



people) and Javanese (32.62% or 3,753,947 people).<sup>520</sup> According to the 2009 Statistic Bureau report, Nias Island then had 443,492 inhabitants.<sup>521</sup>

Administratively, the Nias Regency (*Kabupaten Nias*) is included in the Province of North Sumatra, and in early 2003, this island was divided into two autonomous regencies: North Nias Regency and South Nias Regency, with Gunung Sitoli and Teluk Dalam as their respective capital cities. Following the implementation of the Government Ordinance of Regional Autonomy, Nias Island is now divided into four Regencies (Gunung Sitoli Municipality, Nias Regency, North Nias Regency, and West Nias Regency). Despite its beautiful landscape, this area has remained relatively untouched by international and even domestic tourism, unlike, for example, Bali and the Lombok islands. Yet, since the end of 2004, Nias has received extensive coverage in the media after it was badly affected by the devastating tsunami and earthquake of December 2004 and March 2005 respectively. As these natural disasters left a trail of devastation behind them, various social, religious, and relief associations landed in Nias in order to reach and help the victims.

The social and economic rhythm of the Niasans suddenly changed after the natural disasters resulted in a flow of domestic and international funds to the region, brought by various NGOs. Along with the government's reconstruction team, both domestic and international NGOs have provided relief supplies and managed social, economic, and physical reconstruction programmes. Some relief NGOs only supervised short-term plans, providing goods and supplies for victims, while others continue to run long-term social and economic development projects, focusing on sustainable livelihoods. Meanwhile, large-scale reconstruction projects are predominantly supervised by the government, government NGOs (G-NGOs), and international NGOs. Various local institutions, such as religious associations, NGOs, and social institutions have played pivotal roles in forging partnerships with domestic and international NGOs operating in Nias.

New developments in the social, cultural, religious, and economic domains can also be seen in post-disaster Nias. The flow of foreign funds brought by 'outsiders' (i.e. international NGOs and foreign donors) over the last three years, for example, has had a great impact on the socio-economic life of this island, as considerable growth in the reconstruction sector has been followed by an increase in wages for people residing in rural and urban Nias. The contact between local people and foreigners can also be said to have influenced the Niasans' views on life and traditions, and even their religious belief systems. It has been reported by local religious and social activists that the numbers of charismatic churches on Nias, representing a 'revival-messianic-nativistic'

<sup>520</sup>Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003).

<sup>521</sup>BPS Kabupaten Nias, *Nias dalam Angka/ Nias in Figure* (Nias-Gunung Sitoli: BPS, 2009), p. 47.



### *Da'wa and Giving Practice in Islam*

Islam is a religion of *da'wa* (mission), reminiscent of Christianity. *Da'wa* means 'call for Islam' or 'Islamic propagation'. In a broader context it also signifies social welfare and missionary activities. Islam came to the Indonesian archipelago centuries ago and has increasingly become a dominant religion since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its followers outnumbering those who adhere to Hinduism and Buddhism. Christianity came to the archipelago later on, and was first disseminated by Western missionaries during the colonial era.<sup>524</sup> Islam is the predominant religion in Java and Sumatra, with parts of the North Sumatra as exceptions where German-oriented Protestantism is prevalent. In the other outer islands, Christianity is strongest, except in regions of long-time Muslim influence such as Borneo and South Celebes. Yet, there are areas where Muslims remain the minority, areas such as Papua, East Nusa Tenggara, Bali Island, North Sumatra, and Nias Island. Islamic associations, like the Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam, and Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah (DDII) were among the leading institutions to supervise missionary activities in isolated regions as a means of serving and strengthening the Muslim minority groups who were settled in non-Muslim majority areas.

Legitimised by the notion of the universal values of Islam (*rahmatan li al-alamain*), *da'wa* on the outer islands has become a major agenda for certain Islamic associations. The Muhammadiyah has run various missionary activities in isolated areas, including the area where Muslims migrants have settled, by being involved in the social and economic development processes in the areas. This Muslim modernist association, for example, has sent many *da'i* (Muslim preachers or missionaries) to assist the religious life of Muslims who transmigrated into these isolated areas.<sup>525</sup> As the outer islands and isolated regions have become an arena of contestation for religious missionaries, Muslim missionaries to a certain extent compete with Christian missionaries and indigenous religious groups.<sup>526</sup> Therefore, from a larger perspective, Islamic propagation in isolated areas can be seen as a contestation of the two largest religious groups in Indonesia: Islam and Christianity. Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII) is institution that actively runs *da'wa*-related activities on outer islands. Established in Jakarta in 1967 by Mohammad Natsir, the prominent former Muslim politician, the DDII has until now been an active *da'wa* institution, not only in

<sup>524</sup>For one of the best works on the history of Christianity in modern Indonesia see Kareel Steenbrink, *Catholics in Indonesia 1808-1942*, vol. I (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003).

