



A path to youth leadership

Connecting youth with culture,
nature and self



Author: Million Belay

Editor: Anna Brazier

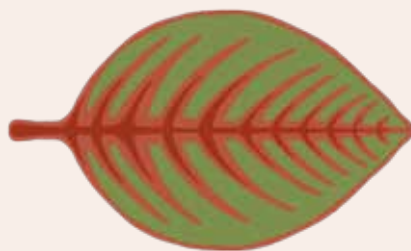
Photographs: courtesy of Bereket Wolde

Design and layout: Anna Brazier

Graphics and cover design: Luc Brazier

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Preface

They say culture is like a river. It has a source and if the source is alive, it keeps on flowing. The source is how we connect with rivers, lakes, mountains, wildlife and livestock. These respectful connections are what keeps the earth functioning. The source is our traditional medicine and a large part of our people still use it. The source is our seeds and food. We do not know what is in store for us in the future. In this time of uncertainty, we need our seeds for resilience. The source is the knowledge of our mothers and fathers. There is vast experience and knowledge that is useful to us in this knowledge coded in our language. The source is how we manage our relationship with each other and our environment. We need our cultural values to keep us living and thrive in the future.

Well my friends, the source is in great danger of drying up. Especially in Africa. Rapidly! I have talked to communities in Ghana, Togo, Benin, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda and they all tell me similar stories. The river is not flowing because of the gap between elders and the youth. Urbanization, globalization, formal education, religion and bad models of development are some of the causes for this widening gap. The new generation does not seem to be interested in the flow of the river.

In 2004, Liz Hoskein, the director of the Gaia Foundation, introduced me to Andrew Muir, director of the Wilderness Foundation in South Africa. He told me about a project called Imbewu, "seed" in Zulu. Imbewu take children into a forest to spend 3 days with elders and through this the children experience connection with nature and culture. Imbewu target black children to give them experience in nature and they let the elders, (former park guards), facilitate the process. I liked the idea and felt that it would add value to our work with schools.

Six participants went to South Africa from Ethiopia and Kenya by the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) to learn how the Imbewu program was conducted. This helped us understand both the concept and the techniques. I also participated in an the Imbewu practice at Kruger National Park, South Africa. We combined our reports to become a draft program.

About the same time, we started an ABN program in Botswana to train members in traditional African ways of connecting with nature and culture. I later combined the Ethiopian programme: Learning About Cultural Biodiversity with the Imbewu and the learning from Botswana and initiated SEGNI. SEGNI means seed and it has the best of the three programs. It takes youth and children into the forest and uses Imbewu methods to connect them with nature. It uses the Botswana experience for a deeper cultural exploration and the Cultural Biodiversity Program to help schools apply what they learnt in the forest.

I experienced a range of creative moments during this time. The program was basically talking about connection with nature and culture until it occurred to me that it has an element of connection with self. The second revelation came in South Africa. I went to facilitate a cultural program in Limpopo Province, Venda. A teacher met me at the airport and while I was driven back, the diagram in the book came to me.

At that time I was reading a book called First Thing First which talks about four areas that are critical for your personal life. These are living, loving, learning and leaving a legacy. This understanding explained the “self” part of the Segni program and it connects well with culture and nature. For example we can ask “what is the connection, between living, culture and nature?” I used this as a framework for the facilitation of the Venda workshop and it formed one of the deepest discussion that we had with the teachers of the community.

As I am writing, the SEGNI program is being conducted in more than 100 schools in Ethiopia and is a regular program in Togo and in some schools in South Africa. I hope this book helps those who are keen to connect youth with their culture and with their surroundings.

Million Belay



Participants in the forest during a SEGNI programme

Part I: Introduction



SEGNU in Oromifa, one of the languages of Ethiopia, means seed. It also stands for Social Empowerment through Nature and Group Interaction. The name was taken from a program in South Africa which is called Imbewu. Imbewu also means seed in Zulu, a language of South Africa. The SEGNI program in Ethiopia combines: The Cultural Biodiversity Programme (started in Ethiopia); the Imbewu program (from South Africa), the Traditional Ecological Knowledge experience (from Botswana) and concepts and practices from a range of publications listed at the end of this book.

SEGNU is a program that takes young people into a forest in a process facilitated by elders, to connect them with nature, culture and themselves. Later the youth start a SEGNI club in their school or community and initiate a range of projects to educate themselves and others about nature, culture and to build leadership

What the purpose of the SEGNI program?

The SEGNI program was started in recognition to the cultural erosion and environmental degradation that is taking place in Africa and to mobilize young people to play an active part in reversing these trends.

The purpose of this book is to give both conceptual and practical guidance to those who want to facilitate a SEGNI program. It is not designed to be a menu, rather the main purpose is to help users explore the relationships between culture, nature and oneself. It is my observation that, done in the right way, SEGNI is one of the most life-changing experience that youth can hope for.

SEGNU works in a practical way to:

- provide a profound experience in nature and traditional culture for children and youth (and occasionally others) who will be the future agents of protection for ecological and cultural diversity;
- encourage support for conservation and pride in cultural heritage;
- create and facilitate a deep interaction with the natural environment;
- increase awareness of traditional ecological knowledge and influence the formal education system.

Young people, as future environmental protectors, are well placed to become eco-advocates (defenders of nature) no matter what career path they may follow. Through respecting the natural world and developing a mutual relationship with their environment, young people can develop a more peaceful and holistic outlook and are less prone to anxiety about materialistic concerns. SEGNI can be seen as a preventative measure - avoiding both destruction of the planet and illness in human beings.

Support for students from their school after the program is very important to encourage the initiation and sustainability of the SEGNI club. Many teachers who have been involved take particular interest in the programme and work hard to encourage and motivate the participating youth in their SEGNI projects.

The structure of this book

The book starts by introducing some key concepts to give a conceptual background. It starts by explaining the cultural challenges that the youth are facing and what the link with culture means and, using a diagram, describes how the self is connected with nature and culture.

The second part of the book describes the preparation that needs to be done for conducting a SEGNI activity. It includes choice of the SEGNI site in the forest, how elders are selected and how facilitators are chosen. The third part of the book contains the actual activities that are done in the forest. It is divided so as to explain what could happen in each day spent in the forest.

The last part of the book contains activities that can be done in schools. Schools that cannot do the forest activities can rely on this section. It includes suggestions on how to organize celebrations, how to construct school cultural houses, how to organize tree raising and planting operations, how to organize and run theatre clubs. Schools can also develop their own exercises to connect youth with culture and nature.

Critical SEGNI concepts

The following section explains some conceptual foundations of the program. This is critical to explain why certain things are done to give guidance's for participants. When the program was started its aim was to connect the participants with nature and culture. As the program evolved we could see that it was changing the behaviour of the participants. Being in nature has transformed some of them profoundly and this has encouraged us to strengthen the "self" part of the program. Therefore, the first part of the book explores how the connection to nature and culture has a bearing in the psychological empowerment of the participants.

Challenges faced by the youth and need for connecting

The degradation of the landscape including habitat loss, soil erosion, decline of water resources, degradation of forests, pollution of land and water resources, climate change, agro-industry and mono-cropping, replacement of traditional crops with non-native species, wetland draining and exploitative commercial factories also has the effect of degrading culture. People's language and knowledge become degraded because they are connected to nature. Young people need to connect with their history to encourage them to reverse this degradation.

Rural and urban areas are changing rapidly economically. There are new infrastructures and new investments including mining and agriculture. This will have a pull effect basically taking the youth from rural areas as day labourers and changing their culture significantly. Or it can have a push factor where the youth are pushed out of their land into urban areas and thereby encountering a dramatically different culture. These development changes affect the relationship of the youth both with his environment and culture. Maintenance of languages, cultural forms, and practices are deeply linked to traditional forms of livelihood, many of which are difficult to follow in the modern urban context.

The need to connect with nature – nature deficit disorder

Humans have a psychological and physiological need to connect with nature. Nature gives us the respite from our busy urban lives. Urbanization is an increasing phenomenon in Africa. Added to this is the advent of technology where people are spending more time in the virtual world than in the real one. In addition, urban people are more susceptible to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD)¹ including cancer and diabetes, which result from unhealthy eating habits and lifestyles. People who do not relate to nature regularly seem to get a Nature Deficit Disorder². This is expressed in depression, aggressiveness and antisocial behaviour.

Our actions in urban environments have real consequences for the planet, as much as cutting down trees does in a forest. When we buy plastic, and throw it away, it affects the entire ecosystem. By giving youth experience in nature, the SEGNI program tries to reduce this disorder. It also helps rural children find new meaning in their environment as well as understanding the sources and significance of their knowledge and the history of their environment and their culture.

The need to be grounded in culture

According to the concept of biocultural diversity youth can become connected with nature in four ways. Through spirituality, livelihoods, language and knowledge and governance³.

Worldview or spirituality

People living with nature consider the environment as an extension of themselves. It is not unusual to find people saying that this tree or that animal is their brother or their ancestor. For them the natural and human worlds are interrelated. This understanding is very important as it instils respect and love for the natural environment.

