

## The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

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**ABSTRACT:** This study analyzes the policy agenda-setting process of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools in Angola, based on analytical models from the Political Science field referring to agenda-setting, seeking to understand the elements considered for the formulation of this project and identify the visible and invisible participants that intervened or influenced the process. With a qualitative bias, supported by documents and bibliographic references, the study fits into the field of research on policies and programs, based on the analysis of the policy-making process. The political analysis of the project indicates that the modality adopted for defining the policy agenda was top-down, that is, having the State as the main component, as visible participants through politicians, namely, the President of the Republic and his auxiliary bodies, with emphasis on the Office of the Minister of State for Economic Coordination, which signals some deviation in the pattern of public policies formulation of the Angolan government, given that this responsibility lies with the Ministry of Education, in interaction with its social partners. On the other hand, it was found that for the formulation of the project, the government considered elements related to the need for democratization access to schools and improvement of education quality in the country, to respond to international agendas by itself subscribed.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational Policies; Political Agenda; Angolan Schools; Educational Access and Quality.

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### INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is based on the analysis of the policy agenda-setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools in Angola (PCER), seeking to understand the elements considered for the formulation of this project and identify and describe the attributions of visible and invisible participants, looking mainly at their influence on the project formulation process.

This is a study that falls within the domain of research on policies and programs, based on the analysis of the policy-making process, (MAINARDES, 2018). Its realization imports theoretical-methodological references of analysis of the field of Political Science because it is understood that this specific field has produced explanatory models that allow a better understanding of how and why a government does or fails to do some action that has implications in the lives of its citizens (SOUZA, 2002). The choice for this field is also based on the intention to analyze the role of institutions in the decision and the formulation of public policies, understanding the context, the subjects, the developments, and the directions of the policy.

The study is based on a qualitative methodology, supported by documents and bibliographic references. In essence, the study focused on documentary analysis, concentrated on the Constitution of the Republic of Angola, the Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System, National Development Plan 2018-2022, National Education Development Plan 2017-2030, Presidential Order No. 11/21, of January 22 and in the Terms of Reference of the Reference School Creation Project. The option to study this policy through documents is justified considering the importance of analyzing public policies aimed at education, considering economic, social, and political aspects.

The public policies in this study are understood as responses of government authorities to the problems identified and are presented as fundamental in public and government action. These policies seek to respond to the demands defined by multiple factors and agents. As a concept, public policies are not easy to define, because there is not only one definition for their interpretation. Still, different authors, such as Ribeiro and Bembe (2019); Fialho and Moreira (2018); Agum, Riscado, and Menezes (2015), point out as the most consensual the definition proposed by Thomas Dye (1984), in which public policy would be what the government chooses to do or not to do. In other words, the absence of a policy is itself a policy.

Fialho and Moreira (2018, p.2) refer that the idea defended by Dye expanded by incorporating the argument of Subirats *et al.* (2008), since “such (in)actions are intended to regulate behaviors, organize bureaucracies, distribute benefits and collect taxes (or all these cases at the same time), in order to resolve, promptly, a problem politically defined as collective”. The authors consider that these (in)actions refer to the set of guidelines, guiding principles of the public power action, rules and methodologies for social relations,

## The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

and mediations between actors of society and the State.

It is important to note that, despite the consensus that exists in relation to the definition of public policy proposed by Dye, according to Souza (2006) the best-known definition remains that of Laswell (1956), that is, decisions and analyses on public policy imply answering the following questions: who wins what, why and what difference does it make.

Ribeiro and Bembe (2019) using Andrey Heywood (2002) state that public policy is the aspect of politics that affects most people and that in practical terms, it consists of the outputs of the political process. Agum *et al.* (2015) point out that David Easton (1953) described public policies as the manifestation of the political process, thus transforming inputs into outputs, that is, supports or demands transformed into practical actions or even taken decisions.

