

TRIBUTE TO THE LATE PAUL SINAPPAN BY MS OOI KIAH HUI

Thanks for organising this memorial, for friends and loved ones to gather to remember a true friend who had given himself to us, enriched us by investing himself generously

This photo I took of him in 2013

This is how I remember Paul:

Warm and welcoming

Encouraging and tireless

Always willing and accessible

For the next few minutes, I'd like to share my memory of Paul and who he was to me.

2013 Jan 18 – Preparation to start an Orang Asli (OA) cooperative in Negeri Sembilan

We went to an OA village in Negeri Sembilan together to support and provide training to the community organiser Darren Phang

Paul was showing Darren how to set up a cooperatives, the governance structure, and documentations process and the works. Even though he had done this same process so many times with numerous groups both here in Malaysia and in other developing countries, when he was coaching Darren that day, he was excited about the new cooperative and went through every detail with patience, as if he was doing it for the first time. There's a life-giving touch about Paul.

I came to know Paul through the Orang Asli cooperative movement Paul began with Malaysian CARE. He taught my seniors in Malaysian CARE how to set that up a cooperative in the 1990s, modified the system and process to suit the unique context of the indigenous people, especially designed to help those living in remote locations without access to microfinance services.

The Koperasi Sengoi Pribumi Perak (KSPP), a cooperative of the Semai indigenous people, was first set up under the coverage of Koperasi Kredit Rakyat, the People's Credit Union, until it became independent in 2007.

The KSPP today serves over 1000 Orang Asli members in Perak including children members. Many who would otherwise have no access to saving and credit facilities benefited and improved their livelihoods because the cooperatives offer them the much needed economic opportunities. Some of the participants now are 3rd generation members.

Paul was passionate and dedicated in empowering poor community through cooperatives, economic development initiatives and especially building capacity among grassroots leadership. And he was a great teacher to the community. Literacy level, language, location were of no concern. He could teach anyone who's willing to learn.

Among the people he was uplifting through leadership training, Paul was especially dedicated to strengthening women. Paul was an advocate for women empowerment. He thought husbands how to respect their wives and to see them as equal partners.

I began working closer with Paul in 2010 – he was my mentor in developing a financial literacy programme for the urban poor. He trained me and the pioneering team to strategize the network, built a team of trainers and produced 2 training manuals. He was at that time suffering from severe gastric troubles, but would still take a nearly 2 hours bus and train journey all the way from Batang Berjuntai to conduct these monthly training that last the entire day.

Here's a photo capturing the launch of the financial literacy programme trainer's manual 2014 September

The financial literacy programme is a tool to create economic stability in poor urban families by helping the heads of household making aware and wise daily financial decisions, through planning and budgeting.

The work has since train hundreds of trainers, and over thousand of community members throughout Malaysia – and still actively reaching out to and impacting more households. Here's Paul at the launch of the financial literacy programme trainer's manual

Paul was one of the guests of honour seated in the front rows, and enjoying a joyful moment, celebrating the fruits of his labour multiplied

For Paul, it was never about him. It was always about how he could be of help and serve. Generosity and humility were his unmistakable hallmarks.

This was the last working event together 2019 Nov – National SDG Summit
I was glad we took a photo together. This was our last photo.

At this moment when we gather to look back at Paul's life, we could see the evidences of a life well-lived. A life that has made daily decisions on things that matters in the really long run. Paul has left behind a life-giving legacy by giving himself to many. After 5 decades of tireless work to alleviate poverty among the poorest communities, despite setbacks and limitations, Paul maintained a hopeful outlook and full of zest till the end. This is the same spirit I'd like to cultivate and possess as I follow his footsteps in caring for justice and improving the everyday reality of the poor and marginalised.

The work he has given his life to build will continue to extent and expand through you, me and many individuals he has touched, to serve and empower the poor community for years to come.

I thank God for having a great teacher, an example of faithfulness and hopefulness, and an embodiment of the love of God. Thank you Paul. And thank you all for this opportunity to honour his memory.