<sup>525</sup>Badan *da'wa*/Bimbingan Masyarakat Terasing-Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, *Dakwah terhadap Masyarakat Terasing*

<sup>526</sup>See Goodwill Zubir and Sudar Siandes, *Potret Gerakan Kristenisasi di Indonesia Versi Da'i LDK Muhammadiyah* (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah: Lembaga Dakwah Khusus, 2005).



in line with God's order, such as to study Qur'an, to provide scholarship, and to provide adequate worship place (mosque), and to finance missionary activities (*dakwa*).

In coherence with this, I would argue that *zakat* agencies, such as Al-Azhar Peduli and LAZ DDII, have defined the Muslim minority on the outer islands as being *zakat* and *sadaqa* beneficiaries, specifically classified as *muallaf qulubuhum*. It should be noted, however, that *da'wa* activities have also been legitimised by the notion of *jihād fi sabilillah* ('struggling in the way of God'), a term which is often loosely interpreted by Muslims. In addition to this, the concept of poor or needy is often understood not only as a shortage in terms of material matters, but also spiritual. Muslim communities whose religiosity and religious knowledge are weak due to the shortage of Islamic education and absence of mosques, for example, can in part be regarded as being poor spiritually and therefore needing wide-ranging assistance.

### **Al-Azhar Peduli (AAP): Reaching the *Muallaf* and Strengthening *Dakwah***

Al-Azhar Peduli (AAP) is one of the community-based *zakat* agencies in Indonesia that have played extensive roles in collecting and distributing aid originating from Islamic social funds. This institution is attached to the Grand Mosque of Al-Azhar, one of the renowned mosques in Jakarta due to its historical background. The Al-Azhar Mosque is located in Kebayoran Baru, South Jakarta, and has been proclaimed by the local government as one of eighteen historical sites in Jakarta. In the 1950s, a number of Masyumi activists, supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Mr Syamsuddin, set up an Islamic foundation, namely the Islamic Education Foundation (*Yayasan Pendidikan Islam-YPI*) on April 7, 1952. On November 19, 1953 the YPI started to build a mosque which was completed and first officially opened for public in 1958. The name of this mosque resembles another prominent mosque in Cairo, Egypt; the Al-Azhar Mosque.<sup>528</sup> In recent times, Al-Azhar and the YPI have operated a wide-range of Islamic education institutions, ranging from kindergartens to universities, where Muslims among urban upper middle-class send their children to study.<sup>529</sup>

AAP and other *zakat* agencies have shared a similar set of programmes, such as charitable services, income generating projects, free healthcare provision, and scholarships. Yet, each *zakat* agency has put emphasis on certain activities, and AAP has been heavily interested in *dakwah* as well as in the construction or reconstruction of

<sup>528</sup>Professor Mahmoud Shaltout, the rector of Al-Azhar University of Cairo, who was invited to Al-Azhar Mosque suggested that it also be named Al-Azhar, to reflect the greatness of the mosque's construction at that time. The Al-Azhar Mosque in Jakarta has also become a spot where younger Muslim activists, under the Youth Islamic Study Club Al-Azhar (YISC), have vigorously organised discussions, seminars and conference since the 1970s.

<sup>529</sup>HAMKA, the nickname of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, is one of the well-known figures of Al-Azhar, and HAMKA became the first Chairperson of the Indonesian 'Ulama Council (MUI).



Muslim families able to attend this *mushalla* regularly or irregularly. Four of the families are from this village; others come from different villages and even neighbouring districts. One attendant, Ama Jernih, for example, had to ride a motorcycle and passed through hilly fields to reach this *mushalla* from his home in district of Lasara. Meanwhile, Ama Ope who resided in the hills had to walk 5 kilometres from his home to the *mushalla*, because his home cannot be reached by public transportation or car or even by small motorcycle.

