

#PfalReflections : Watch out world, we are coming for everything !

Nomonde Ndwalaza describes the Programme for African Leadership (PFAL) Forum in Mombasa, Kenya in one word: Lit!

This year's Programme for African Leadership (PFAL) Forum – which saw old and new PFAL-ers converge to Mombasa, Kenya for three days was a great way to close off what has been an incredibly challenging and affirming year at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences. I am not sure what my master's experience would have been like without the support and sense of community that PFAL has given me. I continue to develop a greater understanding of all of Africa through its people that I now call my friends, and I have made meaningful relationships that I intend to keep for life.



Pfal Alumni in the midst of a game called “Nails Challenge”. Image Credit: Syerramia Willoughby

Framed around the theme ‘Working together to shape our future’, the forum was a well-thought-out mix of presentations and panel discussions from African thought leaders, group sessions that were ably managed by Maggie Ainley and Alfred Kibunja, impact workshops, some theatre for the heart and the soul as well as an opportunity to take in the beauty of Kenya. Since 2012, PFAL has been creating a network of African leaders who are committed to the development of the African continent and are aware of the challenges and opportunities that come with the task. Throughout the sessions, the importance of constructive change beyond rhetoric- change that is dependent on collaboration and oneness was on everyone’s mind.

Some of the topics that were explored included the importance of risk-taking even in the face of danger; effective communication strategies; self-mastery and routes to employability. Of all the sessions that we were presented with, Dr. Vanessa Iwowo’s sobering talk on organising for social impact stayed with me the most. Dr. Iwowo spoke about the ‘shame of failure’ that has continued to characterise imaginings of the African continent and what those of us who are tired of being associated with it need to do to change the perception of continent but most importantly, the reality of its people. Dr. Iwowo implored us all in attendance to invest back in Africa and not to prey on our own or think that it is someone else’s job to change things. She was highly critical of the culture of entitlement that often lulls us into a false sense of feeling like the world owes us something- this triggered an unexpected level of self-reflection from all of us. Finally, she reminded us that we have a duty to make the world better and this means that we cannot take our privileges – the privilege of an LSE degree and access to a programme such as PFAL – for granted : “all we need is us – and a critical mass of us” she implored.

In addition to this, one of my absolute highlights of the summit was Maimouna Jallow's one-woman theatre rendition of Lola Shoneyin's bestselling novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's wives*. Having read the book and watched another theatre adaptation of it (twice) in London this year, I was incredibly impressed at Maimouna's approach to re-enacting the book, as well as her dexterity in telling an important story about the resilience of African women in the face of patriarchy and all the ways in which patriarchy limits both men and women from being full human beings. Jallow's storytelling approach was accessible, well timed and endearingly humorous, leaving my some of my colleagues who had not read the book enchanted and inspired to discuss its themes and its importance to the contemporary conditions facilitating our existence and to also seek out the book.



A group photo of the Pfal alumni. Image Credit: Syerramia Willoughby

The forum also gave me a chance to connect with former LSE alumni, and also better understand what life post the supposed 'shelter' of LSE is really like. To put it plainly: the forum was lit! I was introduced to Kenyan food and culture, I made friends and future career connections and I left for home reaffirmed in the belief that the future of Africa is very bright and most importantly, I am exactly where I need to be. Watch out world – we are coming for everything!!!!

Nomonde Ndwalaza is a Pfal Alumnus that was part of the Pfal cohort 7 from the academic year 2017-2018

The views expressed in this post are those of the author and in no way reflect those of the Africa at LSE blog, the Firoz Lalji Centre for Africa or the London School of Economics and Political Science.