

“10 Years Later, PfAL Continues to Inspire My Development Career Path“

— Ojok Okello

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During the summer of 2014, I made first my trip outside of Uganda to the heart of Central London. Before I came to London, I had been facilitating the societal reintegration of former child soldiers in Pader, a remote district in northern Uganda still grappling with the aftermath of the LRA war. Transitioning from a small Ugandan town to one of the world’s most bustling cities presented its challenges. The cultural disparity, climate, and cuisine made the initial weeks tumultuous. However, with the support infrastructure provided by PfAL, the process was considerably smoothed.

Alongside 15 other scholars hailing from various corners of the African continent, I joined the 3rd cohort of PfAL Scholarship Fellows. Each of us pursued diverse postgraduate programs at different departments within LSE. I enrolled in the International Development Department, pursuing a master’s degree in development management. During our year, an initiative was undertaken to integrate additional African students at LSE into PfAL, rapidly expanding our cohort to over 50 individuals. In essence, we evolved into a close-knit family unit within this bustling academic environment in the heart of London City.

We convened over dinners and lunches and participated in numerous seminars together. Among our shared experiences was a dinner hosted by Firoz Lalji, whose unassuming demeanor left us all in admiration. Mr. Lalji’s remarkable generosity afforded us the exceptional chance to pursue a world-class education at LSE. During the dinner, he imparted invaluable wisdom, emphasizing that our greatest form of gratitude for his support

would be to excel in our studies, return to our homelands, and apply the knowledge and skills gained at LSE to enact positive change within our communities. His advice from that evening has always stayed with me, silently encouraging me to leverage the education and expertise acquired at LSE to drive transformation within my community.

Over the years since I left LSE, I have been trying to embody Firoz’s advice in many ways. For instance, in 2019, I founded [Okere City](#), a rural futuristic development organization impacting the lives of 5,000 marginalized individuals in northern Uganda through the provision of educational, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The impactful work of the project has garnered attention and recognition, featuring prominently in international media platforms such as [CNN](#), [The Guardian](#), [TEDx](#),



Ojok performing his poem, “We are the referees” at a PfAL seminar.

[Christian Science Monitor](#), and others.

I was deeply motivated by the academic rigor and the constant intellectual stimulation provided by the PfAL in particular and LSE in general. Through PfAL’s weekly seminars with Prof. Teddy E. A Brett, coupled with the regular course lectures and seminars, we were not only equipped with knowledge but also gained a deeper appreciation for the role institutions play in addressing the underlying causes of poverty. Prof. Brett’s emphasis on conducting Political Economy Analyses throughout the lifecycle of development projects has been instrumental in refining my approach to development work. His insistence on thorough analysis before, during, and after project implementation has significantly influenced the effectiveness of my development work.

Similarly, the profound and unapologetic perspectives of the late Prof. Thandika Mkandawire instilled in us a sense of optimism for Africa’s future.

During his lectures, I found myself immediately drawn to his ideas, largely due to his extensive experience and deep understanding of the continent. With a blend of wit and intellect, Thandika not only elucidated Africa's development challenges but also proposed tangible solutions to tackle them. Central to his approach was the concept of the "6Is": Ideas, Initiatives, Institutions, Industrialization, Interests, and (Thinking) Internationally – prerequisites he believed were essential for development. These principles continue to resonate deeply with me, providing a robust framework for the development endeavors I have undertaken over the years.

Generally, the analytical tools acquired through PfAL seminars and lectures have been invaluable, enabling me to move beyond superficial understandings and delve into the intricacies of development challenges. This deeper understanding often translates into more impactful interventions, ultimately contributing to positive change in the projects I am involved in.

Finally, the PfAL Fellowship provided me with a unique platform to expand both my professional and social networks while enhancing my research skills. As a PfAL fellow from Uganda, I was engaged in a series of development consultancy projects, collaborating with various NGOs in Uganda. One significant undertaking involved the [Journal of African Development and Democracy](#), where fellow scholars and I collaborated to publish the journal. This experience later opened doors for me to join an international political foundation, where I dedicated six years to bolstering the pillars of good governance in Uganda and South Sudan.

Reflecting on the past decade, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunities PfAL has afforded me to contribute towards the advancement of Africa. However, my enthusiasm remains undiminished as I eagerly continue to pursue avenues to consolidate and expand upon the progress achieved thus far.

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Ojok with Prof. Thandika Mkandawire (RIP).



Ojok with fellow PfALers Sylvia and Eunice from Uganda.



Ojok at the then New Academic Building, now Cheng Kin Ku Building