In this study, the focus is placed on educational policies, looking at how public policies are defined in the scope of education, considering the relations established between the State and civil society aimed at guaranteeing the right to education and the right to quality education. According to Souza (2011) in the field of research in educational policy, there is complexity when talking about quality, especially considering the political disputes over the school, political-partisan interests, and pressure groups. By the way, the author states that such complexity:

[...] reveals itself in the need to understand better what and how the policy agenda is constituted (the social pressure), what is how the politics itself is instituted (government decisions), its execution, and the results of this process, with a view to knowing the designs and movements of the action of the State in the face of demands, even the little recognized ones, for education. (SOUZA, 2011, p.16).

The author leads us to understand that a policy is a social construct and a research construct that, in the specific case of education, represents the existence of a social construction of the educational problem. It is from this understanding that it will be sought in the first instance to make a framework on the policy agenda of education in Angola in this study, then to address how the process of elaboration of public policies takes place, observing the different forms and perspectives in which it is discussed, a historical description of the studies on the public policy agenda-setting is made, to arrive at the final considerations, making inferences about how the policy agenda-setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools in Angola took place.

Considering that it can be understood as public policy the discussion and practice of actions related to the content, concrete or symbolic, of decisions recognized as political; that is, the field of construction and performance of political decisions, as suggested by Agum *et al.* (2015) and the analysis of public policies as a political and social activity in the logic of Bardach (1998), this study is carried out as the focus on agenda-setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools in Angola, while a program of public education policy, based on the study of the cycle of public policies.

For Bell and Stevenson (2006) cited by Ball and Mainardes (2011), educational policy studies tend to take one of the following three forms: (i) the development of analytical models through which policies can be analyzed and interpreted; (ii) the analysis of a set of policy-related issues; and (iii) the critical analysis of specific policies. Ball and Mainardes (2011) point out the existence of two distinct groups in Brazilian research and publications on educational policies:

(i) Studies of a theoretical nature on broader issues of the policy-making process, covering discussions on changes in the role of the State, a network of influences in the policy-making process, historical approaches to Brazilian educational policies (usually linked to the analysis of socioeconomic and political contexts), among other aspects. (ii) Analysis and evaluation of specific educational programs and policies (BALL; MAINARDES, 2011, p.12).

The present study, despite dealing with a non-Brazilian reality, in the specific case, the Angolan reality, can fit into the first group, that is, it is a theoretical study that seeks to discuss a cycle of the policy formulation process, in this case, the agenda-setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools in Angola, from the perspective of several theorists in the area of public policy study

### Public Policy-Making Process

The discussion about the public policy-making process is not easy to occur because the theorists who study it diverge a lot in almost everything. Despite the various divergences, it stands out the common understanding that it is more recommended to study it in cycles with different phases. This is the approach that is sought in the present study. In this sense, and for a better understanding of how this process takes place, some models of public policy elaboration will be described.

When searching the literature on the study of public policies it is understood that the first theorist to work on the process of public policy-making and to build a systematization of its phases was Harold Lasswell (1956), identifying 7 phases: (i) *Information*, which is based on the collection of data relevant to the public policy, as well as the prediction and planning of the action plan; (ii) *Initiative*, which is the approval of the public policy in alternation from the current one; (iii) *Prescription*, which refers to the issuance of general rules for the application of the public policy; (iv) *Invocation*, which seeks a provisional qualification of the conducts based on the general rules; (v) *Application*, where a definitive qualification of the conducts is given based on

## The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

the prescriptions; (vi) *Evaluation*, based on the estimate of the success or failure of the decisions; (vii) Cessation, is where the validity of the prescriptions ends and there is the extinction of the institutes created in the ordering in compliance with the adapted norms.

Lindblom (1959) identifies the following steps in the elaboration of a public policy: (i) *Agenda-setting*, in which the different social or government problems and demands reach the decision-making process, becoming themes of the policy agenda; (ii) *Formulation*, in which the people and actors involved in this process conceive, formulate or describe the themes that are the object of government action; (iii) *Planning*, the phase in which future action is planned, considering the risks and potentialities involved, the alternatives, the expected objectives, and the expected results; (iv) *Operationalization*, it is at this stage that technicians or agents operationalize the formulated policy; (v) *Evaluation*, in which a specific methodology is constructed for the analysis of a given public policy.

