

ALAS



Photo By TK



Map by RD

Demography	Alas Language	Status
Location: Aceh Population: 88.000 Major religion: Islam	Bible: No Jesus Film: No Online Media: No	Believers: < 5 ⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾ Engaged: Yes Indigenous church: 0

Identity and Location

The Alas are a people group located in Southeast Aceh Regency, Aceh Province. There are many rivers in the Alas area, including Lawe Alas (Alas River). The area where they live is known as “The Land of Alas”. The word alas refers to a mat used for sitting or sleeping”.

The origins of the Alas remain unknown, although they share many similarities with the Batak ethnic group, such as their language and their family names. Among their folk tales are stories about some Batak idol worshippers from Lake Toba who came to the mountains under their leader, Alas.

During the Dutch colonial era, the government treated two areas (lands of Gayo and Alas) as one district. However, the Alas people are a unique people group with their own culture and language which is actually quite different from the Gayo culture and language. The Alas are a majority in the districts of Badar, Babussalam, Babel, Lawe Sigala-gala and Lawe Alas.

Society and Culture

Most of the Alas people live in villages at high altitudes and make a living from farming and raising livestock. The Alas area is considered the “rice storehouse” of the Aceh area.

Other agricultural products include rubber, coffee, and kemiri (a local spice) as well as forest products such as wood, rattan, resin, and incense. However several areas are prone to landslides, erosion and flooding caused by deforestation.

An Alas village is called a kute. A kute usually consists of one or more clans called a merge. Extended families live together in one house and submit to the authority

of the parents. They are a patrilineal society, tracing descent through the father’s family.

The Alas culture emphasizes two kinds of laws. They have both religious laws that are given by God and cannot be changed, and traditional laws that are made by community leaders and can be changed according to the times.

According to Alas marriage customs, an engagement lasts from one to three years as the groom acquires the bride price and the bride acquires the groom price. When they marry, they live near the groom’s parents. After they have children, the young family moves and lives separately (jawe) from the parents, but they remain in the area of their own clan. Polygamy is permitted only when a marriage has produced only boys, only girls, or no children at all (adak meu keu dueu).

Beliefs

The Alas people are followers of Islam. Syari’ah Islamic law has been implemented strongly in this area. Even so, many Alas still believe in supernatural powers, occultism, magic, and shamans. They perform ceremonies so that their crops will prosper and be protected from plagues. The shaman reads mantras and uses magical potions of leaves and flowers that are considered powerful for warding off plagues.

Needs

The Alas have a great need for strengthening of education and economy. This area is very prone to flooding, mudslides and flash flooding. Efforts are needed to prevent erosion, floods and landslides – both extension training for reforestation and prevention of illegal logging.