

Mia Valle
Ankeny Centennial High School
Ankeny, IA, USA
Angola, Human Rights

Women's Rights in Angola

If you were to go up to a young woman and ask whether they were still attending school or not in Luanda, the very heart of Angola, chances are they would say no. Despite being the most contributive in the agricultural workforce of this country, women continue to be at the largest disadvantage due to a lack of knowledge. The average amount of schooling for the majority of women in the Huíla province is about three years because of the lack of awareness about menstrual cycles (“Mozambique”), instantly leading to less education in all aspects as young women continue to drop out of school for this reason. A gender imbalance such as the one seen in education gives women less of an ability to provide for their families, worsening food insecurity throughout the country. Women must take a certain priority in education, starting simply with the continuation of their studies.

Angola, filled with over 33 million people, is a compact and overpopulated country. A large percentage of citizens is made up of youth, with around 47% being under the age of 15 (“Angola”, CultureGrams). The presidential republic led by João Lourenço (“Angola”, CultureGrams) is not only surging with high infant mortality rates but also high fertility rates, leading to the commonality of about three generations of family all living together (“Angola”, CultureGrams). Three years ago, 66.5% of these families had less contaminated drinking water and 72.7% had more sterile sanitation (Bailey); 40% had access to electricity about four years ago (Hebert). However, what has the larger contrast in percentage is the number of people working in agriculture and the amount of usable land.

Many families take part in subsistence farming and in general over 85% of the citizens in the workforce are involved in agriculture, with only 3.9% of arable land (Bailey). Southern parts of Angola experience more aridness, being cooler and dryer. Several animal populations such as elephants and giraffes have plummeted due to major conflicts and combat (“Angola”, CultureGrams). Previously important crops included coffee, cotton, tobacco, and sugar. Known meals consisted of mainly pastes, fish, vegetables, and other harvested foods (Bailey). Now, after years of war, drastic changes in climate, and rapid population growth, the land available for cultivation has dwindled.

Over time, these dramatically changing factors have led to severe emergency conditions exacerbated by droughts. In 2021, over 1 million people in Angola were battling starvation but in 2022, the number went up to 3.81 million (“Angola”, UNICEF). This has caused difficulty in farming as drought conditions continue to get worse and heighten the difficulties of everyday life such as taking children to school. The Angola Humanitarian Situation Report created by UNICEF states, “Eight point three percent of students in Namibe, 20.1% of students in Huíla, and 69.1% of students in Cunene have experienced reduced access to schools due to the drought. In focus group discussions with school communities in Ombadja, Cunene in June 2021, caregivers and teachers consistently noted that the lack of food and access to water made it difficult for many children to attend school.” Not to mention, conflict has impacted Angolans negatively for years on end. Civil wars have been ceaseless, causing overcrowding in schools and the destruction of

educational buildings (Bailey). Out of things impacted by these wars, schooling has taken one of the hardest hits.

The humanitarian crisis in Angola continues to become increasingly dire in several areas as the years progress. Due to the drought in the southern region of the country, there are a multitude of factors that continue to magnify these hardships. *The State of the World's Human Rights* by Amnesty International says, "Diversion of traditional grazing lands by government authorities for commercial farming continued, violating domestic and international human rights standards, including by the failure of the authorities to carry out community consultations and provide adequate compensation; all these aggravated the crisis." representing the part Angolan government takes in provoking worsened conditions. The lack of resources being provided is bringing up a call for "Angolan authorities and the international community to ramp up their relief efforts, including providing sustained and regular emergency food assistance and access to clean and safe water for domestic use and consumption..." ("Angola", Amnesty International). *Make the Vote Meaningful...* released by Amnesty International mentions there is evident consumption of public funds by authorities as two years ago, twenty-four officials were prosecuted with embezzlement.

Throughout 2022, there have been multiple accounts of police brutality in Angola. Due to the restrictions of the pandemic that prevailed into 2022, protests intensified bringing on an increase of violations by authorities such as containing people for days on end without food or water and use of weapons on citizens (World Report). Human rights violations made by law enforcement are not the only dilemma at hand. Angola has also struggled with gender inequalities specifically in education. *The World Report 2023: Angola Events of 2022* made by Human Rights Watch mentions, "Angola lacks a reentry or continuation policy that protects a pregnant girl's right to education. This has led to uneven enforcement of education rights..." showcasing the importance of reproductive rights in the matter of women's learning. But for girls, the journey through the varying academic system is more complex than a reentry policy.

In many ways, Angolan women lack an understanding of their very own reproductive systems. This includes menstrual cycles, pregnancies, and contraception. There are noticeable and acknowledged differences in the way women are able to work when being unaware of certain reproductive aspects. One woman who had eight children within thirteen years, leaving only about an 11-month window between pregnancies, mentioned that she had a hard time feeding her family when pregnant as she was always sick and could not work ("Diamonds Are Scarce"). Later on, a caretaker revealed to the woman, Nsenga Malu, that it was possible to plan the birthing of children; this was something Malu was completely unaware of ("Diamonds Are Scarce"). It is unmistakably clear that the lack of knowledge on the part of women in Angola affects how they work and how they can provide.