It is important to note that Lindblom presents a systematization that can be understood as an update in relation to the Lasswell model and that certainly signals the referral to the model adopted by Dye (2005) which is assumed as the paradigmatic model of this study. For a better understanding of the reasons that will have led to adopting the model of Thomas Dye, it is important to differentiate it from other models of public policy elaboration defined by Hogwood and Gunn cited by Ribeiro and Bembe (2019); Randall Ripley cited by Ribeiro and Bembe (2019); Bardach (2000); and Dunn (2004), as described in the following table:

**Table No. 1 Synthetic description of public policy-making phases according to several theorists**

Theorists	Hogwood and Gunn	Randall Ripley	Bardach	Dunn	Dye
PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING PROCESS	Agenda-setting	Agenda-setting	Definition of the problem to be faced	Policy agenda-setting	Problem identification
	Subject filtering	Formulation and legitimization of objectives and program	Information gathering	Public policy formulation	Agenda-setting
	Subject definition	Program operationalization	Alternatives construction	Public policy adoption	Formulation
	Prevision	Evaluation of operationalization and impacts	Criteria selection to evaluate alternatives	Public Policy operationalization	Operationalization
	Objectives and priorities definition	Decisions about the future of public policy and the program	Results projection	Public Policy Evaluation	Evaluation
	Options analysis		Costs confrontation	Public Policy Adaptation	
	Operationalization		Decision-making	Public Policy Succession	
	Evaluation and revision		Argumentation and defense of the proposal: communication	Public Policy Termination	
	Change, succession and finalization				

**Source:** Elaboration of the author (BRÁS, 2023).

The Hogwood and Gunn model stands out the idea that it is essential first to define the agenda and what will be decided, filtering the subjects to be analyzed and on which to apply a public policy, determining how to decide on them, taking into account the

## **The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**

provision of how the subject can unfold to pass the other stages, taking the elements already gathered and defining objectives and priorities of public policy, then analyzing options for the operationalization of public policy, monitoring and evaluating the results to know if a reformulation is necessary or if it can be moved to the maintenance, succession, and finalization stage of public policy. In relation to the model of Randall Ripley, the need for perception and definition of the problem is highlighted, as well as the mobilization of support to include the problem in the policy agenda, characterized as a process that produces the agenda of the government. In this model, public policy statements are produced, including performance objectives and the *design* of programs to achieve them, often in the form of a statute, being a product that results from information, collection, analysis, and dissemination, the development of alternatives, defense and construction of coalitions, commitment, negotiation, and decision. In the operationalization of the program, it is urgent to acquire resources, plan, organize, and provide benefits and services, among others, that is, they constitute political actions, which should stimulate and lead to the performance and impacts of the public policy and the program.

As for the Bardach model, which according to Ribeiro and Bembe (2019) deviates significantly from those previously analyzed, the idea that stands out is that one should always start by trying to define the problem and the communication of the resolution proposal, being almost inevitably the final stage of the process. The construction of alternatives and selection of criteria to evaluate them are also determinants in the entire process of public policy-making, which in the view of these authors must be “understood as cyclical, and therefore, these steps must be repeated, sometimes more than once” (RIBEIRO and BEMBE, 2019, p.121). It is important to note that Bardach draws attention to the fact that he considers that all eight phases of his model are interconnected and that they do not need to be developed exactly in the order he suggests, as well as not all are necessarily significant in each problem.

In the model of William Dunn, the inclusion of problems in the policy agenda stands out, noting that many of them are not even approached while others are only after many delays. Then, alternative public policies are formulated to address the identified problem, which can take the forms of executive orders (very common in the Angolan case where they are usually presented in the form of presidential decrees), court sentences, or legislative acts. This phase is followed by the adoption of public policy with the support of a legislative majority, through the consensus of its main agents, advancing to the operationalization managed by administrative units that mobilize human, financial, and other resources for its effectiveness.