1 <https://www.nature.com/articles/450494a>

2 Louv, R. (2008). Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.

3 Pretty, J. Adams, B., Berkes, F., Athayde, S., Dudley, N., Hunn, E., Maffi, L., Milton, K., Rapport, D., Robbins, P., Samon, C., Sterling, E.J., Stolton, S., Takeuchi, K., Tsing, A., Vintinner, E. & Pilgrim S. How Do Biodiversity and Culture Intersect? Plenary paper for Sustaining cultural and biological diversity in a rapidly changing world: Lessons for global policy, April 2008, New York.

There are often natural resources that are sacred to the community. Young people need to understand and respect these for they are sources of wisdom, integrity, cohesion and refuge for wild life.

Livelihoods

Young people are related to their natural environment through food, medicine, entertainment and emotion. They get their food through farming or hunting and gathering. They get cured when they are sick and are kept healthy through medicines strewn in the landscape. They get musical instruments, toys and playgrounds from natural sources. They love and hate in natural environments. Thus, they are intimately connected with nature.

Language and knowledge

The language that the youth speak has a direct link with the surrounding nature and social life. If they try to understand it by asking those who know, they can learn about their histories, the morals of their society, and how their identity is related with their social and ecological environment. In this way, language can help them see their surroundings in a new way. In this way, language and knowledge are intimately linked to nature. Learning is social and the knowledge gained has significance in the social reality that they live in.

Governance

Most local communities have or had a governance structure. Even though these governance structures may be significantly weakened, we see their expression during conflicts or some social events such as marriage. During this time, the elders in the community use their cultural legacy to mediate either socially difficult moments or create a lasting relationship among people. These local governance systems hold a lot of wisdom for the youth. Learning about how elders manage relationships within the community, and the communities relationship with the natural surroundings, will help them understand how to be a responsible citizen and contribute to the wellbeing of society.

How culture, nature and self, interconnect

The SEGNI program helps youth, in addition to with nature and culture, connect with themselves. In a book called "First Things First"⁴ Stephen Covey identifies the four elements necessary to make one's life whole. The SEGNI program relates these four elements with nature and culture and uses them to strengthen children and youth understanding of themselves and their relation which their culture and their natural surroundings.

The first element is **living**. - the importance of for example eating the right food, exercising, learning about yourself and meditation.

4 Stephen Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill, First Things First: To Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994 (ISBN 0-684-80203-1)

The second is **learning** through formal education as well as learning new skills and concepts that you find fulfilling. Learning can also happen outside of the school environment and this is the part that SEGNI encourages and cultivates through various activities mentioned in Part IV of this document.

The third is **loving** - the relationships that you have with your family, relatives, neighbourhood and with the larger society.

The fourth is **leaving a legacy** - meaning doing something that stays after you have passed away. The other three exist to make this possible.

Covey says that for a person to be happy, all four elements should be fulfilled. If a person is healthy but does not have education, they feel something is missing. If a person is healthy and educated but has a bad relationship with his or her family, relatives and the larger society, then he or she will always miss the love and the care that others can give. If a person is healthy, educated but does not work to leave a legacy, then he or she has not fulfilled his ultimate goal which will give him the best of happiness. There are those who live for a legacy but who have forgotten the other three, they always feel unfulfilled.

What is the relationship between these elements and culture and nature? Diagram 1 and the section following explain how self is related to culture and nature.

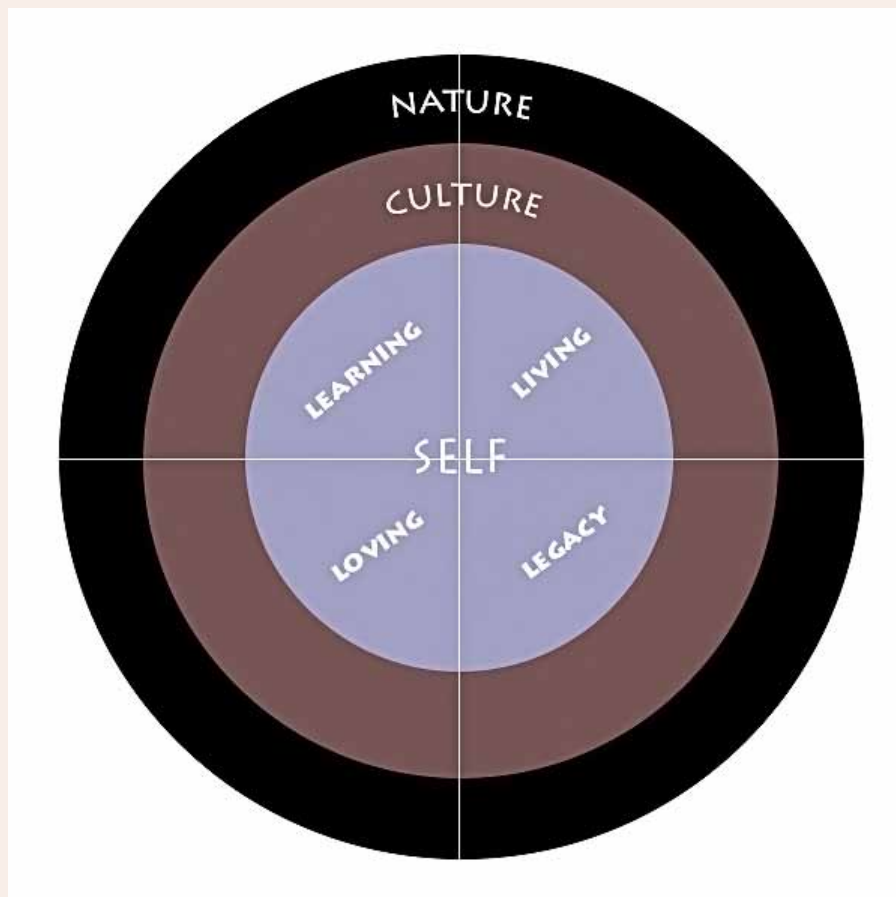


Diagram 1: The connection of self with nature and culture

Living in the context of culture and nature

A simple example of these connections can be seen in the consumption of unprocessed, whole foods. Nutritionists know that these are more healthful than any form of processed or packaged foods. In almost all traditional communities across the world, people have identified, experimented with and domesticated thousands of food items. This is knowledge documented in their language and practice. This is part of what we call culture. Since the food comes from nature, through human production, then this clearly shows the link between culture, nature and living.

Another example is health systems. The knowledge of the traditional healers is cultural while the materials that they use to heal comes from nature. In this way, wellbeing, nature and culture are intimately connected.

Learning in the context of culture and nature

Nature is the fundamental basis of all knowledge. We can learn a lot just by observing how natural phenomena work. The Western knowledge system, which is formal knowledge, is also cultural to Western people.

Learning can happen culturally in a natural environment. If we delve into the stories, proverbs, plays and also agricultural, pastoral and other practices of communities, there is a lot to learn through the wisdom in people's cultural expressions. Most cultures give animals the character of humans and in so doing pass on moral and ethical messages from generation to generation.

Loving in the context of culture and nature

Caring for one's family and relatives as well as the wider community is a value ingrained in most traditional cultures. Most rural communities have strong social bonds. People are brought up to depend on each other rather than to live by themselves. In urban environments, even though you may still relate with your neighbours, the dependence of people on each other is not as much as in rural areas. This can be exemplified by your relationship with someone at the post office. You are dependent on him to deliver your post but you do not know him.

A lot of social activities are related to the cycle of nature including seasonal activities or ceremonies. In Bale, Ethiopia, for example, people have several ceremonies revolving around the lives of their livestock. These ceremonies increase the bonding among members of the community. In this way, nature, culture and the individual participation in social life are interrelated.

Leaving a legacy in the context of culture and nature

There are a lot of instances where the youth are actively encouraged in the society to leave a legacy. Every community has a hero or heroine as an inspiration. These people have left a legacy to be remembered. The act of narrating the history of the hero or heroine is cultural.

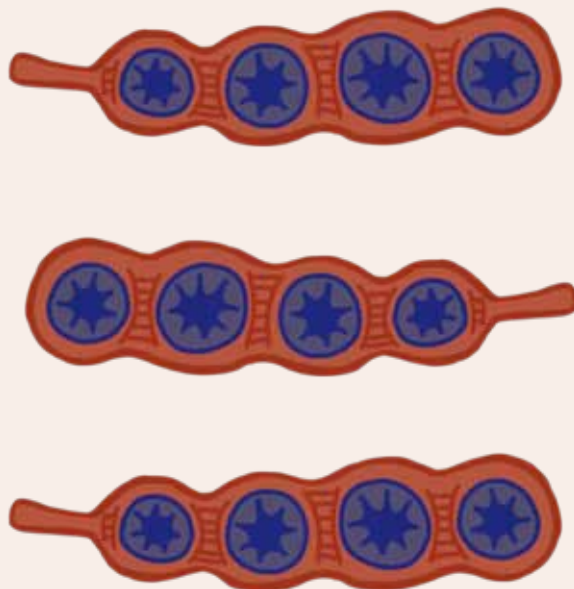
Nature is intertwined in the myth the heroes and heroines when these stories are told.