Women in Angola are highly responsible when it comes to providing. A study done in 2020 mentions that women create half of the workforce in Africa but are seen as a small group of people in higher education fields (Van Houweling et al. 486). Adding on to this, a large amount of Angolans rely heavily on livestock but with water shortages and the long periods of traveling required, women and girls struggle with overwhelming workloads while having trouble providing for their families ("Make the Vote"). As of 2020, the study adds, "Agriculture is one of the most male-dominated disciplines, alongside engineering,

manufacturing, and construction [...] The proportion of women is highest in food and nutritional science (44%) and lowest in disciplines related to engineering, such as water and irrigation (8%), forestry (15%), and soil science (13%).” (Van Houweling et al. 489). There is a clear imbalance in the agricultural education of women, causing a setback in supplying meals for themselves and their families.

The Education system strongly affects the amount women are able to provide for their loved ones. To lighten this disparity, there must be a focus placed on women’s education; secondary and higher. Educational centers dedicated to returning people post-partum to their schooling and giving them an awareness of agricultural careers may bring a wide variety of changes. Centers made to educate women have created noticeable changes before. In the Huíla province of Angola, the United Nations Population Fund has tackled reproductive and menstrual health awareness. It has been observed that in Angola, women have fallen behind or left school entirely due to their menstrual cycles (“Mozambique”). They had begun a program sharing with the young girls in the area how the reproductive system works. UNFPA shared a brief summary of the results stating, “Girls felt confident in participating in activities where they might have held back before, and boys felt more comfortable supporting friends, girlfriends and sisters in making informed health choices and in everyday participation” (“Mozambique”). This is just one of many instances where initiatives based on women’s learning have brought on positive and varied change by giving young girls more encouragement where encouragement is due.

The project of creating women’s and agricultural-based learning centers is meant to be funded and led by groups or organizations whose objectives align with those of the project itself. In this instance, the best recommendation would be the United Nations, particularly the United Nations Population Fund. The UNFPA has created initiatives before, advocating for women and their rights. Though their organization is more directed towards sexual and reproductive health, they have committed works to women’s rights in general. In the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022-2025 it is stated, “The strategic plan is a call to action. It calls for tackling harmful gender norms and inequalities, investing in young people and protecting the bodily autonomy of women and girls.” Furthermore, this supports that their plans do in fact align with the ideas of gender equality implemented in this project. The UNFPA is also currently in and has been in partnership with several individuals, non-profits, and organizations such as BeGirl, which creates high-quality and affordable menstrual products for women. During the pandemic, the two partnered in order to address menstrual health and cycles, as well as general hygiene. This ended up impacting, “...2,000 boys and girls aged 10 to 16 in four provinces, trained 27 educators to provide menstrual health and sexual reproductive health educational workshops and distributed the same reusable period panties and tools to help participants track and understand cycles.” (“Mozambique”). Moreover, the UN organization already has multiple plans for funding in place for different areas of impact and uses financial resources from governments and donors to carry out projects. The UNFPA would be an organization to carefully consider for the reasons above.

The motivation of women in schools is highly important for their futures. Support is crucial for most girls to go onto higher education whether it be systematically or behaviorally. Proven in previous studies, it is shown that women who have successfully gone onto higher education or agricultural careers, had certain incentives surrounding their access to instruction. Conversations with women who’ve had successful educations and careers showed specific motives such as, “...strong family support, awareness of agricultural careers and opportunities, and individual determination and confidence.” (Van Houweling et

al. 500). As stated in the study, the simple knowledge of possible agricultural careers can lead to it becoming a reality for educated women, but what was also mentioned is the importance of familial encouragement.

Attitudes and social norms are underestimated in the way they affect girls in school every day, particularly those driven by perceptions of gender. Ambition and drive can only take women so far when what contradicts both surrounds them at all times: discrimination. The Human Rights Watch mentions, “discriminatory attitudes and social barriers pressure girls to drop out altogether.” (World Report). However, it is not just coming from the outside, it’s also coming from within; in tradition. Several customs in societies are demoralizing to women and girls of all ages, as indicated, “...preference to educate boys over girls, and cultural traditions such as early marriage and dowry payments, along with the value placed on motherhood, limit education opportunities for women and girls [...] Domestic chores and family obligations often leave women and girls with less time for school work and frequently cause them to miss school, with consequences for their overall achievement.” (Van Houweling et al. 499). Women’s education is never prioritized, as established by the statements above, causing impediments in the way girls participate in their studies and eventually leading to dropping out. Teaching young girls about agriculture in collaborative, women-focused centers, as well as having the possible chance of discussing with families, may bring a reduction of the typical attitudes surrounding the idea of women in agriculture. Though, despite how impactful families are to the young girls they raise, men in the workplace can often be more impactful, for the worst.