The evaluation phase is marked by the determination by the audit and accounting units of the government, whether the executive institutions, legislatures, and courts follow the legal requirements of a public policy, and whether they are achieving the objectives. Next, the same government units inform the institutions responsible for the formulation, adoption, and operationalization of public policies of the possibility of poorly written regulations, insufficient resources, inadequate training, and other insufficiencies that may jeopardize the implementation of public policy. Succession tends to occur when the institutions responsible for evaluation and formulation realize that the public policy is no longer necessary because the problem has already been solved or has disappeared and consequently the end stage occurs when the institutions responsible for evaluation and supervision determine that a public policy, or even an entire institution, must be closed because it is no longer necessary.

As mentioned above, the model of public policy-making that was adopted for this study is defined by Thomas Dye. The adoption of a paradigm that helps to elaborate or reflect on a specific public policy appears as a relevant step, because in the view of Ribeiro and Bembe (2019) after investigating different proposals, the policymaker is called upon to adopt a model. In this sense, the choice of the Dye model is justified by the fact that it is understood that its five stages (problem identification, agenda-setting, formulation, operationalization, and evaluation) are present in a way clearer and detailed in the models already presented, regardless the differences of sequence.

In the logic of Dye, in the identification phase of the problem, it is sought to know who decides what will be decided, and where public policy issues come from, without neglecting the question of why some issues are ignored while others are given attention, as well as to seek to understand how a subject has access to the political system and how public policy proposals arise. As for the agenda setting, the author makes it understood that it happens after the formulators of public policy have identified the problem, have felt the need for the government to address it, and have sought a solution to it, this being the official version, from which the public policy will be born.

The formulation deals with the development of alternatives to answer the problems in the policy agenda. Thus, from the moment the subject receives political support, it enters the system for the formulation, configuring itself in a democratic and participatory or in an authoritarian and cabinet process, with an ascending or descending approach, etc. Regarding operationalization, it is necessary to point out that it aggregates all the fundamental activities for the effectiveness of public policies formulated by official bodies. This is a process that should be seen as an evolution.

Finally, the evaluation is aimed at systematically measuring the capacity of public policy to achieve the objectives previously set. Ribeiro and Bembe (2019, p.159) state that public policymakers and other actors who intervene in their elaboration process, such as the Government, interest groups, bureaucrats, the media, think tanks, and political parties, can “seek to ascertain whether public policies achieve predetermined objectives, at what costs and with what effects on society”.

## **The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**

### **Public Policy Agenda-setting**

The study on the agenda-setting of Public Policy has been done by different areas of knowledge. Capella and Brasil (2015) point out that the original areas are Communication and Political Science. The authors describe the different traditions in the approaches of these two areas by referring to:

While studies in Communication developed more focused on understanding the relationship between mass communication and public opinion, that is, on the relationship between media agenda-setting and public agenda-setting, in Political Science the focus was shifted to understanding other issues linked to political power and government attention. (CAPELLA and BRASIL, 2015, p.5). The authors also refer to that understood as the policy agenda-setting, or the public policy agenda, this tradition of studies develops as an unfolding of analyses aimed at investigating processes of political participation and its limits in the context of democratic theory, advancing to the theorization on the formation of the governmental agenda (CAPELLA and BRASIL, 2015).

In the field of Political Science, the first studies carried out by Cobb and Elder (1971, 1972) were characterized by a strong relationship between the process of forming the governmental agenda and the amplification of democracy through popular participation. Marked, above all, by the debate arising from traditional Political Science, the great innovation of these studies lies in the differentiation between the systemic agenda and the governmental agenda (CAPELLA and BRASIL, 2015).