The SEGNI program equips and motivates children and youth to initiate and participate in environmental and societal activities either while they are a student or after they complete school. Most of them get involved in tree planting. Others start their own youth club and organize their members to work on sustainability issues including empowering women as well as protecting their environment.

This chapter began by explaining where the name SEGNI comes from and outlined the objectives of the program. It described the challenges that youth are facing as part of their society and set the context explaining why the SEGNI program is important. It then went on to explain the conceptual underpinnings of the program. It outlined how culture is connected to nature through spiritual practices, livelihood activities, language and knowledge and during governance.

The core concept of the program is based on how the self is connected with culture and nature. The living, loving, learning and leaving a legacy framework of Stephen Covey was used to explore how nature and culture are intertwined with the self.

The next section will talk about the experience in the forest.



Part II:



Preparing for the SEGNI process

The SEGNI process is divided into three components:

1. Orientation. This involves a broad discussion about why nature and culture are valuable for sustainability and an explanation about the SEGNI program. It is also used to encourage the school to allow students to participate in the program. Some schools hesitate to send girls on the programme as it involves three to four nights out. The orientation session can reassure the families and the school about the girls safety.

2. Activities in the forest. These activities take place in the forest or natural areas for the purpose of connecting the participants with themselves, their culture and the natural environment.

3. Activities in the school or in the community. These activities are done in the school or community (rural or urban), by those who have participated in the program. The purpose is to motivate them to continue their engagement with culture and nature through a range of activities including art and planting trees.

Orientation

The first part of the SEGNI program is orientation. The aim of this part of the programme is to explain to the school community the purpose of the program as well as to choose student leaders to take part in the program.

If the project is linked to a school, the facilitator should ask the school director to be allowed to speak to the whole school. If allowed, the facilitator should talk about the value of conserving nature and culture and about the SEGNI program. This speech can include why we care for nature, how nature is related to culture and how being in nature can help us improve our life. During this session it is important not to create a classroom environment. The facilitator can mention some of the environmental challenges in the locality and give the audience hope that they can be addressed. This is important so as not to create a feeling of helplessness or, worse, eco-phobia - a phenomena where people lose hope of ever improving their environment because all they hear about are environmental problems.

The orientation also gives the facilitator a chance to talk about the prerequisites for the SEGNI programme to help the school or community decide whether they have the resources and are able to commit to the programme.

Pre-requisites for running a SEGNI programme

The following core requirements are an integral part of the conceptualization, design and delivery of a SEGNI programme.

Committed facilitators

These should have been trained by MELCA (Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action) and have 3-5 years' experience in an appropriate field of work, (such as education, sustainability, group facilitation, or psychology).

Facilitators should understand the value of nature and culture and able to explain to the participants. They should also be able to walk in the forest. Equally important is their back ground in being respectful of elders as well as not having a record of abusing students.

Committed elders

As the program works on culture and nature, elders are critical to its success. They are the guardians of the cultural stories. They also know most of the plants and animals and are respected by the community for their knowledge. This does not mean that young people do not come with knowledge. Most elders who have worked in the program for a long time attest that they have learned from the participants as well.

In general, elders who work on the SEGNI programme need to:

- Be prepared to give consistent, committed involvement to the programme. They should be willing to share their knowledge and experience throughout the course itself and in follow-up sessions. They should also be available for consultation on a regular basis.
- Have respect of and from their community.
- Have good understanding of traditional ecological and cultural knowledge.
- Have the ability to communicate this to young people through methods such as discussion, stories, and the retelling of myths.
- Have the ability to walk in the forest.

Although it is difficult to get female elders to commit five days to this event, it is important to try to involve them. In most African cultures, women know many stories and proverbs and also know a lot about medicinal plants.





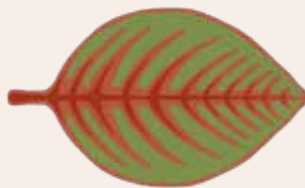
A community elder showing participants medicinal plants

Carefully chosen participants

Choosing young participants depends on many criteria. The following are good choices:

- **Lead students** – they will lead by example after the programme. Extracurricular club leaders will improve their leadership skills and help mobilize the school for further action.
- **Delinquents** – these will benefit from the programme the most and have been shown to find the connection between nature and themselves very powerful.

Most students who come to SEGNI are above 13 years old but increasingly, the 7th and 8th grades are being targeted as they will have a longer time in schools and as this means a longer time of participation and learning in club activities.



Equipment

Tents, beds, cutlery, plates and consumables. It is important that strong and durable tents are bought. Canvas tents are very strong but they are heavy. Light, strong tents are better. Mattresses, sleeping bags and cutlery should also be provided. It is also important to buy proper consumables such as torches, lamps, tissue paper, and exercise books.

Food. Ideally food should be bought from communities around the camp site to reinforce the SEGNI principles of connecting to culture and to your surrounding but this can be challenging. If food must be bought from supermarkets try to include fresh vegetables, local bread and non-trans fat oils (these are oils which solidify).

Water. It is best to buy a number of jerrycans per student and give them to individuals for their stay in the forest. Each student consumes on average ten litres of water during their stay. Water for other purposes is transported to the site separately and used communally and carefully. Alternatively, large water containers can be transported to the site and used and monitored carefully. Be careful not to drink from a water source in the forest unless you are sure that they do not cross cities or towns. The facilitator should give a direction in this regard. If water is not available and if the students are forced to drink from a water resource that the facilitator is not sure about, he or she should use portable filters and water purifiers.

Selection of a SEGNI site

The selection of a SEGNI site is one of the most critical parts of the process. It is preferable to have two or more sites. This gives option for changing if needed or having two processes taking place at the same time. The following suggestions will help you choose the best site.

Natural: The area should be natural since the main purpose of the program is to connect nature, culture and self. Campsites should be at places that are naturally beautiful. This will accentuate the sense of wonder about nature. There should also be a facility for walks to surrounding areas of beauty.

Peaceful: The camp site should be far from noise such as from a road, digging for minerals, building or logging. It should also be far from villages. Participants should get quality time, undisturbed by other people who are not involved with the programme. Outsiders can be highly intrusive and may disrupt participant's deeper conversation with him or herself.

Accessible: The camp site should be easily accessible as it is difficult to transport food and medicine deep into the forest. Easy access to road is also important for getting help if there is an accident.

Safe: There should always be protection from criminals and dangerous wild animals. The organization facilitating the SEGNI program should have up to date information about the site.

Close to a water source: The site should be near clean water, preferably water that the participants can bath in. A rule must be set, though, not to use it as a toilet. It should also not push boys and girls into unsolicited relationship.

How food is organized and handled

It may be necessary to hire cooks rather than to ask students to prepare the food. In a similar exercise in South Africa, though, the participants themselves prepared their food. Having cooks frees students for other SEGNI activities but getting them to cook for themselves also creates a sense of responsibility and teaches them team work. The facilitator can choose what is best for the situation according to the context. Each meal could have three or four volunteers serving the others. This should be organized by the facilitator on the first day and everyone will know when to serve. Alternatively, the facilitator can assign one boy and one girl to lead the process and they can organize who serves at what time.



Part III:



SEGNU experience in the forest

This part gives suggestions of activities that can take place in the forest to in order to help participants to understand the connections between nature, culture and themselves. It is a critical part of the experience and, if it is handled expertly by both the program leader and the elders, it will be unforgettable.

The forest experience has impacted so many in so many ways. The most common are change in participants behaviour such as becoming better citizens, having more respect for their cultural values, developing a sense of responsibility towards nature and leading to self-initiated social and environmental activities.

This section should be used as a guide but feel free to include additional or alternative activities that are relevant.

Usually, two elders and the facilitator participate.

Day 1- Arrival



Orientation in the forest

Orientation happens during the first day of the program. After the group has arrived and had their food and drink, everyone goes to a designated SEGNI place and sits in a circle. A designated SEGNI place is the part of the forest where tents are pitched and where the group spends most of their time. The elders start the process with prayer. Then each of the participants will be given the opportunity to introduce themselves. This usually includes their name, where they came from and their connection with culture and nature.

Then the facilitator collects all mobile phones and cameras as they interfere with the process of the program. They may be returned to allow the children to make a final call to their family to say that they will not be using their phone during their stay in the forest. Participants are not informed about the confiscation of their mobile phone in advance and experience tells us that, although they are quite shocked to part with their sense of security and with the connection to their usual world, it adds to their sense of vulnerability and opens them to what is going to come during their stay in the forest.

The facilitators then take the participants through the following processes:



Setting up camp

Background to the program

Someone tells the participants about the place where the SEGNI process takes place. For example, if the processes take place at the Menagesha Suba forest, a forest management officer should be invited to explain the history of the place and to welcome the participants. This will link the participants with the area that they are going to stay in for the coming days. This might take up to half an hour.

