

PART 2

Country Cases

CHAPTER 8 Angola

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Prior to the outbreak of armed conflict, Angola produced one of the most abundant harvests in Africa, which included maize, coffee, fruits and other agricultural products. More than two decades of war, however, have devastated the country's economy as well as its infrastructure and social fabric. Agriculture has suffered from an acute labour shortage because of the massive exodus of displaced persons migrating from rural areas into the cities as well as to neighbouring countries. As a consequence, production in the primary sector has experienced severe setbacks from which it has never recovered.

The protracted civil war dominates every aspect of Angolan life. No other priority receives so much attention from the government. The armed conflict siphons off resources from other sectors, diminishing the possibility of reviving the country's economy, which is heavily dependent on petroleum production. As the latter accounts for 60 per cent of GDP, any drop in the international price of crude oil causes a major loss of public revenues, squeezing the social sectors and making it extremely difficult to design and implement specific policies to combat poverty.

The government has had a reputation for designing sound development plans, but of being unable to implement them. Lack of continuity appears to be a major problem for government initiatives. The few programmes that the Angolan authorities have tried to implement were always abandoned within a few months. The consequence is that public policies have had a meagre impact on the lives of the poor.

It is against this background of very limited success in the implementation of development plans that in 1997, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offered its assistance for the preparation of a series of studies on poverty and gender. As this chapter will show, the ability of donor-assisted initiatives to contribute to major changes in policy is severely constrained by the institutional fragility that characterises many developing countries. This calls for a major effort by donor agencies to invest in capacity-building and institutional development in these countries.

Poverty analysis

Given the particular situation imposed by the war, there have been relatively few studies and resources to carry out systematic analyses of poverty in Angola. For

this reason, the possibility of drawing from technical and financial resources made available by UNDP through the Poverty Strategies Initiative (PSI) was very well received in some government circles. The UNDP office invited Angola's National Statistical Institute (INE) to serve as the focal point for the PSI project, which was perceived as an opportunity to undertake in-depth analyses that could be used as inputs for the formulation of public policies to combat poverty. The purpose was also to fill some critical information gaps that were believed to impede a better understanding of the phenomenon of poverty in the country. The choice of INE as the project's counterpart was certainly a strategic one, not only because INE is perhaps the only government entity with some built-in research capacity, but also because it is part of the powerful Ministry of Planning. This was seen as providing an important entry point for linking research results with policy-making and planning.

Based on several discussions between the staff of UNDP and INE, it was decided that the PSI funding would be used for the preparation of four studies related to poverty. The first study was an analysis of the policy measures required for alleviating poverty by pursuing equity and efficiency goals in tandem, rather than one at the expense of the other (Wold and Grave 1999). It was prepared jointly by INE and Statistics Norway as a first step to galvanise national efforts towards the preparation of Angola's first national poverty eradication strategy.

The second output was a study for the determination of a basic food basket for Luanda (Ribeiro 2000). It includes an assessment of the impact of inflation and exchange rate policy on living conditions, as well as a definition of a basic basket of goods linked to food security and estimates of consumer purchasing power. This study was intended to feed into the development and adoption of a database to monitor the cost of the basic basket of goods.

The two other studies were a profile of rural poverty and a socio-economic and demographic profile of labour in the Luanda province. The former contains a breakdown of poor and non-poor households in rural areas, a profile of the rural poor, and a definition of target groups for public programmes. The latter is an assessment of the evolution of employment and unemployment indicators during the 1990s (Adauta de Sousa 1998).

In addition to these four studies, a set of guidelines for the production of gender statistics was developed and used in training workshops conducted with mid-level government officials in Luanda, Lubango and Benguela, and a document on the role of women in Angolan society was produced and published (Ceita 1999).¹

The policy study, together with the profile of rural poverty and the analysis of the role of women in Angolan society, are rich in information and analyses about poverty, labour markets dynamics, gender, employment, and the coping strategies of the poor. The same may be said about the study for the determination of a basic

food basket for Luanda, even though this output was of a different kind and, unlike the others, was not expected to have a direct impact on the public debate. According to data compiled by INE, between 60 and 70 per cent of the population live below the official poverty line. Of these, 13.4 per cent live in extreme poverty. The flight of refugees from rural areas has been formidable, turning the cities into a refuge for the poor. Seventy per cent of the population in Cabinda, 68 per cent in Lubango, and more than 60 per cent in the other main cities (Luanda, Lobito and Luena) fall into the category of poor (Angola 1997a). The studies financed by the PSI confirm the findings from the national Human Development Reports (HDR) sponsored by UNDP in 1997, 1998 and 1999, which single out the impact of the war as one of the main determinants of the country's massive levels of poverty. High unemployment and extremely limited access to health services are also closely associated with poverty.²