In areas of work or education, which are mainly made up of men and only have small groups of women, negative results tend to come to the surface. Many could feel intimidated and threatened by the possibilities of harassment, bullying, assault, abuse, and more. A specified workshop had attendees confirming these fears, saying, “...sexual harassment continues to be the norm in their institutions and all the women in attendance had been the victims of sexual harassment.” (Van Houweling et al. 496). Also noted, is the obvious effect this fear has on these young women by causing abnormal attendance patterns, lower confidence, and overall worsening performances in school (Van Houweling et al. 496). These anxieties and concerns are some of the main reasons why women-focused educational programs would bring significant changes. In an all-women environment, girls would feel more incentivised to work with others, combat negative attitudes, attend school more often, and overall be comfortable with their learning, most likely leading to them pursuing successful careers.

A potentially positive outcome of pushing toward more female representation in agriculture would be helping communities that are currently suffering. The idea of steering women towards higher education in science and engineering subjects associated with farming can bring different perspectives on how to approach agricultural techniques for good. This makes it a sustainable approach and one that could possibly touch the entire population by women legally making changes. As mentioned in previous research, the Angolan government lacks a reentry policy for women post-birth, which could be the first legal area to put focus on. Changing this policy not only allows women to continue secondary schooling but is also another step forward, heading toward higher education. Motivating girls to pursue careers can allow them to “...bring new ideas and insights to the table that can help shape future agricultural innovation approaches and respond to the issues that women small-holder farmers face...” (Van

Houweling et al. 487). Not to mention, the chances for newer thoughts and ideas on how to help subsistence farmers as they struggle with losing land, could carry out permanent changes for the better.

There is an unmistakable disparity between the education provided for women and the education provided for men. The lack of schooling this causes for girls in Angola has a connection with what these same girls are able to provide for themselves and their loved ones. Young teenagers continue to drop out resulting in less knowledge of what possible career paths or studies could be taken by these women in subjects of agriculture, affecting their potential to provide more for their family and holding back change to the agricultural industry. If more focus is placed on women's learning, one could hope the next time the question arises of whether a young girl is still attending school, their answer could be different from just a simple "no". With this project, hope could become a reality.

Works Cited

- Amnesty International Report 2021/22: The State of the World's Human Rights*. Amnesty International, 29 Mar. 2022. *Amnesty International*, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/po110/4870/2022/en/. Accessed 2 Feb. 2023.
- "Angola." *CultureGrams Online Edition*, ProQuest, 2023, online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country.php?cid=200&cn=Angola. Accessed 08 March 2023.
- Angola Humanitarian Situation Report, June 2022*. UNICEF, 8 Sept. 2022. *UNICEF*, www.unicef.org/media/126971/file/Angola-Humanitarian-SitRep-June-2022.pdf. Accessed 2 Feb. 2023.
- "Angola: Millions facing hunger, as thousands flee their homes as drought ravages the south of Angola." *Amnesty International*, 22 July 2021, www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/angola-millions-facing-hunger-as-thousands-flee-their-homes-as-drought-ravages-the-south-of-angola/. Accessed 8 Mar. 2023.
- Bailey, Ellen. "Angola." *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, Great Neck Publishing, 30 Sept. 2022. *Topic Overviews 6-12*, discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=282c24fe-642f-3951-ba18-6fcaa7ce824b.
- "Diamonds are scarce – sexual and reproductive health information shouldn't be." *United Nations Population Fund*, 14 Dec. 2021, www.unfpa.org/news/diamonds-are-scarce-sexual-and-reproductive-health-information-shouldnt-be. Accessed 7 Feb. 2023.

Hebert, James. "AfDB Approves Grant to Angolan IPPs." *Trade Finance*, 11 Feb. 2019, p.

N.PAG. *Advanced Placement Source*,

[discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=36533a46-330a-34b8-971c-fb293a5be3f7](https://www.discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=36533a46-330a-34b8-971c-fb293a5be3f7).

Make the Vote Meaningful for Human Rights Observance: Human Rights Manifesto for Angola

Ahead of the 2022 General Election. Amnesty International, 16 Aug. 2022. *Amnesty*

International, www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr12/5896/2022/en/. Accessed 2 Feb.

2023.

"Mozambique, Angola help girls manage menstrual health and hygiene in crisis and beyond."

United Nations Population Fund, 28 May 2021,

[www.unfpa.org/news/mozambique-angola-help-girls-manage-menstrual-health-and-hygiene](http://www.unfpa.org/news/mozambique-angola-help-girls-manage-menstrual-health-and-hygiene-crisis-and-beyond)

[ne-crisis-and-beyond](http://www.unfpa.org/news/mozambique-angola-help-girls-manage-menstrual-health-and-hygiene-crisis-and-beyond). Accessed 7 Feb. 2023.

"UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022 - 2025." *United Nations Population Fund*, Jan. 2022,

www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/EN_unfpa_strategic%20plan_2021.pdf.

Accessed 12 Feb. 2023.

Van houweling, Emily, et al. "Women's Access and Experience in Higher Education Agricultural

Programs in Africa." *Gender & Education*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1 May 2020, pp. 486-504.

Advanced Placement Source, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1495832>.

World Report 2023: Angola Events of 2022. Human Rights Watch, 2023. *Human Rights Watch*,

www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/angola. Accessed 2 Feb. 2023.