Learning about the forest

Purpose: to introduce the participants with the wild animals in the forest.

Materials required: Large piece of paper and pen, scissors.

Time taken: about an hour

This exercise links the participants with their surrounding very quickly. Ask the elders to name all the animals in the forest. It is beneficial if you give the scientific name of the animals, to complement the knowledge of the elders. Write the names on a large piece of paper.

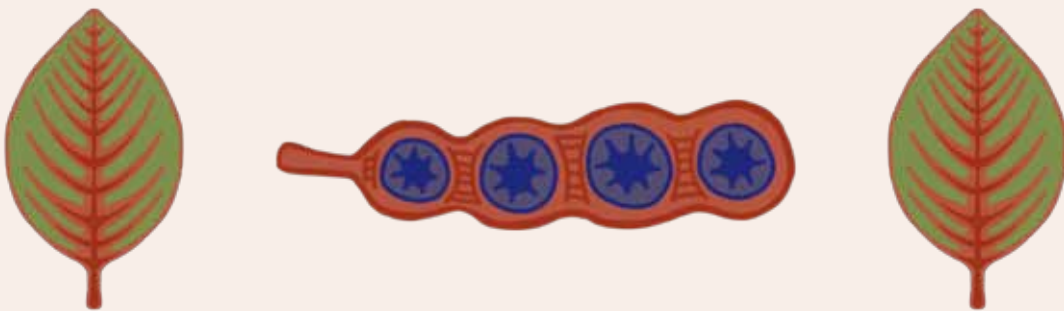
Cut the paper into pieces each containing the name of one animal. Put the papers into a basket and get each participant to take one piece of paper. Each participant will get the name of an animal and this becomes his/ her name as long as he/she is in the forest.

Play a game to help the participants remember the names of all the animals. Ask the first participants to say his/ her animal's name. The second must say the first animal and his/her own. The third must say the two before him/ her and his/ her

own. The game continues like that until the last participant gets his/her name and all the names. As the name of each animal is repeated, it is likely that at least half of the animals names will be remembered.

The facilitators should try to learn and tell the children about the behaviour of each animal. Some animals have a negative connotation such as hyena which are considered greedy eaters, cowardly and dirty. So, it is critical that the boy or the girl who gets the name do not feel unhappy. If they know that hyena is one of the strongest of the animals, does a huge service to clean urban and rural areas and is the most brilliant social animal, they will change their mind about it and appreciate being called after its name.

On the second or third day, the game can be repeated with plants. Major, critical plants can be named and the participants get the names by lot. Again, it is important that they are encouraged to remember their own and each other's plant names and also about the value of the plants.



Do's and don'ts

Purpose: to set the ground rules of what is allowed and what is strictly forbidden.

Materials required: None

Time taken: about half an hour

The facilitator can do this activity in different ways. He/she can ask the participants to suggest what can be done and what cannot be done or he/she can ask the children to suggest the rules themselves.

The facilitator should have a list before hand to ensure that everything is mentioned. Here are some suggestions:

1. We should try to leave the forest in a better condition than we found it.
2. Loud voices and louder laughs are forbidden. We should try to stay as quiet as possible. You will benefit more by speaking to yourself than speaking with others around you.
3. No one will be allowed to leave the area for any reason during camp.
4. Cell phones should not be used during camp. This includes using any applications or texting.

5. Extinguish the campfire completely using water. Wind can spread fire and this will cause danger and harm the program.
6. Do not throw food or other waste into the forest. Use the designated places for rubbish. Food might attract wild animals.
7. Please use only toilets. If you use the forest, cover your waste very well.
8. Please do not cut leaves, branches and trees
9. Please do not approach, try to feed, or attack the wild animals.
10. Please do not stray away from the camp. Use only goat trails for walking in the forest.
11. While in the forest, do not do anything that will disturb or destroy the beauty of the land.
12. Foul language, bullying, or any disrespect will not be tolerated at any time.
13. Weapons (knives, guns, sharp objects, etc.) are strictly forbidden at camp.
14. Spaghetti strap tops, tops that show a bare stomach, low dressage pants, and any other clothing that exposes undergarments are not permitted.
15. Use, possession, or distribution of weapons, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, or any other illegal product is not permitted.
16. Verbal or physical abuse of any kind, including hitting, kicking, biting, or pushing is strictly forbidden.

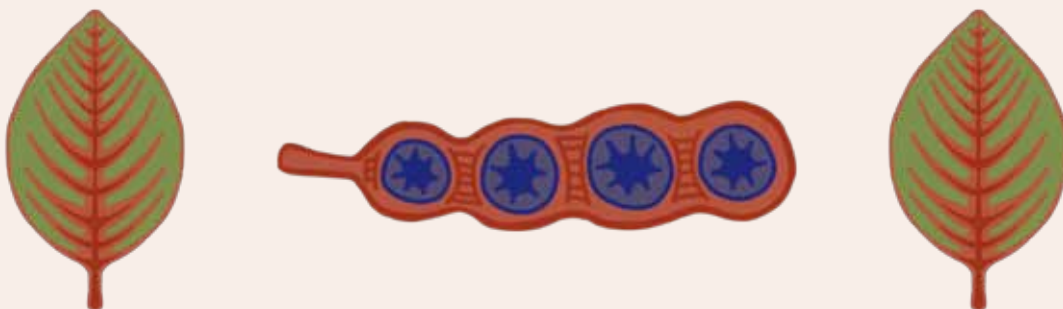
Explain that if the rules are broken offenders will be asked to leave the camp and if the abuse is serious, they will be taken to the police.

Taking turns to serve food

Purpose: This is a good chance to create team spirit as well as the importance of serving others.

Two leaders will be selected per meal and they will organize the washing of hands, distribution of food and cleaning at the end of the meal. This will be done in turn and as many of the participants as possible should participate.

Explain that it is important that elders are served first. This is to recognize their age as well as their service in teaching the students. Elders are respected in many societies and it is important that the SEGNI program does that.



Principles of communicating in the forest⁵

Purpose: To teach to the participants basic group communication skills in the forest.

Materials required: talking stick

Connection between nature, culture and with oneself happens best when participants are silent and do not speak with each other all the time. Nature usually helps people go deep into themselves when they are quiet. The processes in the forest are designed to facilitate silence so that people can think for themselves and about themselves even if they are in a group. This is helped by each of the participants keeping quiet. So, explain that whenever participants speak with someone, they should do it without raising their voice.

Rules for sitting in a circle and talking/ council work

Explain that during the SEGNI process, we are required to sit in a circle in a number of times. The facilitator will find a suitable place to do this. They will have a talking stick or any object that can be passed around easily. Only the one with the stick or object is allowed to speak and the others have to listen. These are the four rules that participants should follow during talks in the circle.

First, we speak from our hearts. We do not speak to impress others but we speak by way of emotions or imagination and always from our hearts.

Second, we listen with our hearts. We do not judge the person who speaks. We encourage each other to speak.

Third, when it is our turn to speak, we do not explain a situation or argue about something. We just say what we felt. We can even hold the stick and sit and not say anything.

Fourth, we speak without thinking. This is difficult to do but do not rehearse what you are going to say. It is difficult to listen to others with your heart while you are practicing what you are going to say. If we speak what we have rehearsed and not what is in our hearts, those listening with their hearts will know it. If, on the other hand, we speak our hearts, the others will be on our side no matter how much we might stumble.

Sacred speech and silence

Explain that while we are in the forest, we should forget as much as possible about where we have come from, our family, politics and so on, and focus on what we observe around ourselves. We should avoid talking about trivial matters including football, movies, the weather or gossip about friends or teachers.

5 Plotkin, B. (2003). *Soulcraft: crossing into the mysteries of nature and psyche*. Novato, Calif.: New World Library.

We should talk as little as possible but if we have to talk, is better to talk about our dreams inside the forest, our struggles with our life, our loves, our emotions and what we want to create.

This is very difficult to do as our mind goes off in different directions. We are not used to silence. There is no requirement that such conversation be very serious or hushed. We can be funny with our mistakes and laugh at our experiences. A regular diet of limited conversation about the things that are important to us and silence nourishes the soul.

Journal work

Purpose: to exercise writing about our experience

Materials required: pen and exercise book

Time taken: 20 minutes

Explain that during your stay in the forest, you should write to connect with yourself and with your surroundings. You record your memories, dreams, reflections, visions, hopes, emotions, major life transitions, and meetings with remarkable people. You write your experiences with SEGNi practices. This will be a very good practice even after you go back to where you have come from. This practice has helped a lot of people to develop themselves and even to become writers.