In the face of extreme vulnerability, people have resorted to a multiplicity of survival strategies to make ends meet. Household survival strategies include women's and children's participation in the labour market, particularly in informal sector activities in which, according to various sources, almost 50 per cent of the urban population is engaged. In Luanda, for example, it has been estimated that 54 per cent of all families are linked to the informal economy (Adauta de Sousa 1998). Women have entered the labour market on a permanent basis, and are considered to be breadwinners on equal footing with men (Wold and Grave 1999). Although labour plays a central part in people's survival strategies mainly through work intensification practices, households have also been forced to adopt a range of 'restrictive' strategies to protect their level of consumption from further erosion. These include not going to the doctor in order to avoid the cost of health services, using cheap but less efficient sources of energy such as firewood, and incurring debt to pay for children's education (see chapter 3, this volume). These 'private' initiatives have flourished as a result of the lack of support that the poor get from the government, which is itself subject to acute pressures due to the protracted armed conflict.³

It is important to stress that the activities financed by the PSI programme were integrated into existing local initiatives for data-gathering and research. They also contributed further to strengthening the efforts that in recent years had been supported by UNDP, as well as the World Bank. In particular, the institutional collaboration between UNDP and INE dates back to the preparation of the 1997 *Human Development Report*, which was under way at the same time that the PSI studies began. This contributed to a fruitful fertilisation of ideas between both sets of analytical work, a process that was certainly aided by the fact that some key INE staff participated in both. Some of the statistical data on which the HDR is based came from the analyses carried out by the PSI studies, which also appear to have had a

significant impact on the contents of the report. More importantly, the HDR clearly pointed out the need to undertake more in-depth and systematic analyses of poverty in Angola. This need was partly met by the PSI project. The latter thus fell on ground that had been prepared by the initiatives and activities that were being undertaken locally, even though with great difficulty and limited resources.

Perhaps the single most important analytical contribution of the PSI studies, particularly the one on anti-poverty policies, is the notion of poverty as an economic and political phenomenon (Wold and Grave 1999). The significance of this notion may be gauged only by considering that, by and large, poverty in Angola is perceived as being primarily a 'social' problem. By implication, it has been deemed to be out of the ambit of government action. A central purpose of the analytical work supported by UNDP, therefore, has been to emphasise the economic and political roots of poverty. Likewise, the analysis of the conditions of women has generated a fledgling debate in academic and policy circles on the importance of their role for society and the discrimination they face in the development process (Angola n/d).

Although, as we shall see later, one cannot be too optimistic about the probable impact of these studies, there are at least some indications of a greater awareness about poverty and gender issues among key policy-makers. It was encouraging, for instance, that at a press conference held in late 1999, the President of Angola dealt extensively with the question of poverty, using data produced by the PSI studies. It appears, furthermore, that both the national HDR and the PSI studies may have influenced the design of government programmes, although concrete evidence of such impact is hard to come by. The Medium Term Stabilisation and Economic Recovery Programme 1998-2000 deals explicitly with poverty issues. Among the broad objectives of the Programme are to 'combat social injustice and disparities', 'rehabilitate the economic and social infrastructure and equipment in areas in which refugees and displaced persons will resettle', 'revitalise the peasant agricultural sector' and 'ensure minimum levels of consumption of food and other basic necessities'. The social objectives of the Programme are to:

- Reduce unemployment and combat poverty;
- Increase food and other basic supplies to the population;
- Improve the provision of public health services and primary health care;
- Improve the provision of education and occupational training services;
- Upgrade the infrastructure for basic sanitation and drinking water supply to rural and urban populations (Angola 1997b).

There are, in short, positive signs that give some room for hope. Unfortunately, the problems of institutional weakness and lack of continuity that have plagued this war-ravaged country in the past seem to have once again doomed the prospects for translating the analytical outputs sponsored by UNDP into tangible policy outcomes.

Capacity-building

The development of local capacities was not a major objective of the PSI project, given its limited funding and its primary emphasis on advocacy and raising awareness. Nevertheless, it would not be correct to say that the project did not have any impact on capacity-building. Its main merit lay not so much in creating new capacities where none existed before, but in availing itself of those that were already available in the country and putting them to good use for carrying out systematic analyses of existing survey data on poverty and gender issues.