Those who live far from the mosque usually come to the *mushalla* on Friday at noon in order to attend the Friday Congregation (*Shalat Jum'at*) and they bring all their family members. For them, this small *mushalla* is not only a place where they can listen to the sermon of the *ustadh* (religious teachers), but also a place where they can share and communicate with other fellow Muslim converts. They wear Muslim dress, with *baju koko* and *peci/kopiah* (hat) for males and *jilbab* (veil) for females. Afterward, all congregation participants will have lunch inside the mosque during which time they may share their daily experiences with each other. Shortly after lunchtime, the *muallaf* families continue to chat on the *mushalla*'s veranda while their children study the Qur'an inside the *mushalla* under the supervision of an *ustadh* from the office of Religious Affairs of Gunung Sitoli Regency. It is not always easy for these families to attend this *mushalla*, because they have to bring their children who, at that time, are supposed to be in school.

One family told me that he often asked the teacher's permission and picked up his children from school every Friday around two hours before Friday Congregation time in order to be able to come to the *mushalla* and 'Friday School'. As he explains, this is the way in which he negotiates with the school in the village not to force his children to attend the Christian 'Sunday School'. Apart from this, the *ustadh* has introduced Muslim converts to the Ordinance on National Education System (*Undang-Undang Sisdiknas*), that one of its article concerns teaching on religion at schools. Accordingly, students have the rights to be taught the religion that they and their families adhere to. On the subject of religion, for instance, Muslim children should be taught by Muslim teachers about Islam even though they study in a Christian school, and *vice versa*; Christian children should have subject on Christianity instead of studying Islam despite his study in Islamic schools. In practice, this issue remains a matter of dispute and is being practiced inconsistently either by Muslim or Christian Schools. In Nias, because the Christian schools in the village cannot provide Muslim students with Muslim teachers to tutor them about Islam, the Muslim families have attempted to negotiate with the school so that the school can allow Muslim children to attend 'Friday School'.

Apart from providing support to Muslim converts in Botomuzoi, AAP and the YPMN have tried to revitalise the Al-Furqan Mosque in Gunung Sitoli in which an





face a great deal of difficulties in raising the required fund. In addition to this, there has been a new trend within corporations in Indonesia to channel their ‘social fund’, legitimated by the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), to *zakat* agencies in order to finance social and religious enterprises. It should be noted that although the existing *zakat* agencies in Indonesia are competing ‘against’ one another in terms of mobilising domestic funds, they, to a certain extent, have been able to build synergy with other institutions and to fruitfully execute at least one prestigious project.

### DDII and AMCF: Dakwah and the Struggle for Development Projects

Other important players in *dakwah* activities on the outer island are DDII and AMCF. Along with other Islamic associations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, DDII has a long experience in carrying out *dakwah* activities in isolated regions. Since the 1970s, Natsir, the founder of DDII, created *dakwah* programmes for assisting *muallaf* (Muslim converts) and Muslim communities in transmigration areas. Meanwhile, AMCF (Asian Muslim Charity Fund) of the United Arab Emirates is one of the prominent international Islamic charitable organisations that have set up branch offices in Indonesia. They are frequently involved in social services, either by creating their own programmes or by establishing partnerships with domestic Islamic charities and other Islamic civil society organisations. For example, the AMCF, which specifically works on *dakwah*, welfare and education,<sup>536</sup> has cooperated with certain Islamic associations in Indonesia, notably modernist Muslim groups such as the Muhammadiyah and PERSIS (*Persatuan Islam*-the Islamic Union).<sup>537</sup>

<sup>536</sup>In the field of education, AMCF has strongly sponsored the establishment of *Ma'had 'Ali* (Islamic Higher Education Institution). *Ma'had 'Ali* of the AMCF have operated in, among other things, Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta and Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. A new *Ma'had 'Ali* is going to be set up in Muhammadiyah University of Sumatra Barat, West Sumatra. Meanwhile, in Bandung, West Java, the AMCF has cooperated with the PERSIS. There is no evidence that the AMCF has founded a partnership with NU. This is probably because the AMCF believes that Muhammadiyah and PERSIS have a similar ideology, that is, puritan ideology. Moreover, the AMCF has recently run various projects, including building 850 mosques and 15 Arabic and Islamic Higher education institutions throughout Indonesia. For an overview of the development of *Ma'had 'Ali*, see Marzuki Wahid, “Ma'had 'Ali: Nestapa Tradisionalisme dan Tradisi Akademik yang Hilang”, *Jurnal Istiqra*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2005), pp. 89-112.

