

Colin Barlow with cocoa farmers in Flores, Indonesia



Colin Barlow: ambassador for humanity

By Mesach Daniel Beeh
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Colin Barlow founded the [Nusa Tenggara Association](#) in 1998 to reduce poverty among rural communities in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, and was the Association's CEO until his death on 11 December 2022. This is an edited version of a tribute delivered at Colin's funeral service.

Thank you all for this special occasion on which it is given to me to say some words about our beloved friend, Colin Barlow, on behalf of myself and family, on behalf of all friends of Colin and Ria in Indonesia, especially in Kupang, and all over East Nusa Tenggara Province of Indonesia.

I would like to express our condolences to all family of Colin and all friends of Colin in Australia, especially Nusa Tenggara Association (NTA) members. It is hard for me to say in words, in this moment, because the death of Colin has left us with the very deepest sadness. How could it not?

Colin and Ria met me in Kupang in 1989, 33 years ago. Since then, the three of us became a very solid team. During 33 years we have built up a very intimate togetherness, more than just a partnership to work together but, may I say, a very intimate friendship - friend in need and friend in deed. This is the pattern of our relationship during 33 years. It is not a short time.

The first step of Colin, 33 years ago in East Nusa Tenggara Province of Indonesia, was to meet poor people on an isolated island, the island of Semau. On this tiny island at that time there was no road, no vehicles, no electricity, no toilet, a lot of mosquitos and, sometimes, no food. In our visit to this island, we just walked from one village to another, day by day, under the burning sun and Colin got burnt. We were in darkness when night came. We walked throughout the island, it took more than one week.

Colin wanted to meet people in their real conditions. Colin did not feel satisfied by only hearing stories or reports. Colin visited these people twice each year for 33 years.

Colin enjoyed this way. This was his way. He became poor with poor people. He was hungry with people who did not have enough to eat. He got burnt with people who worked every day under the burning sun. He was in darkness with people who had no electricity. He involved himself totally in the whole life of people. By that way, Colin found the proper way to lift people up from the darkness of poverty to the light of proper life.

This was the main reason NTA was established. Colin invited me to come to Australia to accompany him and to make sure of NTA's existence. For many people associations or NGOs, with partnerships or MOUs, last for five or ten years – but for Colin, helping poor people never had a limit of time. Colin committed his life to the poor. He dedicated his life to the welfare of people.

His body might have passed away, but his sacrifice of life stays deeply in people's hearts. The name of Colin will always be mentioned through the generations. Even some couples in Semau have given the names Colin to their boys and Ria to their girls.

We all miss him, but how beautifully Colin demonstrated a sincere humanity. Colin has given us a lesson: how to be a better and sincere human to others. For us, Colin dedicated his whole life for humanity. He was really an ambassador for humanity.

His first step was humanity and his last step was also because of humanity.

Prior to his involvement with NTA, Colin was an academic at The Australian National University, and was Head of the Department of Economics, Research School of Pacific Studies in the late 1980s. Colin held a PhD from the University of Aberdeen and received an OBE in 1967 for his work as Head of the Economic and Planning Division of the Rubber Research Institute of Malaya. You can read more about Colin's inspirational life in the [Devpolicy Aid Profile](#) of him, and in this [tribute to Colin](#) by ANU Professor Hal Hill.

About the author/s

Mesach Daniel Beeh

Mesach Daniel Beeh (Mes Beeh) established the Semau Island Community Development Foundation in 1983 and worked with Colin Barlow at Nusa Tenggara Association.

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