The growth of the theme is strengthened by the studies of Anthony Downs (1972) concerning the attention cycle and the existing relationship between the role and functioning of public opinion for the emergence of themes and the formulation of public policies. The second stage, according to Capella and Brasil (2015) is from 1980-1990, which was marked by the emergence of important theoretical models that sought to analyze not only the moments of small and gradual changes (incrementalism) but also the moments of quick and significant change in the governmental agenda. The Multiple Streams Framework of John Kingdom (2003) and Baumgartner and Jones (1993) emerge, then, as the main theoretical and methodological innovations in the studies of the formation and change of the governmental agenda in the United States. The third stage is understood by the diffusion of these models and their application in several cases, especially in American policies. The consolidation of models and adjustments made during the late 1990s and early 2000s led to empirical experimentation in the analysis of the process of setting agendas and to more systematic explanations of the dynamics of policies and their processes of change (CAPELLA and BRASIL, 2015).

The fourth and most recent stage of the studies, according to Capella and Brasil (2015), presents both methodological advances and the overcoming of territorial limits with the wide diffusion of models for the analysis of the most distinguished political systems around the globe. The creation of CAP – Comparative Agendas Project – with the participation of more than fifteen countries from four different continents marks the beginning of the 2010s as a moment of progress in comparative studies, based on the adoption of a common methodology.

Fialho and Moreira (2018, p.3) point out that to better understand the political reality surrounding agenda-setting, authors proposed conceptual models being the most influential, as indicated by Birkland (2007), the Multiple Streams Framework (Multiple Streams Framework), developed by the North American John Kingdom. Two other models are also used in agenda-setting: The punctuated Equilibrium model of Baumgartner and Jones and the Advocacy Coalition Framework model, suggested by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith.

Due to the characteristics and objectives of this study, the approaches in relation to each of the models presented above are not deepened, focusing solely on the analysis of agenda-setting, which is a complex and multifaceted process. Therefore, Ribeiro and Bembe (2019) warn that to understand this process one must look not only at the dynamics of the process but also at the interactions and roles of the various governmental and non-governmental participants. In this sense, an important contribution is that of John Kingdom (2003) who operationalizes four concepts that form a model for building the policy agenda in the following ways:

1. Firstly, agenda-setting should be seen as a dustbin, consisting of the combination of current problems, policies, solutions, participants, and opportunities for choice.
2. Secondly, public policy ideas are recombined and incubated over the years in public policy, expert, and specialist communities.
3. Third, public policy-makers (advocates who are willing to engage in the promotion of an idea, elected officials, civil servants, lobbyists, academics, or journalists) provide the link between ideas and public policy-makers;
4. Finally, there are structures of opportunity, so that ideas become part of the policy agenda.

It is important to note that Kingdom (2003) considers these structures are "windows" of public policies because, in this sense, they can either remain open or closed because of changes in the problem and political currents.

### **Characterization of Educational Policies in Angola**

Angola is a sovereign and independent Republic since November 11th, 1975, whose State has as its fundamental objective the construction of a society that is free, just, democratic, and solidary, of peace, equality, and social progress (ANGOLA, 2010). It is in sub-Saharan Africa on the west coast of Southern Africa, south of the Equator. It is bordered on the north and northeast by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the east by Zambia, and on the south by Namibia.

## **The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**

The country has a dimension of 1,246,700 km<sup>2</sup> and is politically and administratively, constituted of 18 provinces (states in the Brazilian reality), 162 municipalities, and 559 communes. According to the definitive results of the 2014 Census, the population in Angola, at the time of the census, May 16th, 2014, was 25,789,024 people, of which 12.5 million are women (53% of the population), of whom 63% live in the urban area and 37% in the rural area (ANGOLA, 2016).

After achieving independence in 1975, the country plunged through a period of civil war that came to an end only in April 2002, beginning a set of political and social transformations, namely, the establishment of peace and national reconciliation, the transition from a socialist-oriented economy to a market economy, the approval of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola (CRA) by the National Assembly in 2010, and the institutionalization of the democratic and legal state with the holding of frequent general elections in 2008, 2012 and 2017.