<sup>537</sup>PERSIS is a modernist association founded in 1923 by Haji Zamzam and Haji Muhammad Yunus. It is concerned with ‘purifying’ Islamic practice in Indonesia. Ideologically speaking, PERSIS shares similarities with Muhammadiyah in terms of religious practices, as both can be regarded as puritan Muslim associations. However, Muhammadiyah tends to pay greater attention to welfare issues by establishing schools, clinics, orphanages and universities throughout Indonesia, compared to PERSIS, which mainly focuses on education by establishing *pesantren* in West Java. For an account of the profile of PERSIS, see Howard M. Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam: Islamic Reform in Twentieth Century Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project, 1970), Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1973). Achmad



my fieldwork express their opinions that *dakwah* is not supposed to be restricted to the despatching of preachers. This is partly because Islamic *dakwah* associations are now challenged by the hardships in society. Therefore, Islamic *dakwah* associations should be able to provide more sophisticated and well-prepared economic development and livelihood projects. They believe that the establishment of Islamic Financial Cooperatives (*Baitul Mal wa Tamwil*-BMT) that can support microfinance project will be essential to poverty alleviation programmes within Muslim communities (*umma*).

BMTs have proliferated throughout Indonesia since the 1990s along with the emergence of the first Islamic bank, Bank Muamalat Indonesia (BMI). This originated from Muslims' concern about bank interest and whether or not conventional banks, with the concept of interest, is in line with Islamic principles of economics. Between 1990 and 2000 the numbers of BMTs in Indonesia have moderately increased, reaching 3000 units with small assets of about IDR 1.5 trillions. Unlike banks, the establishment of BMTs has very often been initiated by Muslim associations or social or profit-oriented institutions with Muslim workers. In recent times, *zakat* agencies have also set up BMTs as a means of managing domestic funds in a more productive way. Unlike on Java Island where one may find a BMT easily, there is not one Islamic financial cooperative on Nias Island. This is not merely because Nias is a Muslim minority region, but it reflects the genera; poor development of infrastructure in the region.

By contrast, Catholics in Nias have had an extensively supervised Credit Union among villagers since 1984, officially established in 1987, in support of small and medium enterprises and economic development among rural communities.<sup>541</sup> The Credit Union is quite popular among villagers, as it can reach creditors in isolated villages that conventional banks cannot. In certain regions, the Credit Union is even more well-liked among rural communities than the government-sponsored bank. This is because the CU is, to some extent, embedded within religious institutions, such as Catholic Churches, while at the same time it offers a less bureaucratic approach which is liked by creditors among commoners, especially those working in non-formal sector areas such as farmers and craftsmen in small villages.<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> The inception of the Catholic Credit Union (CCU or CU) cannot be detached from Catholic Missionaries from North Sumatra such as Pastor Fidelis Sihotang and Mr. K.R. Situmorang. Supported by 110 employees, the Credit Union, which has since 2002 been renamed the Rural Development Cooperative (KSP3), manages 21 branches with 48,698 members and total assets of IDR 117.8 billions. <http://ksp3nias.com/en/index.php>

<sup>542</sup> Credit Union projects have been implemented in various regions, notably among poor rural areas. See other related cases studies Marcell D. Lodo, *Bangun Solidaritas, Selamatkan Tradisi Suku Dayak: Kisah Sukses Credit Union Pancur Kasih, Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat* (Jakarta and Surabaya : Center for Economic and Social Studies, and Jawa Pos Institute of Pro-Otonomi, 2005); Ary Wahyono, *Study Kasus Koperasi Credit Union "Sejahtera", Cibirong Jawa Barat: Konsep Fungsi Ganda dan Masalah Pengembangan Koperasi di Indonesia* (Jakarta: LIPI, 1989).







initiated, is indispensable. In February 2010 FOSDAN was founded.<sup>547</sup> The reason behind the rise of FOSDAN is that these preachers wish for making broader change on Nias Island not only religiously but also socially and economically. It is reflected in their daily discourse that social welfare activities and economic development projects should be included in strengthening the *umma* and in turn the society as a whole. So that *dakwah* activism can touch the real social problems and economic hardship that communities have faced. In a nutshell, *dakwah*, in their interpretation, should not be restricted to the ‘conventional preaching’, but must be augmented with other activities that can cover society needs at large.