Here are some ideas for journal work:

- If you feel that your life is changing in a fundamental way or if you want to change something, write about it in detail. What is it you want to change? Why do you want to change? What will you do to make it happen? What will be your obstacles? How do you think you will overcome them?
- Record your dreams. If you are having trouble remembering them, do this (it works most of the time): Have your journal ready at your bedside. On the top of a new page, write the next day's date and the words "Dream Report." Place the pen on the page like a bookmark. Turn the light out and begin a long conversation with yourself concerning the specific reasons why you want to recall your dreams. List the reasons in your mind and imagine you are storing each one in a different part of your body.
- Keep the conversation going until you fall asleep. As soon as you wake up, don't move until you have fully replayed your dream in your imagination. Perhaps give your dream a title, such as "My Journey with Two Women Comes to a Halt." Then reach for your journal. Write about your dreams in the present tense as if you are recording actions and experience occurring as you write them. Include all emotions (what you felt like during the dream). Ask yourself what your dream means, or don't ask at all.



Day 2



Morning activities

Exercise

Purpose: to aid waking up and to reinforce the importance of healthy living
Time taken: 15 – 30 minutes

Organise light exercise to help the participants to wake up. After this choose one of the games from the list below. After the game, breakfast is served.

Games

The games in this book are designed to connect the participants with nature and to help them think about some critical questions. It is important to stop at the end of each game and ask what we learn about the relationships in nature from the game. You can also ask what the game tells us about us. The games below are suggestions. The facilitators can add other games based on the availability of time and the context.



SEGNI participants in a forest activity

Touching nature

Purpose: to use other sense organs than the eye for orientation in the forest

Materials required: cloth to cover the eyes

Time taken: 15 minutes

Divide the participants into pairs. Ask one person in the pair to cover his/her eyes with the cloth. The partner leads him/ her to the piece of nature (such as a plant, tree or rock) that she/he wants to "show". The blindfolded person should touch the object and try to remember it. Then they come back to the start. The blindfolded person can uncover his/her eyes and try to find the same piece of nature. Later they change roles.

Meet a tree

Purpose: to use other sense organs than the eye to relate to nature

Materials required: cloth to cover the eyes

Time taken: 20 minutes

Divide the participants into pairs. One person should cover their eyes with a cloth. The other should lead him/her through the forest to any tree that attracts him/her. How far will depend on participants' age and ability to orientate themselves. For all but very young children, a distance of 20 - 30 meters usually is not too far.

The partner should help the blindfolded person to explore the tree and to feel its uniqueness. Give specific suggestions on how to explore the tree.

For example, if you tell children to "feel the tree," they will not respond with as much interest as if you say, "rub your cheek on the bark." Instead of "Explore your tree", be specific ask: "Is this tree still alive? Can you put your arms around it? Is the tree older than you are? Can you find plants growing on it? Animal signs? Lichens? Insects?"

When the partner finishes exploring the tree, the other person should lead him/her back to where they began but take an indirect route. This part of the game has its fun side, with the guides leading their partners over imaginary logs and through thickets that might easily have been avoided.

Remove the blindfold and let the participant try to find the tree with his/her eyes open. Suddenly, as he/she searches for the tree, what was a forest becomes a collection of very individual trees. In this way a tree can be an unforgettable experience in the young person's life. Often young people who have played this game become attached to "their tree" and when they return to the place they played "Meet a Tree", search through the forest again to find "their tree".



Map of the surroundings

Purpose: to understand the forest

Time taken: 40 minutes

First put a stone in the middle of a place you want to “discover”. Ask participants to bring two sticks each, one should be longer than their arm, while the second one should be half of the size. They should put the sticks on the ground creating a circle divided into small pieces, like pizza.

Long sticks divide the circle into pieces and short ones create the outer ring of the circle. Each participant chooses one piece of the circle. Then they turn around and walk for about 50 meters ahead in the straight line away from the circle. After a few steps (about 10 meters) they stop and collect a piece of nature that is characteristic of this area, for example a leaf, moss or stones.

When they have collected five objects, they should come back and put them into the circle. The things that they found closer, they should put close to the middle of the circle. Explain to them that when they all put their pieces of nature in the circle, they created a sort of map of the area with the typical plants and characteristics. Indigenous people in USA used this method to have better orientation in the space and to know where to go when they needed something.

Natural patterns

Purpose: this helps to recognize relationships in nature

Time taken: 15 minutes

Ask participants to choose three connected lines on the palm of their hands and mark it with a pen. Then ask them to find the same pattern in nature, for example on leaves or branches.

Trekking – walk in the forest

Purpose: to learn about the forest and cultural significance of plants and animals.

Materials required: note book and pen

Time taken: at least one hour

The walk in the forest is one of the key activities. It has its own regulations. Before the walk starts, the elders lead the group in traditional prayers. Explain to the participants that they should walk behind each other and that they are not allowed to leave the line. Note that talking is strictly forbidden. If any one sees something interesting they must tap the shoulder of the person in front of them and point at what they saw. If they are in the front, they should raise their hand. They could have seen a wild animal. Wild animals are extremely sensitive and can run if disturbed and that is why it is important to be quiet.



SEGNI participants trekking

When the elders see something interesting, (such as a plant of cultural importance), they should stop and explain the significance. The participants can take notes and ask questions but they are not allowed to talk among themselves.

Solitary time

Purpose: to learn to observe and listen to nature and ourselves

Materials required: writing/ drawing book and pen/ pencil

Time taken: at least one hour

Solitary times are one of the greatest opportunities for youth during the programme. Solitary time should happen before the group conversation which is called tracking and will be explained in the following section. Usually after the trekking, participants will be asked to walk in any direction, not very far, (so that they are not in the sight of another participant) and sit quietly. They will be asked to look for some attraction at the place that they are sitting in. They should observe their surroundings in detail (they can even draw a particular plant or animal).

Then they should ask themselves 'what worries do I have about my life that I cannot change?' This is called a circle of concern. This is usually concern beyond the individual reach. For example, someone can worry about the result between two premier league football clubs but he cannot change the result. Then they should ask 'What are the areas in my life that I can change but I am not changing?' This is called circle of influence. These are basically habits that we could change but are not changing for various reasons, mainly through lack of action or discipline.



A SEGNU participant experiencing solitary time

This can be a very powerful exercise. Participants are encouraged to write about what they were thinking and exchange with each other, mostly sitting in a circle in the tracking session. This is usually done at least for an hour but the longer, the better.

After this the group goes back to camp and eats lunch and rests for some time.

Afternoon activities

It is better to take the group to a different part of the forest in the afternoon. They sit in a circle and practice tracking.

Tracking

Purpose: to develop a group memory and hear others various experiences

Materials required: talking stick

Time taken: about one hour

This is another key exercise. It is usually done after the solitary time, but it can be done any time. After some rest, participants go to a quiet area and sit in a circle and discuss (track) the time that they spent together.

On the first day, for example, someone can start to track his previous day starting from his trip to the forest, then talking about the first impression of the forest, then the orientation program and what he felt, his first night in the forest and the next day with the group. Other participants get the chance in the coming days if the session cannot include all participants responses. This is a really good exercise for developing a group memory as almost everyone has slightly different experience of the past day based on his or her upbringing, childhood, history, education and so on. It can also help them notice things that they have overlooked.

This session can also be used to discuss participant's thoughts during the solitary time and/ or what they felt at any moment in the forest. Tracking what they were thinking during the solitary time is really essential. It will help them to off-load what has been weighing down on them and also, help them to see that most of life's challenges that they think are only theirs are shared by others. This is deeply healing. It is important not to rush this exercise and hear anyone ready to speak. This is where the talking stick is used to great effect.

The following are exercises that can be done during tracking.

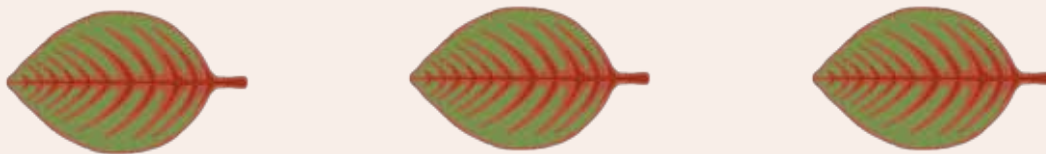
Widening circles⁶

Purpose: to help participants see an issue or situation which is of great concern to them from a new perspective. Thus, they participate in widening circles of identity.

Materials required: clacker or bell, talking stick

Time taken: 60 to 90 minutes

Note: This exercise can also serve as the sole experiential component of a short workshop or evening gathering.



⁶ Macy, J., & Brown, M. Y. (1998). *Coming back to life: Practices to reconnect our lives, our world*. Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers.

This is an excellent exercise for developing environmental activists, bringing, wisdom, patience, flexibility, and perseverance.

Participants should sit in groups of four. Ask them to choose a particular issue or situation that concerns them. Examples could include: forest degradation, sex before marriage, using artificial fertilizer, eating health food or time spent on social media. After a moment of silence, invite them to take turns speaking and listening to each other.

