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WHY LOCAL ARTS ARE CENTRAL TO MISSION

We could see that our tires would never touch the dirt on the other side of the bridge. The truck's wheels were spaced further apart than the rotting logs of the bridge, so the sixty or so Congolese pastors and I got out and began to walk to the church conference twelve miles up the road. We were in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where my family and I had come to help start a project to translate the Bible into the Mono language. At each village we passed, mothers, fathers, and children whom I had never met yelled out the name our local pastor had given me, "Gyaregbo! Gyaregbo!" They ran up to shake my hand and laugh and ask me to play and sing the one Mono song I had learned on the kundi, an eight-stringed harp. I felt like a politician running for office. The non-Mono pastors looked on in wonder: "They

really love you a lot!"

When we reached the pastors conference, I gave my report on our activities in the northwest region of DR Congo. As part of the report, I performed the same song, to great applause. Even people who didn't know Mono asked me to play it again. And again. And again. Another pastor remarked, "They sure love you." But why? Why do they love me so much here? Then this thought struck me: "They love you because they think you love them." My interest and involvement in Mono music served as a clear statement of respect and affection.

Christians communicating Truth cross-culturally have often misunderstood and undervalued local artistic forms like Mono song. In response, SIL's

Ethnomusicology and Arts Group has developed programs to train people to advocate for local arts, researching and recognizing the crucial roles of communication and identity formation bound up in these forms. Our goal is to spark the emergence of enduring traditions of Scripture-infused song composition, drama, dance, story telling, chanting, visual and other locally thriving arts, traditions that help communities respond to the spiritual, social, and physical challenges they face. We'd love to have you join in this fresh, rigorous approach to the arts ●

See www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_4_PDFs/199_Schrag.pdf for an expanded version of this article.