



Sola

The Sola live in northern Benin and Togo. They practice traditional animistic beliefs which are sometimes mixed with Islam. In recent years, a few Sola have begun to find hope and forgiveness in Jesus, and a small church community is forming. SIM serves the Sola by creating a written form for their language and translating the Bible.

Current SIM Ministry

SIM began its work in Benin in 1946. The church that grew out of its ministry is the Union des Eglises Evangéliques du Bénin (UEEB). In conjunction with the UEEB, SIM's translators have analyzed the Sola language to put into written form. They assist the church in areas such as ministry to women, Sunday school for children, and training church leaders.

Scripture Availability

After preliminary analyses, the SIM/UEEB team has begun Bible translation for the Sola people. Currently, the books of Genesis, Exodus, and the Gospel of Mark, Acts, and some of Paul's epistles are underway. Since the literacy rate among adults is very low, reading classes and the distribution of Scripture portions need to be strongly encouraged. Copies of these translations are distributed into the community and neighboring villages.

Location

The Sola are a small people group of approximately 8700 members in the north of Benin and Togo.

Culture

Once known as "the people of one village," the Sola have dispersed over the years. However, they still consider their origin as the "ancestral mountain" around the village of Solla. This is where they gather on a regular basis for religious ceremonies. Initiation rituals such as circumcision for men and various other ceremonies play an important role in Sola society.

Language: The official language of Benin is French, although with 40 ethnic groups residing in Benin, other smaller languages prevail. The Sola language is named after its people group. It is a complex language in its construction.

Society: As one of the poorest countries of Africa, one-third of the population of Benin lives in extreme poverty. The average life expectancy is 52 years, and the illiteracy rate, as of the year 2003, is 80%.

Religion: The Sola people's life and culture are intertwined with strong animistic beliefs and practices. They believe an entire army of spirits is responsible for every detail of their lives. With the growing presence of Islam in the north, their animistic worldview has mingled with Folk Islam. Among the Sola people group, only a handful have found freedom through Jesus from the oppression of the many spirits they once relied on.

Generally the Sola are quite reluctant to accept outside influences. However, people from the village of Anandana have responded to the evangelistic efforts of a neighboring people group. As a result, a church is established in this village.

The Sola are deeply entrenched in tradition and ritual. Honor is highly valued. For Christians to break from their animistic traditions brings shame to them and their families. Where traditionally they would take revenge, Christians struggle with forgiveness as a Christian virtue.

Livelihood: The Sola earn their living as farmers of agriculture. With their small, meager farms and the lack of modern technology and remedies, they struggle to find sufficient nourishment for their large families. They raise corn, sorghum, and more recently, cotton. However, the scarcity of water in that part of West Africa keeps the yields to a minimum.

Traditions: Honor is the underlying value of Sola society. In order to receive honor, a boy must pass several rites of passage. Between the ages of 12 and 25, he must go through a number of rituals and ceremonies. The most important take place on their "holy mountain."

One of the first rituals is "tattooing," where the boy receives incisions around the hip. With the village gathered for the occasion, accompanied by drums and music, the young man must stare at a rod. In the course of "tattooing," if he shows even the slightest sign of pain or he moves his eyes, he brings shame, not only on himself, but also to his family for many years. After a series of ceremonies in the following years, if he successfully endures, he is recognized as part of the community of men. Very few Sola break from their traditions; those who do not join in the ceremonies are threatened with excommunication.

Economy: Benin exports cotton and other agricultural products, such as peanuts and palm oil.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.