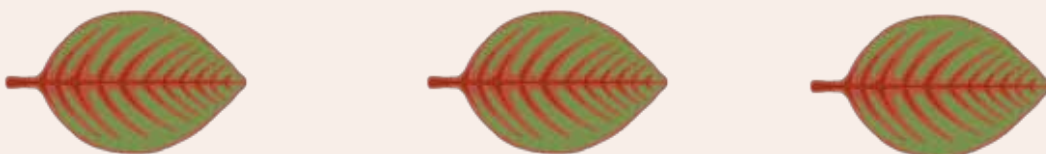
Explain that each person in the group should describe the issue from four different perspectives:

- From their own experience and point of view, including their feelings about the issue;
- From the perspective of a person whose views are very different and even adversarial on the issue, introducing themselves and speaking as this person, using the pronoun "I";
- From the viewpoint of a nonhuman being that is involved in or affected by that particular situation;
- And lastly, in the voice of a future human whose life will be directly affected by the choices made now on this issue.

The facilitator should announce these perspectives when the time comes for each person to speak instead of all at the outset. He/she should repeat them in the sequential fashion for each new speaker. Participants should be given at least three minutes for each perspective. Signal the time with a verbal cue (such as "take another minute to finish") and then with a clacker or bell to end that part. Allow for silence between each part and at the end of each series.

To speak on behalf of another person and identify even briefly with that person's experience and perspective, is an act of being in their place and understanding their position. It is not difficult to do: as children, we knew how to "play-act." Use a soft, almost casual tone in your instruction; you are not asking people to be wise, but simply to imagine another point of view. Allow some silence as they choose for whom they will speak and imaginatively enter that other's experience, so they can respect it and not perform an exaggerated act.

It is a brave and generous act to make room in your mind for another's experience and to lend them your voice; let the participants appreciate that generosity in themselves and each other. Allow time at the end for people to share in their small groups what they felt and learned.





Night activities

At this time, it will be time for those whose turn it is to serve others. After dinner and some rest, it is time for a great story from the elders.

Night time story

Purpose: to give elders time to tell stories and for the participants to listen and learn from them.

All of the participants should sit around in a circle for this exercise. Firewood should be used sparingly.

The time for the elders to tell stories is one of the most special times in SEGNU experience. The elders should be encouraged to use original stories told in their local language. Translation can be given by the facilitator for those who do not understand. It is critical that a discussion on the stories follows. The facilitator should ask the participants what they think the stories mean. As people do not see the same story in the same way, the combination of reflections/ responses enriches the understanding of the stories.

After the night story, it will be time for night watch.

Night watch

Purpose: to give experience to participants of night life where they can reflect on their life as well as help them conquer their fear.

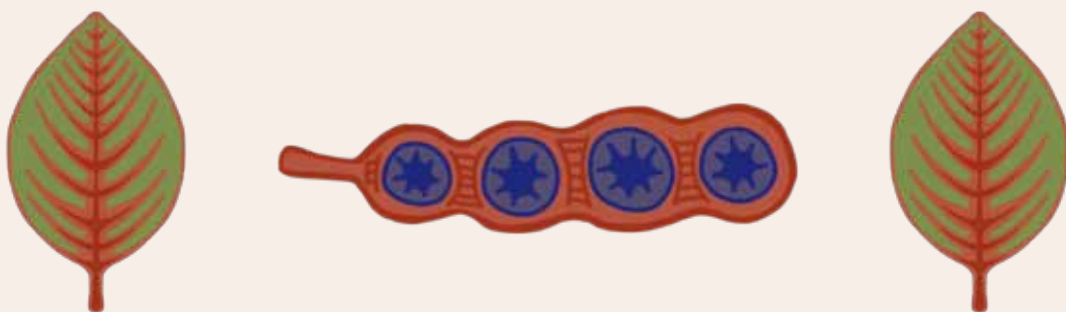
Materials required: Torch and watch

Time taken: One hour

In this activity participants will take turns sitting around the fire for one hour throughout the night, being woken by and waking their peers on a rotational basis. The facilitators must make sure that the camp is absolutely safe in terms of exposure to wild animals or other security dangers. The participants should sit quietly and should not talk to others. A fire can be kept burning through the night to ward off wild animals and also to give some light. But do not burn a lot of wood.

Just before the story time, the facilitator will write the animal or plant names of the participants on pieces of paper and ask them to take a draw. Based on the first lot basis, the facilitator will line them up for the evening. Night watch can be a really frightening experience for some of the participants. In extreme case of a nervous and frightened participant, they should be paired but the experience is much more gratifying and fulfilling when they do it alone. So, a lot of encouragement is needed.

The next day, during talks in the circle, participants are encouraged to share their reflection of their night watch experience.



Day 3



On day three, most of the activities done during day one are repeated.
Here are suggestions for day three.

Morning activities

Start with an exercise as day one. You can ask the participants to stand in a circle while the facilitator leads them a warm up and stretching exercise. You can also ask each to contribute one exercise and it will be fun to do as a group.

Games

Observing nature

Purpose: to increase their attentiveness to nature

Materials required: Different coloured paper

Time taken: 30 minutes

Divide participants into pairs. Give each pair some pieces of different coloured paper and ask them to find these colours in nature. Remind them not to pick any pieces of nature, just to observe. Afterwards ask the participants if they managed to find all the colours.

Nature photograph

Purpose: to learn to observe nature

Materials required: cloth for blindfold. Paper and pen for drawing the comic strip

Time taken: 30 minutes

This will be more effective if played in an area where there are many plants. The participants form pairs. One will be the “camera” and the other the “photographer”. They will wander around the forest. The “camera” will be blindfolded, and the “photographer” will act as a guide. The photographer will stop anywhere he/she wants to take a photo. Then he/she will open the camera’s eyes (by lifting the blindfold) for a second or two. The camera will then explain to their partner what they have taken a photo of.

Encourage the participants to give as good description as possible by asking them questions. If the time given for the camera to take the photographs does not seem enough, provide more time. You can make this game longer by asking the photographer to tell a story to the bigger group. After the photographer has taken a series of pictures, the “camera” should guess what the story was about. The photographer will have an idea of the story and does not tell the camera. This is to help the camera to be more observant of what he/she takes a photograph of.

To finish the game, the camera “develops their film.” This can be done by drawing a comic strip of the pictures taken and writing a story to accompany the images.

Listening to nature

Purpose: To exercise the practice of listening with purpose

Materials required: No material

Time taken: 30 minutes

The whole group stands in a circle with their eyes closed and their fists up in the air. For one or two minutes the group listens to the sounds of nature and stretches out one finger for each sound they hear. After some time, the leader asks everyone to open their eyes and participants compare their results. Nobody is a winner here – it’s not about hearing the largest number of sounds!

After the games the participants have breakfast and prepare for trekking.

Trekking

This time the elders take the participants in another direction and continue teaching them about the plants and animals that they find on their way.

Solitary time

At this solitary time, the participants can continue to explore the most important question of they can control and what they cannot control in their lives. This is an age old and very critical exercise. It should be done every day by everyone.

It can be explained to them that most of the anxieties and the worries in their lives comes from not clearly understanding the difference. It is important, as part of their personal growth, for them to work daily on what they can control. This can be their desires, their thoughts, their school work and so on.

Afternoon activities

After lunch, participants can go to the designated place, sit in a circle and start tracking.

Tracking

Tracking can start again on what they have identified as what they can control and they cannot. Those participants, who have spent the first night in taking turns to guard the camp should be given the space to speak about their experience. After that, the following exercise can be added.

Who Are You?

Purpose: This process serves to move us beyond constricted notions of who we are and what can happen through our action.

Materials required: a bell

Time taken: one hour

Participants are divided into pairs. Each pair sits close together, far enough from the others to avoid distraction.

Explain that the partners should take turns to ask each other questions, for thirty minutes each way, without comment. Explain the instructions as follows:

Partner A should begin by asking Partner B, "Who are you?" You listen. You ask again, "Who are you? Again, you listen, then repeat the question, "Who are you?" Rest assured that the answers will be different. You can vary the question, if you wish, with "What are you?" but you say nothing else. This continues for about ten minutes, until I ring the bell.

Then ask the second question, "What do you do?" Now, in a similar fashion, you listen to those answers and then keep repeating the query, "What do you do?" You can also phrase it, "What happens through you?"

After ten minutes, when I ring the bell, you will revert to the first question, "Who (or what) are you?" The process will repeat itself once more, taking seven or eight minutes with each question, ending with "who are you?" for a final five minutes. The bell signals when to change questions.

Note that this is a strenuous mental exercise. It can produce extraordinary insights, sometimes with bursts of laughter, but it feels relentless. It must be undertaken gently and with respect. Remember, you are not badgering your partner. You're not suggesting that his responses are wrong; you're helping him go deeper. You are in service to your partner. The pace and volume of your questions will vary. You will know naturally when to ask again quickly and when to pause in silence. Now before you begin, greet your partner.

Partner A bows to B once more when the cycle of questions is over. As the partners change roles, let them stand and stretch, without talking. At the end of the entire exercise, which takes an hour, allow plenty of time for people to digest what has happened for them. Let the pairs relax and chat; then if there is time, bring them back together in the large group so that people can share some of their insights if they wish - which they usually do.

Evening activities

The evening program is the same as day two and it includes, dinner, storytelling and night watch. Those who did not get a chance to participate in the night watch during the first two days should be given a chance now and this can also mean that some may get it twice or thrice.

