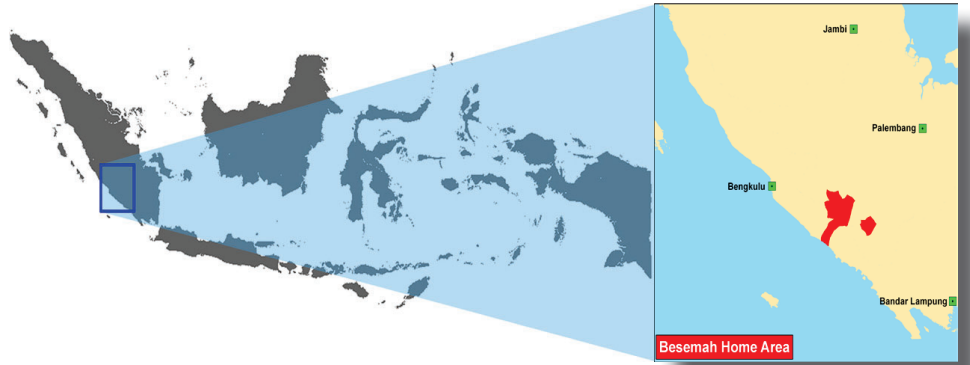


BESEMAH



Photo by RD



Demography	Besemah Language	Status
Location: Bengkulu, Sumsel Population: 710.000 Major Religion: Islam	Bible: No Jesus Film: Yes Online Media: No	Believers: < 50 ⁽⁹⁵³⁾ Engaged: No Indigenous Church: 0

Identity and Location

The Besemah are a large people group who live in South Sumatra Province in the area around Mount Dempo. They divide themselves geographically into three groups: the Pasemah Air Keruh, Pasemah Lebar and Pasemah Ulu Lintang. They live throughout a few districts in the Lahat Regency and the city of Pagar Alam. A few Besemah also live in the South Ogan Komering Ulu Regency. Their communities in the Lahat Regency are in the districts of Tanjung Sakti, Jarai, Fajar Bulan, Kota Agung and Besemah Air Keruh. In the South Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, they live in the Muara Dua Kisam district, where they are often called the Kisam people. According to a local story, the Kisam are descendents of Besemah people who did something wrong and ran through the jungle to a different area.

The Besemah in Pagar Alam live in the districts of Dempo Utara, Dempo Selatan, Pagar Alam Utara and Pagar Alam Selatan. Some also live in in Bengkulu province, in the North Kaur district of South Bengkulu Regency.

Society and Culture

Agriculture is the principle economic activity of the Besemah and is based on three key crops: rice, rubber, and coffee. The Besemah region has fertile soil at a high elevation, with relatively cool climate. Planting and harvesting is carried out by groups of five to ten people working in a wage or share cropping system.

The Besemah people are very enthusiastic and passionate. They play an important role in the politics of South Sumatra and in the government and educational institutions of Bengkulu. Many Besemah people, in both South Sumatra and Bengkulu, have been quite successful.

The Besemah recognize three types of marriage: (1) belaki, where groom pays a bride price, pays for the wedding, and the newlyweds live with the husband's family; (2) ambil anak, in which the husband moves in with the wife's family and does not need to pay for anything, neither the bride price nor the wedding; (3) semendean, in which the wedding cost is split, and the newlywed couple are free to choose where to live

Beliefs

For the most part, the Besemah are Muslim. Islam entered the southeastern part of the Besemah area in the 16th century. The west and northwest areas converted to Islam in the 19th century. The form of Islam followed at that time was the Sufi Islam, which later spread to all of Sumatra. The teachings of Sufi Islam are focused on feelings and stress the importance of knowing God more than merely observing religious rituals. In the Besemah highlands, there are 26 historical sites including ruins, cemeteries, and domes enclosing statues of Buddha that have been considered sacred places since the 2nd century.

There are also large stone statues depicting such scenes as a soldier riding an elephant, a man wrestling with a snake, and a large ocean wave. Besemah people still use these statues as sites for making sacred oaths and calling upon their ancestors' spirits for blessing and seeking their protection against natural disasters.

Needs

One primary need of the Besemah people is for better medical care. They also need help and training to increase crop production through use of appropriate technology for managing agricultural production more effectively. ^(E-RD)