



Dr. Paul Ochien'g Onyango: the person I found, mentored, and admired!

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I first came to know the late Dr. Paul Ochien'g Onyango when he joined a Kisumu-based NGO, OSIENALA (which means 'Friends of Lake Victoria'), after completing his first degree in Bachelor of Arts at the University of Nairobi. He graduated in 1993. OSIENALA, established in 1992 as a membership organization of local communities who live and are dependent on the Lake for their livelihoods, provided a forum for addressing environmental challenges facing the Lake. At the organization, he authored several articles in its newsletter on Lake Victoria's environment and its importance for the livelihoods of the communities around the lake and beyond. These articles attracted my attention, and I was interested in meeting him and learning more about what he was also doing at the organization. Since the Nile perch industry was booming around the Lake at the time, he was also responsible for the tree-planting campaign at OSIENALA. The campaign provided a window of opportunity to offset the loss of firewood used to dry the Nile perch. These two activities laid a good foundation for what he could come and do later in his career.

How Dr. Onyango joined TAFIRI

I met Paul for the first time in Rorya, where we both come from. At the time, I was the Director General of the Tanzania Fisheries Research Institute (TAFIRI), and coincidentally, TAFIRI was looking for a social scientist as there was a need for the Institute to start exploring human dimensions of management challenges facing the fishery sector in Lake Victoria. On meeting him, I was impressed by his wide knowledge of the challenges facing the Lake, and I advised him to apply for a job as a social scientist at the Institute. He agreed and became the first social scientist at TAFIRI under the Lake Victoria Environment Management Project (LVEMP). He was assigned to report at Sota Station under the supervision of Dr. Amon Shoko in 1998. This was the beginning of Paul's long and fruitful career.



Dr. Onyango at the Mvuvu House in Dar es Salaam.
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Establishment of Socio-economic Department

After he joined TAFIRI, though posted to Sota, he was stationed at the Mwanza Centre, where he was assigned two main activities: first, to participate in the socio-economic activities of LVEMP and second, to establish a new department of dealing mainly with research on socio-economic issues. In addition to his research work, he was actively involved in the

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administration work, particularly in relation to the establishment of the new department. I was glad that Paul did well in administration and research. Over the years, he achieved quite a lot in his areas of expertise through research activities and consultancies undertaken nationally and regionally, as well as outside the region. He also established two working groups, a National Lake Victoria Socio-economic Working Group and a Regional Lake Victoria Socio-economic Working Group.

Joining the University of Dar es Salaam

In 2005, he left TAFIRI and joined the then Department of Aquatic Science and Fisheries, University of Dar es Salaam. However, this move did not affect TAFIRI's socio-economic activities. He had already established a strong department with experienced social scientists, including Dr. Modesta Medard, Eliza Mlahagwa, and Joseph Onyango, and he had also developed close collaboration with fisheries institutions in the region. The foundation he laid was critical for sustaining activities initiated during his time and for the creation of new ones.

He completed his Master's at the University of Tromsø, Norway, in 2004 while still at TAFIRI. In 2007, he started his PhD at the same University. His PhD was on 'Poverty in small-scale Fisheries; Governance challenges in Lake Victoria Fishing Communities, Tanzania', and he did his fieldwork in two fishing communities, Nyakasenge and Kasheno, on the southern shores of Lake Victoria. He completed his PhD in 2011 and published several papers from it.

After I retired from TAFIRI in 2006, I returned to the University of Dar es Salaam, where I met Paul again

and started working together on several activities. For instance, we shared courses and also undertook joint consultancies. Since 2020, when SoAF was established, we shared an office. We had long and interesting discussions on different fisheries issues. Paul was more than a colleague to me, he was a special adopted 'son'! I was looking forward to our regular unplanned discussions in the office.

Contribution to Fisheries and Social Sciences in Tanzania

Paul's remarkable contribution to capacity development and research on fisheries' social and governance issues in Tanzania, Eastern Africa, and Africa is well known. He conducted extensive studies and consultancies on different issues in different countries. He supervised postgraduate students (MSc and PhD) on the socio-economics of fisheries in Tanzania, covering freshwater and marine fisheries. He will also be remembered for several projects that he attracted to SoAF that not only supported several Master's and PhD students but were equally important in providing funds for research for other academics and securing equipment.

It has been over two years since he passed on, but I still vividly remember our interactions, discussions, and arguments, particularly in our office. I will always remember his laugh, his smile, and his positivity in life.

Rest in Eternal Peace, my mentee, colleague, office mate, and 'adopted' son! I will always cherish our time together, Paul ■



Dr. Onyango (extreme right) with Prof. Shilla (extreme left) followed by Mr. Lusana and Mr. Malesa at the Kunduchi Campus. ©SoAF