Day 4



Morning activities

Start with exercises. Then play a game. After physical exercise and some games, the participants will do tracking and solitary time.

Games

Sound map

Purpose: to get the participants to pay attention to their surroundings and learn about mapping

Materials required: a pencil and a piece of paper for each participant

Time taken: about 30 minutes

Give each participant a pencil and paper. Explain that the piece of paper will become a map of the surroundings and in the centre of the map participants should draw an X symbol to indicate their location. The goal of the game is to listen to the noises and sounds of nature and then draw them on the paper. For example, if someone hears a bird he/she should draw a bird on the paper. It is important to put the drawing symbolizing the sound on the paper in the location it is coming from, so that a sound map is created.

Land art

Purpose: to enable the children to be creative using the materials around them.

Time taken: about 30 minutes

Ask participants to choose, from their surroundings, a piece of nature that symbolizes themselves or that they really like.

Next ask everyone to stand in a circle, show the object and explain why they chose it. Next ask them to create a picture on the ground that uses only natural elements beginning with the first object that they chose. Afterwards everyone walks around and looks at all the compositions – the land art exhibition.

For older participants, you can give an introduction to the concept of land art. Land art is an art form that is created in nature, using only natural materials such as soil, rocks, logs, branches, leaves, water and other items. Rather than sculptures being placed in the landscape, the landscape is the means for the creation of a sculpture. Land sculpture works frequently exist in the open, located well away from civilization. After the piece of art has been created, it is left to change and erode under natural conditions.

Tracking

Those participants, who have spent the first night in taking turns to guard the camp should be given the space to speak about their experience.

Solitary time

The solitary time this day can be on observing their surroundings and choosing a natural element that they like. It can be a twig or a piece of a bark, or a stone or any other thing. They should reflect why they like it and what it can represent in their life. They will then be called to sit in a circle and reflect on their collection.

Afternoon activities

After lunch, they can be given a free afternoon till dinner. On this day, depending on the maturity of the participants, their willingness, the safety of the place and the availability of the staff to take care for incidents, a full night time session can be organized.

Full night stay in the forest

Purpose: To give profound experience through experiencing the night life

Materials required: blankets and torches

Time taken: the whole night

The group must be prepared psychologically before going into the night. Preparation can include:

- forsaking all meals that day or starting from lunch,
- discussing the value of staying by oneself in natural areas,
- full recounting of indigenous people's experience of vision quest and
- the value of being with oneself for a night.

The participants pray when the dusk falls. They are taken, with their blanket and torch, to an area where they can stay for the whole night. They are encouraged not to sleep but to try to meditate.

This is an extremely difficult exercise for someone who does not have an experience of meditation.

They can be encouraged to quiet themselves, not to fidget, and to pick up an object from the forest and think about it. They can think how the object represents their life. The facilitators will be with them and let the students know that they are guarded and are safe.

They will be collected at dawn and go to the camp and spend the morning resting. They will sit in a circle later and track/ process what they were thinking during the night time.

Day 5



This is the final day of the SEGNI program. Since the participants have spent the night in the forest, they will be given time to rest. There will not be morning exercise and games. It will be time to pack up and clean the forest. The most important rule here is 'leave the forest better than you found it.' Thus, if you find waste during your stay, clean it up but never leave waste yourself.

After the short refectation, an evaluation, Table 1, and commitment session will follow.

Final evaluation and commitment

On the last day of the SEGNI program, there will be an evaluation. Participants can be asked what they liked and did not like about the program. It is useful to do an individual written evaluation or we can ask participants to do a participatory evaluation where they sit in a group and reflect on what worked well and what did not work well. It is important to devise a method where participants feel comfortable to reflect on the program honesty and openly.

Table 1 is an example of a written evaluation. It should be done in addition and kept for record for future analysis.



Table 1 – Evaluation format

Evaluation by the participants: We value your opinion!

Group:

Date:

Please take a few minutes to write down your thoughts on the things you enjoyed and those you did not enjoy so much. Please be honest and do not put your name on the evaluation. Your ideas will help us improve our program. When you have finished, give the questionnaire to the facilitator. Thank you very much!

Opinion of the participants

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Bad
How did you like the SEGNi experience?					
How was the presentation?					
Which activities did you enjoy the most?					
Which activities didn't you enjoy?					
What would you like to do in future excursions?					
What can be improved?					
Other comments:					



School child exhibiting cultural artifacts



Cultural performance at a celebration

Part IV:

Activities in schools and communities

This part of the book explains the activities that participants can do if they form a club when they return from the forest experience in order to promote cultural biodiversity (the linkage between cultural expressions and natural areas). Normally most participants commit themselves to starting a community or school club. They call it the SEGNI club.

Clubs are very important to those who have participated:

- They would help the participants to work together after the forest experience. This togetherness could encourage them to put in practice what they have decided to do while in the forest.
- Through various activities that they do together, they will continue learning about nature and culture.
- They can initiate or participate in social and environmental activities organized around their locality.

This section includes the most important aspects of SEGNI work in schools, such as collecting materials, dramas, songs, mapping, building an information centre and celebration. The other activities help them prepare for a cultural biodiversity celebration. It also includes some advice for setting up learning centres and starting tree nurseries.

Building learning centres in the school

Building a learning centre is one of the keystones of the cultural biodiversity work. SEGNI clubs build traditional houses in their schools to be used as a space for learning about cultural biodiversity. The collections of traditional materials, seeds, medicinal plants, art work is used by the school to teach biology, history, geography and cultural curriculums. They can also serve as a meeting space for the club members. The best example so far is from South Africa where students built a whole traditional household compound complete with everything representing the household. This should be encouraged.

Building a traditional house can be costly but many schools solve this by convincing the director of its value and making it the project for all students. Each student can then bring a material assigned to him or her and can assist in the building. In an ideal situation, the community can be invited to discuss the value of the project and make their own contribution through skill, labour and building materials. The most important thing is to make it last for a very long time and make it a community owned project.



Construction of a learning centre at a school

Size and shape of the centres

Shape of the centre can vary. They are usually circular buildings with conical roofing. It will be best if they are built with strong foundations and with a capacity to for 50 students to meet. Traditional skilled individuals help them to build the centres. Sometimes a local builder is invited when the school wants to combine traditional and other materials to build a bigger centre. The biggest can have a diameter of ten meters. The walls should be strong so that posters can easily be displayed on them.

It is also important that the building is also used by the school community. Each of the teachers should see the value in the space for their own subject and for their extracurricular activity. A history teacher can teach the history of the community using the materials; a biology teacher can use it to discuss the plants and the animals from which the materials are made. The building is a heaven for the art teacher and he/ she can teach traditional art using the materials. A geography teacher can discuss about the geographic places from which the materials have come from and he/she can do participatory mapping to demonstrate this and so on. The Place can also be used as a meeting site by club members.



Collections

Collections help participants to understand the linkage between culture and nature. They also help to revive the cultural identity of the local community. This is because students grow to feel proud of and attached to their culture the more they know it. The collections are displayed in the learning centres that the students build. Most schools collect seed, medicinal plants, cultural materials made up of animal parts. Stories and proverbs can be written down and put in a safe place. Harvested crops can be displayed to demonstrate how the plants look before they are threshed. Collections of art done by students can also be made and so on. The club can also collect plants and build a box to display dried and mounted plants with information about them. Please refer to the following websites for information on how to collect plants for a herbarium.

https://www.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0032/67469/collecting-manual.pdf
<http://www.nzpcn.org.nz/publications/13-Collecting%20specimens.pdf>

How to display collections

Displaying can be done in various ways. The most common way for seeds, for example, is to put them in a transparent bottle or plastic container or stick them on a piece of material. The names of each of the plants should be written in a local name as well as scientific name. It is important not to make the display too cluttered. Careful thought must go into how they are displayed.

Drama clubs

Start a drama club at your school! Our culture is a huge source of inspiration for drama. Schools that have experienced SEGNI invariably use drama to talk about their culture and the degradation of the nature around them. This is usually done in a very entertaining and engaging way.

Some students even show their experience in the forest and the change that they have observed on themselves through drama.

The best drama is made after doing some research. Some drama can be made of typical cultural experiences as well as finding out why their community is acting the way they are acting even though they know that cutting trees is not beneficial for them.

It is also a good idea to run a competition for a good drama and translate the winning entry into different languages. This can be performed in every SEGNI school. The following is advice for starting and running an effective drama club.

- Select a small group of people who have shown an interest in performance and who you know have the self-discipline to attend group meetings.

Do some research in your community about practical ideas for drama. Some schools did drama on HIV aides and other on tree cutting, for example.