These transformations were also accompanied by changes in educational policy that can be understood with reference to the implementation of the first Basic Law of the Education System, approved by Law No. 13/01, of December 31st, 2001, which arose from the need to readapt the educational system in order to respond to the new requirements of human resources training, necessary to the socio-economic progress of Angolan society (ANGOLA, 2001); the reform of the previous law of the educational system with the approval of a new Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System, in 2016, through Law No. 17/16, of October 7th, having as a background its adequacy to the new constitutional framework as a result of the approval of the CRA in 2010 and the new macroeconomic challenges of the country (ANGOLA, 2020a).

Since the achievement of peace, education in Angola has been elected as an area of vital relevance both in terms of policies and practices. From Silva (2016) it is understood that education in Angola is a strategic area for social development, not only for what it represents in terms of schooling and human resources training but fundamentally, for the possibility of qualifying the population for citizenship and participation in national reconstruction. This implies considering that access to citizenship, regarding the assumption of rights and duties and the enjoyment of a decent life, is through educational intervention at all levels and in all life circumstances.

To talk about education in Angola in the present context and the priority it has been having at the level of the policies of the executive requires a roadmap of the policy measures adopted post-civil war. From this roadmap, it can be understood that the government sees in education the possibility of overcoming the backwardness in the most diverse sectors, economic, social, and political, just to name a few, whose qualification of human resources is presented as essential. In the years following the peace reached in April 2002, specific programs in the very relevant sector were adopted.

Such programs are, namely, the Education for All Plan, approved in 2004, the Strategy for the Improvement of the Education System from 2001 to 2015, defined in 2001, the Strategy on Literacy and School Recovery from 2006 to 2015, approved in 2005, the National Education Development Plan, developed in 2017 and the National Program for Training and Management of Teaching Staff, approved in 2018.

All these programs seek and/or sought to reverse not only the situation of educational delay in which the country is and/or was but to ensure the adequacy of its educational public policies to the international agendas subscribed and adopted by Angola, highlighting the 2030 Agenda which sets out the global sustainable development goals and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

Considering the relevance of the education sector, the main planning documents of the Angolan state, namely, the National Development Plan 2018-2022, and the Long-Term Strategy Angola 2050 elect basic education and higher education as priorities, with the goal of promoting the human and educational development of the Angolan people, based on education and lifelong learning for each and every Angolan (ANGOLA, 2020b).

To implement the educational public policy, the government approved a set of specific programs, namely: (i) Development of Preschool Education; (ii) National Program for Training and Management of Teaching Staff; (iii) Improvement of the Quality and Development of Primary Education; (iv) Development of General Secondary Education; (v) Improvement and Development of Technical and Professional Education; (vi) Intensification of Literacy and Education of Youth and Adults; and (vii) Social Action, Health, and School Sport.

Still, within the scope of policies in the education sector, the Angolan government in the 2020-2021 school year, launched the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools which aims to provide fifty-one schools from Preschool Education to Secondary Education throughout the country, and six Professional Training Centers in the provinces of Cabinda, Luanda, Lunda Sul, and Moxico, with human, material and financial conditions that “guarantee the improvement of the quality of the teaching and learning process”. The same arises following a set of social policies that the Angolan government has been implementing for the last eighteen years, aimed at the “continuous expansion of education, teaching and professional training systems, and the consequent increase in the qualification levels of the population” (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2021, p.4).

With these programs, the Angolan government has intended to achieve the objectives inscribed in the international agendas it has subscribed to, especially the 2030 Agenda, to guarantee a quality, inclusive, equitable, and lifelong education for all Angolans. It is important to note in this historical context the influence of international organizations and agendas on Angolan educational policy that has been studied by some national authors, such as Nguluve (2010), Ngaba (2012), and Brás (2019). These authors indicate that

## The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

Angolan educational policy suffered throughout the evolutionary process and reforms, influences of external forces - “transnationalism”.