The PSI activities were undertaken on ground made fertile by existing policy initiatives, as well as a track record of collaboration between UNDP and the Living Conditions Monitoring Unit of the National Statistical Institute. To a significant extent, UNDP was able to benefit from the participation of a team of local experts who not only possessed solid academic training and specialised skills, but also the required competencies and experience for carrying out this type of work. This critical mass of expertise is rarely an abundant resource in countries such as Angola. Tragically, it is not uncommon that some of the best talents in these countries are forced to devote themselves to other activities or to migrate in search of more viable and attractive options due to the lack of incentives in their home country. This 'brain drain' deprives countries of some of their most qualified people, giving rise to serious capacity gaps that may take an entire generation to remedy.

In the context of low salaries, lack of continuity and insufficient resources faced by local researchers, the financial and technical support provided by international organisations over the years, albeit limited, has been critical for ensuring the development of a core group of highly qualified professionals. This also applies to the technical staff at INE, which has been the preferred local partner for the poverty surveys carried out in Angola with funding from outside sources, particularly the World Bank, as well as the national Human Development Reports sponsored by UNDP.

It is to UNDP's credit that it decided to collaborate with and support the core group of experts at INE. This was the appropriate institution to conduct the project activities both because of its access to data and the human capital and technical know-how it had accumulated over time. Besides, the fact that INE belongs to the Ministry of Planning offered, at least in principle, the possibility of establishing a direct link between the analytical findings and recommendations from the PSI studies and the political sphere. While the dialogue between UNDP, the INE experts and the government authorities has not been devoid of problems, there has nonetheless been a gradual process of accommodation that has enabled key local actors to become increasingly sensitive about the problem of poverty.

The emerging recognition of poverty as an economic and political phenomenon and, consequently, as an integral part of the economic policy responsibilities of the government, is no minor achievement in a country that until recently, had

avoided dealing explicitly with the problem. Since many studies had already been carried out prior to this project, it certainly cannot be said that the PSI project by itself placed the subject of poverty and gender on the agenda of discussion. Nevertheless, the institutional collaboration that the PSI studies made possible allowed these topics to be discussed in broader circles as an instrument of dialogue and public awareness. The project was a fundamental step towards achieving a better understanding of Angola's poverty problem, and establishing embryonic links between the producers of data and decision-makers in government.

Equally important is the fact that the topics of poverty and gender are increasingly entering into the public arena. Findings from the poverty profile, for example, were printed in the local press, which is devoting more attention to these issues now because, for the first time, reliable data are becoming available. These and other findings were also discussed in seminars and forums in the city of Luanda and other urban sites, with the presence of government personnel, civil society members and academics. Although not as extensive as would have been desired, these dissemination activities nonetheless helped to create consciousness about the magnitude of the problems facing Angola. They also provided critical knowledge for understanding the policy challenges that these problems entail.

Moreover, just as the inclusion of the group of INE experts clearly benefited the PSI project, there was also a parallel process of institutional learning at INE itself. The implementation of the project activities, which revolved around the analysis and systematisation of survey data and their translation into policy relevant outputs, had important side benefits for both the institution and the experts who participated in the studies. In light of this, it is regrettable that changes that subsequently took place in the leadership of INE apparently aborted a process of learning-by-doing that had been in progress for several years. These changes will be discussed next.

Institutional weakness

The activities sponsored by UNDP produced a number of significant findings and recommendations that could have been used for the development of policy. Moreover, as we have seen, the decision to locate the PSI project in the National Statistical Institute was amply justified in term of its expertise and its critical bridging role between researchers and policy-makers. Unfortunately, and apparently without prior notice, a decision was taken in 1999 to change the Director-General of INE and other key personnel. These decisions have resulted in a change in the priorities of the institution. Understanding and analysing issues of poverty, employment, the informal sector and female labour, which had been priority concerns under the previous management, ceased to be given the same importance under the current management. The new Director-General has expressed little interest in the generation of 'social' statistics, which have now given way to the

collection and processing of macroeconomic indicators.

Consequently, the existence of the Living Conditions Monitoring Unit, a critical space created for socio-economic analysis within the INE, is no longer part of the restructuring plans of the new management. What could have been a seed for new and innovative analysis — which is extremely important for the design of more effective development policies — has instead undergone a process of dismantling following the changes experienced since 1999. INE's best staff, who had pursued post-graduate studies abroad, specialising in survey techniques, applied mathematics and other relevant topics, have left the institution to take up jobs elsewhere. If the former Director had continued as head of INE, or if his successor had drawn upon the investment made in training its personnel, the PSI project could have been part of a process of enhanced capacities within the institution. Instead, a project that had enjoyed some success was dismantled, preventing its results from being fed into policy design and more ominously, discontinuing a process of learning and capacity-building that will take time to restore.

The case of Angola is particularly revealing in many respects. It clearly demonstrates the importance of institutional stability for the success of any initiative. Perhaps because of its limited size, the UNDP project has had a negligible impact in countering what is widely perceived as the weakness of Angolan institutions, characterised by frequent personnel changes, instability and lack of continuity. The direction taken by key agencies seems to depend in large measure on the interests of the individuals who head them, which is a clear sign of the absence of institutionalisation.

Thus, even though some institutional learning took place in INE as a result of the PSI activities, it is highly unlikely that the enhanced capacities generated by the project would be available for future initiatives related to poverty. The changes that followed the qualitative shift experienced by INE have very high costs, both personal and institutional. They not only affect the core group of individuals who were directly involved in the project and have now scattered in other directions. These changes also have a more profound impact in terms of the accumulation of knowledge, given the impossibility of pursuing a collective effort of compilation, analysis and interpretation of data for policy use in a context of institutional fluidity.

One other element in the Angolan case may have some important lessons for similar undertakings in the future in other countries. The absence of middle management personnel with high technical competencies in government ministries was a serious problem. Middle management has the potential to be a link between information and the applied use of that information. Any effort to influence the design of policies through the production of reliable information and analysis on important topics is impeded by the lack of capacity to make use of those inputs. This lack in Angola acted as a further constraint on the potential of the PSI activities to have a discernible impact on policy-making.

An important lesson to be drawn from this experience is the need to focus future efforts on the training of personnel in state secretariats and ministries. This training should cover such apparently simple skills as learning to interpret statistics, perceive the relationship between different variables, and translate analytical outputs into instruments for the design of policies. Without this institutional capacity at the government level, no study would be able to have an impact on policy design, no matter how good it may be. The same could also be applied to the personnel of civil organisations, where there appears to be a tremendous need for this type of training.⁴

Partnerships

Apart from their intrinsic value for ensuring local ownership of policies, the establishment of partnerships amongst social and institutional actors can serve as an antidote for the problems of institutional weakness discussed above. This applies both to the existence of coordination among international organisations and, most importantly, between such organisations and national entities.

With respect to the former, the case of Angola represents a missed opportunity for establishing close links between key international organisations present in the country. The World Bank, for example, has had many projects in Angola in recent years. Funding from the Bank facilitated the establishment of the Living Conditions Monitoring Unit of the INE, which was subsequently involved in the preparation of both the national HDRs and the poverty studies sponsored by UNDP. The World Bank also financed the household survey that furnished the raw data for the poverty studies carried out under the PSI project, as well as for a new national income and expenditure survey that was implemented in 1999-2000. The fact that the same core group of professionals at INE was involved in both sets of activities should have prompted UNDP and the World Bank to coordinate their assistance more closely. Instead, there was very limited connection between the two, and funding for each set of activities was independent from the other.

Clearly, one cannot attribute to the PSI project a seed role in terms of leveraging additional resources for poverty-related work. It is more than likely that given its long history of involvement in the country, financing from the World Bank for the latest household survey would have been made available even without the presence of the PSI project. It seems more accurate to say, instead, that it was the financial support of the Bank that enabled UNDP to achieve significant results in a short period of time, since the data used in the PSI studies had already been collected and were thus available for analysis.⁵ What we find, therefore, is the simultaneous but uncoordinated efforts of two major international organisations, probably to the detriment of their Angolan partners.

Beyond the collaboration between UNDP and the INE expert team for the con-

duct of the studies, there is also no evidence that PSI activities led to enhanced partnerships involving national actors. Although efforts were made to circulate the project outputs among civil and non-governmental associations, and some workshops and forums did take place, no social group has claimed full ownership of the results of the project. This may partly be attributed to the fact that dissemination activities have been rather limited. They took place mainly through personal contacts of the researchers and the informal distribution of reports to government officials, local academics, and representatives from non-governmental and international organisations with offices in Luanda. Unless UNDP and INE make a deliberate effort to ensure that the results of the studies reach a wider policy audience, it is improbable that genuine national ownership will emerge. A specific target should be the Ministry of Planning, given its privileged role in economic policy-making.

Conclusion

Our review of the experience of Angola has yielded some valuable lessons for donor engagement in support of poverty reduction strategies. Probably the most relevant lesson relates to the negative impact that institutional fragility has on the accumulation of knowledge and capacities that may be utilised for policy change. This case illustrates that institutions in many countries are extremely vulnerable to political developments, and take different directions according to the interests of the persons leading them. All too often, the result is that policy initiatives are discontinued, capacities that were created with great effort are wasted, and precious time and energy are lost.

Angola is, sadly, a case in point. The sudden change of leadership at the National Statistical Institute doomed the prospects the PSI project might have had of influencing the government's policy agenda. The change meant that the collection and processing of poverty-relevant information ceased to be a priority for the INE, which led to the dismantling of a Unit that had acquired substantial expertise in the analysis and interpretation of survey data. In this context of change, there was no possibility that the PSI project could have some tangible impact in terms of enhancing local institutional capacities for policy analysis and design.

Before the institutional shake-up at INE, however, the PSI project had achieved some moderate successes from which lessons may also be drawn. Part of its success hinges on the fact that the project deliberately sought to build upon existing local initiatives involving the collection, processing and interpretation of survey data, thereby contributing to ongoing efforts to strengthen the country's indigenous research capacity for poverty analysis. Together with the work funded by the World Bank and other international organisations, the studies sponsored by UNDP were able to introduce new concepts, ideas and approaches that have helped to enrich the understanding of poverty and gender in Angola.

A key factor in ensuring the quality and policy relevance of the PSI studies was the participation of local researchers with solid training and experience. At the time the UNDP project was launched, the choice of INE as the main focal point was amply justified. INE had a small cadre of experts who, given their institutional location within the Ministry of Planning, could have played an essential bridging role between research and analysis, on the one hand, and their application on the other. These capacities were not created by the PSI project; they already existed within the INE. What the project made possible was taking advantage of the existing skills in order to carry out new analyses on topics that had not received adequate attention from policy-makers.

In fact, the analytical work commissioned by UNDP was intended to serve as a building block for the preparation of Angola's first national poverty reduction strategy. Had this process not been discontinued, it might have led to the development of a genuinely home-grown national anti-poverty strategy.

There are still some encouraging signs that the question of poverty has begun to gain greater recognition, both in policy circles and with the public at large. In this context, the PSI studies could still prove to be a valuable instrument with which to engage key decision-makers in a process of public discussion and debate. A major constraint, however, is the absence of technically qualified middle management personnel in government ministries. This may preclude the translation of analytical inputs into concrete policy and programme initiatives, and thus underscores the need to focus future efforts on training staff in the ministries and other government agencies in order to make a more substantive policy dialogue possible.

Furthermore, and given the fragile nature of government institutions described in the chapter, it would be useful to explore the possibility of targeting future initiatives to civil society actors as well. A central goal should be to strengthen their capacity for negotiation and advocacy, and to ensure that they become more actively involved as pressure groups in the process of triangulation between the experts and researchers who carry out the analytical work and those within the government who take decisions.

To make this possible, it is important to ensure that after the research phase of a project is completed, there is sufficient space for a period of reflection, analysis and absorption of its results by local actors. International organisations tend to operate under tight timetables, which normally conflict with processes that may take longer to mature and bear fruit. This often undercuts the possibility of achieving some tangible policy outcomes based on the research conducted.

Therefore, international organisations will need to make provisions in their project budgets and time-frame to allow this period of reflection and analysis to take place. Without it, it is unlikely that the knowledge generated by the research they support will be assimilated and applied in the policy arena. If government

institutions lack the necessary capacity to translate the results of operational research into actual policies, then an effort must be made to ensure that this task is done elsewhere. Angola has a small but highly qualified group of academics who could play this role. But for this, they will need support, continuity, and space for critical thinking. ■

Notes

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¹ Although it appears that this 'package' of activities was overly ambitious, by the end of 1999 all had been completed. With the exception of the study on *Poverty Alleviation Policy in Angola* (Wold and Grave 1999), which was published in both Portuguese and English, all the other studies were produced in Portuguese alone. Even the workshops on gender statistics were organised and carried out within the limits imposed by the country's war environment, in other words, in areas where it was possible and safe to go. Other areas were apparently too dangerous to visit.

² The imbalances caused by the transition from a socialist to a market economy are also among the reasons for the increase in poverty. Under the previous system, people were assured of a minimum threshold of wellbeing that included health services, education and free housing.

³ In 1994, for instance, defence and internal security absorbed 56.5 per cent of the public budget, administrative expenditures another 29 per cent, while the health and education sectors received 3.4 per cent and 2.6 per cent, respectively.

⁴ According to the former director of the INE, most non-governmental organisations in Angola are engaged mainly in the provision of social services, where the practice of advocacy is practically non-existent. Consequently, these organisations cannot be considered to be real users of the studies sponsored by the PSI project. These studies are bound to be most useful for those who are engaged in advocacy activities on regular basis, which is not the case among local civil society entities.

⁵ The PSI funding would not have been sufficient to conduct the household income and expenditure survey, which was very expensive. But that funding was nonetheless crucial for carrying out the analysis of the data furnished by the survey.