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*ANGOLAN ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM FROM A FEMALE
PERSPECTIVE: INEQUALITIES, RESISTANCE AND CHANGE¹*

**ECOSSISTEMA EMPREENDEDOR ANGOLANO SOB PERSPECTIVA
FEMININA: DESIGUALDADES, RESISTÊNCIA E MUDANÇA**

Teresa Domingos Gomes²

ABSTRACT

This essay proposes an analysis of the Angolan entrepreneurial ecosystem from a female perspective, highlighting gender inequalities and highlighting women's contribution to the country's economic participation. The objective is to examine how these inequalities manifest themselves in the world of work, as well as to highlight women's resilience in the face of these challenges, pointing to possible paths for promoting a more equitable and inclusive entrepreneurship. This essay is qualitative in nature, with a bibliographic and documentary approach. Based on data from GEM Angola (2022) and the academic literature consulted, it appears that Angolan women represent the largest percentage of entrepreneurs in the country, corresponding to 55.8%. However, most of these entrepreneurs operate in the informal market, a reality strongly related to social vulnerability and the limitations of their academic training. It is noteworthy that, for the most part, these women undertake entrepreneurship out of necessity, rather than with a focus on innovation. Given this scenario, it is urgent to formulate more inclusive public policies capable of expanding women's access to the formal market and creating conditions for them to develop sustainable and innovative entrepreneurial initiatives.

Keywords: female entrepreneurship, gender inequality, Angola, informal market.

RESUMO

O presente artigo propõe uma análise do ecossistema empreendedor angolano sob a perspectiva feminina, evidenciando as desigualdades de gênero e ressaltando a contribuição das mulheres para a participação econômica do país. O objetivo é examinar como essas desigualdades se manifestam no mundo do

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² Universidade Federal do Paraná. teresa.gomes@ufpr.br



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trabalho, bem como destacar a capacidade de resistência das mulheres diante desses desafios, apontando possíveis caminhos para a promoção de um empreendedorismo mais equitativo e inclusivo. Este ensaio possui caráter qualitativo, com abordagem bibliográfica e documental. Com base nos dados do GEM Angola (2022) e nas produções acadêmicas consultadas, verifica-se que as mulheres angolanas representam a maior percentagem do empreendedorismo no país, correspondendo a 55,8%. Contudo, a maior parte dessas empreendedoras atua no mercado informal, realidade fortemente relacionada às condições de vulnerabilidade social e às limitações em sua formação acadêmica. Destaca-se que, em sua maioria, essas mulheres empreendem por necessidade, e não com foco na inovação. Diante desse cenário, torna-se urgente a formulação de políticas públicas mais inclusivas, capazes de ampliar o acesso das mulheres ao mercado formal e de criar condições para que possam desenvolver iniciativas empreendedoras sustentáveis e inovadoras.

Palavras-chave: empreendedorismo feminino, desigualdade de gênero, Angola, mercado informal.

INTRODUCTION

In Angola, entrepreneurship is interpreted differently compared to other developed countries, being associated with the creation of micro, medium, and large enterprises, or with businesses in both formal and informal settings. A large proportion of women turn to entrepreneurship as a means of supporting their families.

The texts discussed in the course *Entrepreneurial Ecosystem* present a conception of entrepreneurship from an innovative perspective, in which entrepreneurs are always in search of innovation a reality that does not apply to the women engaged in trade in Angola who are nonetheless referred to as entrepreneurs.

Accordingly, Gimenez (2022, n.p.) presents Schumpeter's conception of entrepreneurship, which in 1934 he defined as the realization of new combinations of resources, including doing new things or performing what is



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already done, but in innovative ways. The reflection proposed in this work is on how this concept of creating new ideas applies to Angolan women.

Pigola et al. (2025) present the entrepreneurial ecosystem as a spatial mosaic, breaking with the notion that the ecosystem is limited to fixed territorial boundaries. In the Angolan social context, from a female perspective, the entrepreneurial ecosystem appears as a form of exclusion. Most women are considered entrepreneurs in the informal market - a sector that is poorly recognized, offers low remuneration, provides little financial training, and presents few opportunities for innovation in their ventures.

Notably, despite their participation in the informal market, these women face several barriers to remaining in business, such as police violence, lack of technical and professional training, and, in many cases, no access to credit.

This occurs largely due to low levels of education and the overload of domestic responsibilities - outcomes of the social construct that a woman's place is in the kitchen. These and many other factors have contributed to the exclusion of women from other sectors of the market.

From this perspective, the present study aims to analyze the Angolan entrepreneurial ecosystem from a female point of view, discussing the inequalities women face in the world of work and highlighting how they remain resilient while identifying possible changes for the promotion of a more equitable form of entrepreneurship.

Accordingly, this article is structured into three main sections, excluding the introduction and conclusion. The first part addresses *Entrepreneurship in Angola*, with the aim of understanding how this phenomenon has been consolidated in the Angolan context, marked by social, economic, and historical specificities. The second section, entitled *Gender and Entrepreneurship: A Look at Inequalities*, discusses how gender inequalities manifest and perpetuate themselves within the country's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Finally, the third part,



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Women Entrepreneurs and Access to Public Policies: Challenges and Demands in the Angolan Context, critically analyzes the role of the State and public institutions, showing how existing policies are still insufficient to effectively include women in situations of vulnerability in the formal market. Many of these women are forced to engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than opportunity, which limits their potential for innovation and growth.

METODOLOGY

This article is qualitative in nature, with a bibliographic and documentary approach. It is based on articles, theses, and dissertations that address the theme of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in general.

Our aim was not limited to presenting texts that discuss female entrepreneurship in the Angolan context, but also considered authors who examine the Brazilian reality, such as Vale et al. (2011), who address issues related to gender, immersion, and entrepreneurship in the article “Sexo Frágil, Laços Fortes?”, which was contextualized in light of the Angolan reality. We also used data provided by the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* (GEM Angola, 2022) report.

Our study was conducted from a critical perspective, seeking to understand the divergences between the official discourse on entrepreneurship and the concrete challenges faced by Angolan women entrepreneurs.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ANGOLA

Entrepreneurship in Angola has grown considerably in recent times, as an alternative means of generating income due to the high unemployment rate.

According to Catessamo and Rua (2015), entrepreneurship in Angola arises largely out of necessity rather than opportunity. Many entrepreneurs lack the means to innovate or develop their ideas, which significantly limits the growth



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of their businesses. This is the case for many Angolan women, who turn to informal trade primarily to support their families.

From this perspective, Mendes (2012) reinforces that the majority of Angolan entrepreneurs engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than opportunity. This is mainly because many of them - especially women - live in contexts marked by low levels of education and poverty.

Building on this notion of necessity-based entrepreneurship, Porter et al. (2002), as cited in Pereira (2020), emphasize that in developing countries, economies tend to be based on natural resources, and existing entrepreneurship is focused primarily on survival. In these contexts, many individuals do not have the opportunity to enter the formal market or to seek innovative opportunities, due to limited technological infrastructure and the lack of State support.

This necessity-driven entrepreneurship, in Angola as well as in other African countries, is practiced mostly by women known as *zungueiras*³ and *quitandeiras*⁴. They operate in informal spaces, selling various products such as food, clothing, and school supplies, among others. The presence of these women in informal trade is primarily due to the absence of opportunities in the formal market, rather than a pursuit of innovation or business expansion. Examining the specificities of entrepreneurship in developing countries, Azmat and Samaratunge (2009, as cited in Mendes, 2012, p. 7) argue that:

The first capitalists and, likewise, the first entrepreneurs emerged in more developed countries thanks to the existence of favorable conditions for the development of their activities. However, “developing countries have recently witnessed the emergence of small-scale individual entrepreneurs, ranging from small traders to small service

³ Zungueiras are female street vendors who walk long distances in certain neighborhoods of Angola to sell various products that they carry in a basin on their heads, such as food, accessories and clothing, flip-flops, and more.

⁴ Quitandeiras, the term comes from *quitanda*, a word of Kimbundu origin (a language spoken in Angola), *kitanda*, which means “stall” or “place of sale.” A *quitandeira* is traditionally a woman who sells a variety of products such as fruits, vegetables, greens, clothing, sweets, and snacks, among others, in fairs, markets, or on the street. Unlike the *zungueiras*, *quitandeiras* have a fixed location for selling their goods.



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providers such as street vendors or small shop owners - as a result of market-based reforms, rapid urbanization, unemployment, and poverty” (Azmat and Samaratunge, 2009, as cited in Mendes, 2012, p. 7).

Thus, it can be understood that in developed countries, the rise of entrepreneurship was associated with innovation and capital accumulation, while in developing countries it emerges mainly from informality, unemployment, and poverty - characterizing a necessity-based entrepreneurship.

It is necessary to create a more favorable entrepreneurial ecosystem for the development of sustainable and competitive businesses, with the aim of reducing the inequalities faced by these women, who belong to socially vulnerable groups.

Entrepreneurship is a concept that has been gaining multiple definitions. Gimenez (2023) highlights that it is not a very old field of study and that the term *entrepreneurship* began to be used in economics from the 18th and 19th centuries, but studies on it only intensified from the mid-20th century onward.

In Angola, an underdeveloped country, actions to promote entrepreneurship began to be implemented in the 1990s, but only intensified from 2010 onward, when micro and small enterprises began to emerge.

Entrepreneurship is crucial and closely linked to innovation; it is the vehicle that carries new ideas and ways of doing things to meet market needs (Correia, 2013, p. 1, as cited in Catessamo & Rua, 2015, p. 20).

These authors emphasize the importance of linking entrepreneurship to innovation. However, our concern lies in how these women - recognized as entrepreneurs in the Angolan context, most of whom have low educational attainment, are engaged in informal trade, have limited financial resources, and lack easy access to credit - will be able to innovate without the necessary knowledge and support.

In any case, this reality amounts to a form of exclusion, since, as Catessamo and Rua (2015) point out, in Angola, innovation and entrepreneurship



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are central concerns of the State. The authors refer to Drucker's perspective, according to which innovation can be applied even in small businesses.

Therefore, it is clear that although entrepreneurship in Angola has contributed to the country's economic growth, women still face the most pronounced inequalities. This results from the historical and cultural factors of a society that operates under patriarchal ideas, which ultimately exclude women from positions of power.

GENDER AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A LOOK AT INEQUALITIES

Notably, the presence of women in the field of entrepreneurship has grown in recent times, contributing significantly to the economic development of various countries.

In Angola, for example, women play a crucial role in the economy, even when working predominantly in the informal sector. Despite this, deep gender inequalities persist, limiting both the recognition and the full development of women entrepreneurs.

According to Brandão et al. (2019), the study of female entrepreneurship was incorporated into the academic field relatively late. Vale et al. (2011) also highlight that, in recent decades, female entrepreneurship has become an object of analysis for numerous researchers, reflecting the growing appreciation of this phenomenon. Given the evolution of women's participation in the contemporary economy - even in the face of challenges such as the double workday - it is essential to understand the gender dynamics that shape their entrepreneurial trajectories and the social contexts in which they are embedded.

It is worth noting that, in Angola, female entrepreneurship emerges predominantly as a survival strategy, reflecting a context marked by profound social and economic inequalities. As observed by Pereira (2020) and Mendes



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(2012), this is often necessity-based entrepreneurship, in which women turn to entrepreneurial activity not by choice but as a response to exclusion from the formal labor market. In the same vein, Brandão et al. (2019) define this phenomenon as an “ambiguous empowerment,” which highlights the precarious conditions in which many women are driven to undertake business, especially in informal markets.

Thus, it becomes clear that the socioeconomic limitations faced by Angolan women still represent a significant obstacle to having their role in the market fully recognized and valued.

According to Ferretti and Souza (2022), when speaking of gender in entrepreneurship, it is often associated with a neutral term, where the man is characterized as the entrepreneur and the woman as the “other,” which has rendered women’s presence in the entrepreneurial space invisible. In many cases, the entrepreneurship discourse has generated gender inequalities and hierarchies.

Vale et al. (2011) present a gender and entrepreneurship perspective focused on the Brazilian reality, but some points can be analyzed from the standpoint of female entrepreneurship in Angola, due to gender inequalities that are structurally built into these societies. The authors highlight that women entrepreneurs are guided by strong ties, relying on support networks from family and neighbors. Cohen (2006), in the same perspective, emphasizes that informal networks consist of friends, family, colleagues, and the entrepreneur’s informal relationships with similar businesses (Neck et al., 2004; Birley, 1985, as cited in Cohen, 2006, p. 4). In Angola, women entrepreneurs often operate within these informal networks, where trust and support often come from family, friends, and neighbors, which limits access to strategic, innovative information and to a broader network of contacts for business growth.



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According to Vale et al. (2011), most women entrepreneurs have few family members involved in business, since the majority of formal businesses are run by men. In the Angolan reality, this situation is similar: female entrepreneurship is more associated with informal businesses, usually run by women from more vulnerable families, where the business operates without planning and serves only as a means of survival.

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC POLICIES: CHALLENGES AND DEMANDS IN THE ANGOLAN CONTEXT

Given the historical context of female entrepreneurship in Angola, marked by inequalities constantly reproduced over time, it becomes evident that more inclusive public policies are needed - policies that ensure these women remain in the labor market, and not only in the informal market, where they face various barriers to staying active, such as difficulty in accessing credit, police violence, lack of technical training, among other obstacles.

Catessamo and Rua (2015) assert that innovation and entrepreneurship are at the center of the Angolan State's concerns, but considering the exclusion and violence that women entrepreneurs suffer at the hands of the State itself, it is essential to recognize that government policies are still insufficient to effectively include women in formal markets.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM Angola, 2022), Angola was the only country in 2022 to present an early-stage entrepreneurial activity rate among women above 50%, with women representing 55.8% of entrepreneurs compared to 50.8% of men. However, it is notable that most of these women operate in the informal sector, with few opportunities to innovate. This highlights the urgent need for more inclusive public policies, focusing on access to training, aimed at formalizing businesses run by women in the informal market.



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According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor GEM Angola (2022) report, Angolan government policies assess the extent to which tax and regulatory policies, as well as their enforcement, are neutral with respect to company size, and the extent to which these policies encourage or discourage new and growing businesses (GEM Angola, 2022, p. 51). Furthermore, the document also evaluates the existence of government programs at all levels of governance (national, regional, and municipal) that directly support new and growing businesses (GEM Angola, 2022, p. 48).

It is clear that the policies currently adopted by the Angolan government are insufficient to effectively reach most women entrepreneurs, especially those from more vulnerable contexts. The creation of more inclusive and gender-sensitive public policies becomes essential so that Angolan women entrepreneurs can actively contribute to overcoming the inequalities structurally embedded in a historically patriarchal society.

CONCLUSION

Given the points discussed, it is clear that addressing the Angolan entrepreneurial ecosystem from a female perspective means recognizing that, although entrepreneurship can offer development opportunities, there are still numerous contradictions when this reality is observed through the lens of gender inequalities. It is evident that most women engaged in the informal market do not undertake entrepreneurship out of opportunity or innovation, but rather out of necessity, as a means of ensuring their own subsistence and supporting their families. This reality stems from their financial and academic limitations, as well as the absence of inclusive public policies that would enable women to access the formal market.

Based on the data presented by GEM Angola (2022), it is observed that women represent the largest percentage in the Angolan entrepreneurship



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landscape. However, their participation is concentrated mainly in the informal market. The public policies adopted by the State are not genuinely inclusive, as they do not effectively promote the insertion of women into the formal labor market. This exclusion is directly related to factors such as social vulnerability, police violence, and limitations in academic training faced by many of these women.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to formulate more inclusive public policies that facilitate women's access to the formal market. In the field of education, it is essential to expand support networks so that these women can engage in entrepreneurship not only out of necessity but also by choice. Furthermore, it is crucial that they receive adequate training so they can operate with innovation and contribute more significantly to the development of the Angolan market.



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