- Think about what you would like to do in the drama sessions. Imagine what it would be like and what the outcomes could be. You need to be interested in what you do.
- Meet regularly, at least once a week, for no less than an hour.
- Together with your drama group, draw up a code of conduct to guide the way you will all work with one another. Emphasise that respect, trust and safety are important. Also draw attention to punctuality. Above all ensure that people can be free to be creative and that means free to make and learn from their mistakes.
- Plan the place and the time for showing the drama. Make it a small manageable project that can be well-rehearsed and presented with confidence to an audience of staff, parents, invited guests and students. You want to present a piece of drama that means something to you and all the participants - in other words: make it a relevant, self-motivated and fun performance for your group!
- You have a responsibility to your drama learners: be motivated, have energy, be punctual and regular, and above all share your love of the arts with them.
- When other students and staff see the creative energy, team work, and fun you are all having, they will want to join. Make sure you have space for them or you can help them start groups too.
- To summarise: Take the risk and put your plan into action. Believe in your value as an arts educator, dream into what you would like to achieve and reach out for support.

Songs and poems

Poems are one of the art practices that are created at most schools. They express their attachment, and reflections, to their culture and nature through poems. There are a lot of high quality and inspirational poems written by students. These should be collected and put in a safe place so that others do not plagiarize them. We have to ask the permission of those who write the poems when we collect them and encourage the students themselves to keep a copy.

It is important that we encourage students to learn and sing the songs of their culture as part of the SEGNI process, to help them connect and understand their culture and environment. It is also important that they understand the significance and the meaning of what they sing to understand their meaning. Otherwise it becomes a mechanical activity. They should rehearse the song really well before they present them to an audience. It is not unusual for students to know a really great cultural song but do not know how to perform it.

Participatory mapping

Participatory mapping is the collection of approaches and methods where people create maps of their community instead of experts or cartographers. On the maps people put features that they think are important for themselves. Participatory mapping ranges from mapping on the soil using natural materials, to a highly sophisticated method called Geographic Information Systems (GIS). For the purpose of schools, it is possible to do simple sketch maps. Participants can use this to learn about their surroundings and their history. They can start with the mapping of culturally significant areas including where resources are located. It is mostly done with the participation of elders as they understand the past and can explain the cultural significance of places on the landscape.

Before mapping starts, it is a good idea to walk with the elders in a straight line from one point to another across the village. The walking should take place with those who know their village very well. You can stop every 100 metres or less and discuss what you see. Students can ask about each of the places that they see and record the explanations given to them by members of the community. It is also preferable to go to high ground, such as hills or mountains, to get a panoramic view of the village. The youth and the community members then talk about the landscape in some detail before they start mapping. This helps to stimulate the memory of the participants from community and get an understanding of the landscape on the part of the youth. This helps the actual mapping exercise.

Using mapping papers, an A0 paper, and different colour crayons, the community can start by mapping rivers and prominent places in the landscape. This is to get a good orientation of their environment and easily identify which area is which. They then populate the map with the details of cultural and natural resources. They can even make a map of the past, how the area used to look 50 or more years ago, and another map of the present. They can compare the two maps and note ask what has changed, how it has changed and why it has changed. They can even take this mapping further and make a map of the future to help the community envisions how they would like the landscape to improve in the future. Remember mapping is not the end but the means to help communities understand the cultural and natural environment. It is also used to identify common projects that can be done with the participation of the community. For example: there could be a highly degraded area and the action can be rehabilitation through youth participating in soil and water conservation activities.

Maps could be posted in the learning centre, (which is explained in the next section), and exhibited at the end of the year during the celebrations.





Students making a map

The celebration

Celebrations are probably the most important part of promoting cultural biodiversity. They bring together many important aspects. Since they take place at the end of the year, students can prepare for them for most of the academic year. During this preparation young people learn many important skills including planning, team work, the names and importance of cultural materials, writing poems, acting, understanding their history and cultural songs. Many schools do participate in the celebration. They can be organized by individual schools or by a group of schools. Government representatives are invited and, in some cases, this has encouraged the program to be considered as one of the extracurricular activities in schools.

Materials

Although they can be held in classrooms, the celebrations are usually held in hired tents. Each of the participating schools is given a tent and tables to display their materials. According to availability and resources for renting them, the tents can be more or less 3m x 3m in size. Bigger tents may also be needed for guests coming to participate in the occasion. Strings made of plastic or natural materials can also be used to display collections. Media materials, including speakers, are also needed. It is important to check for the availability of electricity if it is required for any of the displays. In some cases, certificates are given to each of the participating schools and some individuals who have contributed to the occasion and these should be prepared in advance.



Views of some celebrations



Children presenting at a Celebration

What to include

Initially the school community and the facilitating NGOs should sit together and decide on when to have the celebration. It is always good to have a theme for the event. For example, one year the theme could be “seeds”. For this, a very comprehensive collection and display of seeds with their names and uses could be developed.

The students can develop stories, songs, plays and poems related to seeds. If the theme is “traditional games”, the same can happen in relation to that theme. Another theme could be “traditional medicine”. Having a theme will help to focus the event on an issue and get a deeper understanding by the participants and a good representation of it to the audience.

How to prepare

Each school should set aside time to prepare for the event. First the school should setup a coordinating body with people who have been designated specific roles. The facilitating NGO should make regular visits, to encourage the schools to keep on track with their preparations. If there are numerous participating schools, it is important for the facilitating body to visit all the schools and choose the best performance from each. One school may be strong in drama, another on poems, another on songs and others on traditional ceremonies.



The President of Ethiopia at a Celebration

Who to invite

Celebrations are a chance for influencing and informing decision-makers on the importance of traditional ecological knowledge for sustainable living. Therefore, it is critical that we target key people for these events. The coming of the President of Ethiopia three times to our celebrations was a huge success as the local government gave it a high prominence.

Media should also be invited to disseminate to the wider public. The school community, parents and the wider community should be encouraged to come.

The programme

The facilitators of the programme must be very clear of every detail of the programme for the next day. They should even close their eyes and imagine it unfolding. This is a very difficult and challenging process for someone new. The programme should allow for unexpected delays and longer interventions. The guest of honour may be late or one drama or poem could take longer than expected. A speech that is meant to take 10 minutes should be written in the programme as taking 15 or 20 to be safe. A poem taking five minutes can be put as taking ten and so on. These extra minutes will help to absorb shocks and delays.



Organising materials and equipment

Facilitators should also finalize pitching the tents earlier than needed. The tents should be chosen carefully. Are they fit for hanging displays? The organizer should also assign enough tables and chairs for each tent. This is really important as the schools often come with displays that need a table including food items and cultural artefacts. It is also better if organisers could assess the capacity of the school and prepare the space accordingly. Bigger areas can be given to schools with more to display.

Challenges

Many competing and frustrating factors often creep in. These can include: schools arriving late, schools taking more time than assigned during the show, schools coming all at the same time, tents not being ready the first day, mini media materials being late, mini media materials failing, the guest of honour being late, no time to watch the exhibitions because guests running out before exhibitions, organizers taken by the process and not watching the program carefully, so on. The most important thing is for the organization to expect it and prepare for it.

Documentation

Documentation is critical to have a record of the event and share the success with others. They are also important to mobilize resources in the future. Often the organisers fail to adequately document the event. They may be good at taking photographs and video but producing a detailed written document of the events which shows the experience of the schools during preparation and during the day of celebration is scant. It is very important for the organizers to plan this in advance and assign someone to document the preparation and the event. Documentation can include interviews with students, teachers, guests and participating schools about their experience.

Follow up

Most celebrations take place at the end of the year. When schools open again, the facilitating body should visit each of the participating schools or have a meeting with all the schools to discuss the experiences of the past year and plan for the coming year including setting time for monitoring and evaluation. This will ensure that activities continue throughout the year.



Conclusion

We are living at a time where youth are experiencing an enormous social and ecological challenges. They are living in an information explosion and there are so many issues that compete with their attention. The culture and nature around them are disappearing very fast and few notice the change, and sadly, few know what to do even when they want to change the status quo. This book is trying to contribute to the improvement of this monumental crisis through providing an opportunity to youth leaders to connect with nature, their culture and to themselves. It has improved the life of many and it can also help so many in the future.

This is not a set menu. No context is similar, and users can pick what is best to their situation from the list of activities. What is most important is, though, trying to understand why the program is needed and planning with the interest of the youth or children in mind. Equally important, please document your experiences and share it with others. Your documentation, if shared with us, will also help improve the program.



Annex 1: participants registration form for the forest experience

Registration form for participants – to be filled by each participant

Date:

Time:

School:

Age:

Grade:

Phone:

Why do you want to participate?

What do you know about the environment?

What do you know about culture?

What do you want to get out of this participation?

Name and signature

Annex 2: SEGNI forest facilitator evaluation form

After the guided excursion in the forest – evaluation by the SEGNI facilitator

Activity satisfaction level:

Number of participants:

Children/adolescents:

Time involved:

Preparation

Execution:

Follow up:

Changes with regard to the original plan

Personal conclusions:

Content:

Positive aspects:

Negative aspects:

Self-evaluation

Established good rapport with the group

Yes

No

Good presentation and accompaniment of activities

Yes

No

Established a continuity of activity and maintained a flow

Yes

No

Behaviour of the participant (s);

Behaviour of the group:

Conclusions for future guided excursions:

