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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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THE IMPORTANCE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ANGOLA

*¹António Inácio Rocha Santana and ²Zita S. J. Gaspar Rocha Santana

¹Department of Social and Human Sciences. Higher Pedagogical School of Cuanza Norte (Angola); ²Department of Food Biotechnology. National Center For Scientific Research (Angola)

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*Corresponding author:

António Inácio Rocha Santana

ABSTRACT

This essay provides an in-depth analysis of the strategic role of primary education in the context of rural development in Angola, highlighting education as one of the fundamental pillars for promoting social inclusion, active citizenship, and improved economic and sociocultural conditions in rural populations. It argues that, in a country where much of the population lives outside urban centers (about 34.5%) and faces historical challenges linked to poverty, geographic isolation, weak infrastructure, and limited access to social services, the primary school assumes a unique transformative responsibility. Without a comprehensive curricular reorientation that values local knowledge, promotes practical skills, and strengthens community autonomy, primary education risks reproducing entrenched structural inequalities. In this sense, the essay examines in greater depth the role of primary schools, as well as their potential, limitations, structural weaknesses, community challenges, and possibilities for reform to have a lasting impact on rural development in Angola.

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INTRODUCTION

Primary education in Angola has been widely recognized as a structuring pillar of any sustainable human, social, and economic development project. According to data from the 2024 General Population and Housing Census, approximately one third of the Angolan population lives in rural areas, accounting for about 34.5% (I.N.E., 2025). In these contexts, characterized by limited access to public services and more pronounced socioeconomic challenges, primary schools assume a particularly strategic role. For many children and families living in rural and peri-urban areas, the school often constitutes the main - and sometimes the only - regular point of contact with the State, performing functions that go beyond the mere transmission of knowledge by establishing itself as a space for formal learning, socialization, social protection, and the construction of future expectations. However, in a context where deep inequalities associated with poverty, geographic isolation, and weak infrastructure persist, it is crucial to question how rural primary schools can effectively contribute to local development and to reducing these disparities. More than a transmitter of literacy and formal knowledge, the school must be understood as an active agent of social, economic, and cultural transformation. Following Freirean principles, education only reaches its emancipatory potential when it is rooted in the concrete experiences of learners (Freire, 1987); therefore, rural pedagogy cannot be limited to adapting urban content but must

instead value local knowledge, agricultural practices, community dynamics, and processes that strengthen autonomy. Thus, this essay investigates how primary schools in Angola's rural areas can act as agents of transformation, examining their potential, limitations, and structural challenges. It argues that only a contextualized curricular and pedagogical reorientation -one that recognizes the specificities of the rural environment and promotes practical and community-focused skills- will enable schools to contribute sustainably to rural development and to the fight against historically entrenched inequalities.

DEVELOPMENT

Structural problems of rural development in Angola: Rural development in Angola faces multiple challenges that predate independence and were exacerbated by decades of civil conflict. The abandonment of agricultural land, destruction of infrastructure, forced displacement and the disintegration of community networks all contributed to weakening the rural social fabric.

Even after political stabilization, rural regions continue to face:

- inadequate transport infrastructure;
- limited access to clean water and electricity;
- shortages of health and education services;
- low diversification of economic activities;

- youth migration to urban areas;
- low agricultural productivity due to limited technical training;
- climate vulnerability and dependence on traditional farming methods.

Schultz (1968) emphasizes that agricultural development depends largely on investment in human capital rather than solely on material resources. Without access to technical knowledge, information, and training, rural producers remain trapped in low-productivity cycles.

Sen's (2000) capability approach deepens this understanding by defining poverty as a deprivation of capabilities rather than merely insufficient income. Education is thus central to expanding opportunities and enabling individuals to make informed decisions about production, organization, health, and the environment.

Ivan Illich (1973) warns that educational systems disconnected from local realities can reinforce dependency instead of promoting autonomy. In Angola's rural context, uniform curricula often fail to consider local agricultural practices, community organization, and cultural traditions.

The primary school as a driving force for rural development:

Bowles & Gintis (1976) argue that schools do more than transmit academic knowledge; they shape behaviors, work patterns, and civic dispositions. When properly organized rural primary schools can function as community development hubs.

The school contributes to rural development by:

- offering basic training in sustainable farming;
- disseminating knowledge on nutrition, hygiene, and community health;
- promoting cooperatives and farmers' associations;
- teaching environmental conservation and resource management;
- strengthening cultural identity and local heritage;
- fostering civic participation and collective problem-solving.

Newer studies highlight that the rural school should act as a local knowledge centre. This requires implementing community projects such as school gardens, seed fairs, environmental clubs, health brigades, craft workshops, and intergenerational learning activities.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2000) argues that breaking epistemological monopolies is essential -schools must integrate traditional knowledge, including local forms of farming, fishing, herbal medicine, land management, and cultural rituals.

The renewed role of the school in the contemporary rural world:

Rural societies today face profound transformations linked to globalization, climate change, mechanization, digital technologies, migration, and economic restructuring. Milton Santos (2000) emphasizes that understanding these changes is key to designing effective development policies.

Primary schools must prepare learners to:

- understand environmental impacts and adapt agricultural practices;
- use basic technological tools and digital devices;
- adopt sustainable soil and water management practices;
- develop entrepreneurial and cooperative initiatives;
- participate in community planning and local governance;
- protect cultural heritage and local languages;
- identify agricultural and non-agricultural economic opportunities.

Lerner (1963) argues that transitional societies need educational institutions that prepare individuals to manage structural change rather than perpetuate outdated models.

The Education 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes primary education as the foundation of educational systems, emphasizing that universal access, learner retention and meaningful learning outcomes during the early years are decisive factors in breaking cycles of poverty, strengthening citizenship and fostering long-term social cohesion. According to UNESCO, persistent weaknesses at this level tend to generate cumulative disadvantages, especially in rural and socioeconomically marginalized contexts. With specific regard to rural areas, UNESCO advocates for context-sensitive educational policies that move beyond standardized curricular models. The Agenda stresses the importance of relevant curricula, inclusive pedagogies and the recognition of local cultures, languages and knowledge systems as essential conditions for educational effectiveness. From this perspective, primary education should not be limited to basic literacy and numeracy, but rather function as a platform for the development of practical, environmental, social and civic competencies that are directly connected to local livelihoods and community life.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable rural development in Angola depends heavily on the transformative capacity of primary education. However, this potential will only be fully realized if:

- curricula are adapted to local realities;
- community knowledge is valued;
- teachers receive continuous training suited to rural contexts;
- families and local institutions participate actively in school life;
- school infrastructure is strengthened;
- schools are integrated into long-term community development strategies.

The primary school must function as a centre of rural innovation, community dialogue, cultural preservation, and economic transformation. Because development requires overcoming dependence on external models and valuing endogenous potential, something that only inclusive, critical, and contextualized education can achieve.

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