began orienting community leaders and host families on the objectives of the ‘Learning from the Root’ programme, providing them with information on the background of the participants they would be hosting and the responsibilities they were expected to shoulder during the participants’ stay. The

Chairman of Sofi Woreda Ato\_Zeko Ebrahim opened the proceedings by expressing his delight at hosting the programme.

Orientation of participants and students was undertaken by Ato Shimelis Tegegne from ISD who described how they should behave during their stay with host families. For instance, they were expected to: respect the culture of the community and host families; learn from experience by participating in all activities of the host families; inquire freely about the community and traditions of the area; critically observe their environment; and spend most of their time with their hosts. On the other hand they were told not to behave in ways contradicted community norms, or make statements that might offend their hosts.

After the orientation the participants traveled to their various host families to undertake the ‘experimental learning’ part of the programme. Formats were prepared to guide participants during interaction with their host families. These mainly contained queries regarding social norms and agricultural practices. Male participants spent whole days with male members of the host familie, taking part in farming activities in order to get a ‘feel’ of the daily routine of farmers. Likewise, female participants undertook most chores that female members of the host families performed daily, such as fetching water and firewood, and cleaning their home and preparing food. Participants spent nights listening to local stories and traditional sayings and engaging in cultural role play. ISD staff visited the host families to check whether participants were taking part in the activities according to the orientation and guidelines provided.

At the end of the programme a half-day feedback session was conducted with all participants, host families and local government authorities. During the meeting the purpose of the 'Learning from the Root' programme was again reiterated so as to strengthen the understanding of the programme by all. Participants expressed very positive emotions and feelings regarding the programme and were grateful for the opportunity to engage in such an exercise. They particularly appreciated the affection and respect they were shown by the host communities. The participants emphasized that they had now been sensitized on various traditional and cultural values they had previously been unaware of, and also fully understood the importance and

value of cultural exchanges. On their part the host families, particularly the women, said that they were delighted to host the participants and treat them as members of their own families. On a practical level the participants felt they had learned a great deal about important agro forestry farming methods.

An important result of the whole exercise was that ISD received a firm commitment from the head of Sofi Woreda education office Ato Bedri Ahmed to support Awumujahidin School and several other new schools in the woreda undertake sustainable CB activities and to provide assistance to their CB clubs.