As FOSDAN becomes the ‘informal’ umbrella of *da’i* volunteers in Nias, communication between *da’i* can ever more be intensified, and *thus* their *dakwah* activities can be expanded. They started publishing a weekly-bulletin, called “*Ad-Dakwa*”, through which *da’i* can disseminate information about Islam by writing short popular articles, as well as can provide opportunity for the readers among Niassan Muslims to raise questions about Islam. The social condition on Nias Island which has heavily been characterised by local Nias indigenous culture and Christian tradition makes the questions to be raised by the people far more varied, dealing not only with the normative theological matters but also with the interfaith issues. As we have acknowledged that many Niasan Muslims are converts whose relatives remain adhering Christianity and thus practicing local tradition. One of the readers was questioning about the extent to which Muslims in Nias can establish appropriate relationship with non-Muslim relatives. More precisely, he asked FOSDAN Bulletin whether it is acceptable according to Islam to present a swine in order to respect his Christian relatives. On Nias Island, presenting big and expensive swine symbolises honour and respect. In many cases, Muslim converts cannot avoid tradition of presenting swine thank to their good relationships with their Christian relatives. They wanted to practice Islam properly but at the same time hesitated to detach from tradition which has embedded in society, as well as attempted to preserve cohesion among families.

In response to that case, the *da’i* that affiliated to FOSDAN suggest that in the context of Nias society, presenting swine in order to respect non-Muslim extended families are permitted on condition that the givers (Muslims) do not consume the gift (swine). Presenting gift in form of a swine is only a means to strengthen relationships and to preserve the unity of families. Islam, as FOSDAN *da’i* have explained, is contextually “applied in every time and place”. Islam also put emphasis on the necessity to establish good vertical relations with God (*habl min Allah*), and horizontal relations with human beings (*habl min al-nas*) alike. In this respect, presenting swine may represent endeavour to make good horizontal relations, not to violate God’s orders. The

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<sup>547</sup>It consists of Muslim preachers whose presence in Nias was sponsored by different parties, such as AMCF (13 preachers); DDII (2); Hidayatullah (5); and AAP (1).





*Dakwah* associations are targeting both Islamic formal and non-formal education institutions, such as Islamic *madrasah*, mosques and *mushalla*. It is worth noting further that, as explained previously, mosques and *mushalla* can be used for multiple purposes, ranging from performing Islamic rituals to educating Muslim children. The lack of adequate formal Islamic education institutions, particularly in Nias, has resulted in the increase of role played by mosques and *mushalla* as informal Islamic educational institutions. Strengthening the institutional capacity of a mosque can mean providing communities with more adequate informal education institutions. For that purpose, *zakat* agencies and *dakwah* associations have channelled their funds collected from domestic sources to support Islamic *dakwah* and education, especially in isolated regions, rather than to providing healthcare or basic needs of communities, as have mostly been received by poor urbanites.

In order to specify the characteristics of Islamic charities and *dakwah* activism in a Muslim minority region we may explore the extent to which Islamic charitable associations and *dakwah* associations can or cannot work with other non-Islamic associations in Nias, notably Christian associations. This issue becomes interesting because charitable associations and *zakat* agencies such as AAP, DDII, and AMCF are not based in Nias. Rather, Nias is simply a place where they operate social and religious services. They appear in Nias, representing internal Muslim solidarity, to support Muslim minority groups in the region. The absence of non-Muslims as beneficiaries of the above *zakat* agencies and charitable institutions seem to be a result of the characteristic of project-based *dakwah* programmes, not a general concept of humanitarianism. Resource mobilisation by *zakat* agencies and *dakwah* associations, including their campaigns in the mainland during the process of raising funds, is solely intended to support minority groups in Nias who, according to the associations, have encountered difficulties following the 2005 disaster. However, we should also note that in practice the term *muallaf* is often contested, as it may consist of various meanings, such as 'prospective converts', 'those who are sympathetic about Islam', 'new Muslim converts', or 'those Muslims who are less knowledgeable about Islam' due to a less 'Islamic environment'.

A more lasting development appears that delivering aid to isolated regions requires solid networks with local counterparts. Informal networks and informal actors or volunteers to some extent play more effective roles in arranging and managing charitable works than formal organisational structures do. These informal volunteers have increasingly underpinned charity and *zakat* movements in the field as, evidenced by the roles of the AMCF's *ustadh*, AAP's *Da'i Sahabat Mustahik*, and the DDII's volunteers among Niasans. It should also be noted that the Muhammadiyah, AAP, DDII and the Hidayatullah Foundation all offer examples of how Islamic associations can extend their working areas of *dakwah*. Stimulated by the notion of solidarity





