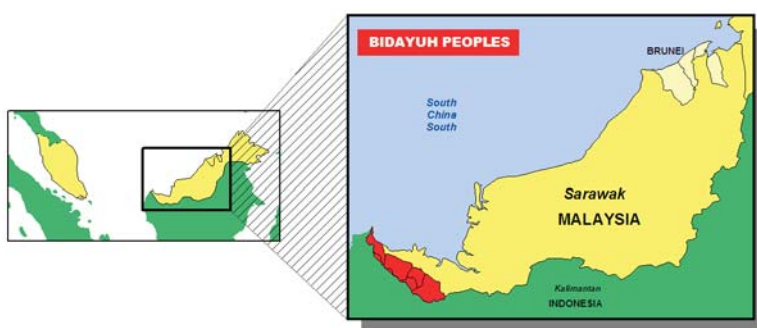


# BIDAYUH PEOPLE GROUPS



Population	Major Religion	Language
167,000	Christianity	Bidayuh

## Who are the Bidayuh?

The Bidayuh are the third largest indigenous community in Sarawak after the Iban and the Malay. They include six main dialectical subgroups: Bau-Bidayuh, Biatah-Penrissen, Bukar-Sadung, Padawan-Sembaan, Rara and Salako. All the subgroups were collectively called Land Dayak in the past but were officially named Bidayuh by government action in 2002. Their total population in the 2000 census was 166,756 (about eight percent of the Sarawak population).

Their traditional homeland was in the southwestern tip of Sarawak with ninety-three percent living in the Kuching Division and another seven percent in the nearby Samarahan Division. As late as 1980, nearly all of the Bidayuh were found in 291 villages in the contiguous districts of Lundu, Bau, Kuching, Serian, and Samarahan. More recently there has been increasing movement of the young, especially those with vocational or professional skills, to other parts of Sarawak. Significant numbers are now found in the towns of Miri, Sibul, and Bintulu.

## What are their lives like?

The Bidayuh were traditionally longhouse dwellers who made their living by subsistence farming. In recent years many have abandoned longhouses for single houses within villages, but many aspects of their traditional culture and social organization have been retained. Rice farming is still an important part of their culture and economy. The agricultural cycle is marked by important festivals called *Gawai*. Their way of life is structured by their *adat* (customary law). There is a strong sense of cooperation and communal sharing that goes back to the longhouse culture. Economic development and education have brought many of the Bidayuh into the mainstream of modern Sarawak society, but they

have managed to maintain many distinct aspects of their culture.

## What do they believe?

Traditionally, the Bidayuh were animists with some influence from Hinduism and Buddhism. While they attribute spirits to many things in nature such as birds, animals, and plants, many who hold to the traditional religion today believe in a supreme god who comes to their assistance in the cycle of rice cultivation as well as major events in the cycle of life.

Many of the Bidayuh have become Christians. Although many Bidayuh have come to sincerely believe the good news and do attend church, some remain nominal Christians.

## What are their needs?

While many of the Bidayuh have experienced the benefits of an improved educational system and the modern economy, the rural Bidayuh in particular are not experiencing the same level of progress. For those in the mainstream of modernization, there is a challenge to maintain their cultural heritage and identity.

There is growing interest in developing their language for use in schools. Translation of the good news has been done in one dialect, and there is interest in doing so for other dialects. Pray that all Bidayuh would have access to education and the benefits of an improved economy, and that they would have access to the good news whether they are from traditional or church backgrounds so their lives could be transformed.