Thus, in the 1st Republic, as well as in the 2nd and 3rd Republics, several influences were registered. In the 1st Republic, from the period between the proclamation of independence on November 11th, 1975, to the introduction, in 1992, of profound changes in the Constitutional Law, enshrining the establishment in Angola of a Democratic and Legal State, pluralist and based on a free market economy, the educational system, on one hand, was fundamentally influenced by a political and ideological character, which started from the vision of a single party, thereby legitimizing a certain power that denies the other – the different politically speaking. On the other hand, they indicate an adherence by Angola to the educational definitions, models, and international normative standards established by the then Eastern Bloc, led by the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, thus adhering to both the structural conformity and the organizational isomorphism of the socialist states. This application of socialist principles had the collaboration of experts from the Eastern Bloc countries, especially the Republic of Cuba (NGULUVE, 2010; NGABA, 2012; BRÁS, 2019).

The 2nd Republic begins with the constitutional revision of 1991, with the purpose of reducing the ideological load and enabling a new political and economic system in the country. With the promulgation of the Constitutional Law of September 16th, 1992, not only did it expand the fundamental rights of citizens and their organized participation in national political life and in the direction of the State, but it enshrined multiparty democracy and capitalism in Angola, after 16 years of one-party system and centralized economy, there was a change in the perspective of political organization of the educational system, with the test of democracy and it was found that Angola adhered to the educational definitions, models and international normative standards established by International Organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the CPLP, where Portugal occupies a prominent place. Cooperation with these organizations had as a common denominator the implementation of the objectives of the Dakar Framework (2000) (NGABA, 2012; BRÁS, 2019).

In the 3rd Republic, which was born with the entry into force of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola approved on February 5th, 2010, there was the maintenance of the influence of international organizations, associated with the economic and social reality of the country. It is at this stage that there are the main reforms in the educational system, whose foundations are based on the promotion of human, scientific-technical, material, and financial conditions for the expansion and generalization of the use in the teaching of Angolan languages, as well as for the insertion and extension of teaching the main languages of international communication, the co-participation of parents and education guardians in schools financing, through the payment of services and the problem of single teaching and teacher training, besides the relationship between academic training and professional practice.

### Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

The Project for the Creation of Reference Schools is a program of the Education sector that is part of the strategy of the Angolan Executive to simultaneously promote the democratization of access to education, by expanding its recruitment base, and raising its quality, by making available the resources necessary to improve teaching and learning conditions (ANGOLA, 2021).

Thanks to a set of properly structured interventions, the project is expected to contribute to the strengthening of a total of fifty-one schools and six professional training centers selected in all provinces of the country, from the different education subsystems, from preschool to secondary education (high school), aiming to continuously improve the quality of education.

In the reference term (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2021) on the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools, managers understand that this project will promote good pedagogical and school management practices and will provide the indispensable material resources for this purpose, namely the technological resources that will allow new teaching approaches and the increase of digitized pedagogical materials. It will also provide students with an educational environment that motivates and encourages them to develop the fullest of their abilities through discovery and experimentation and treat them with affection taking into account the psychosocial dimensions of schoolwork.

According to the reference term, schools and professional training centers of the eighteen provinces of the country were selected to integrate the project, being subdivided by the following subsystems and systems: preschool education (2), preschool and general education (1), general education (8), secondary pedagogical education (4), technical-pedagogical secondary education (36); professional training (6), which are shown in the table below.

**Table No. 2 Nominal List of Reference Schools**

No.	School/Institute	Subsystem	Province
1	Health Technician Training School of Bengo	Technical-Professional Secondary	Bengo
2	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Bengo	Education	
3	Graça School Complex no. 1109	General Education	Benguela
4	School “11 de Novembro” of Canjala - Lobito		
5	Medium Institute of Administration and Management of Catumbela	Technical-Professional Secondary	Benguela
6	Medium Industrial Institute of Benguela	Education	

## The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

7	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Lobito		
8	School Complex no. 291 "Simione Mucune"	General Education	Bié
9	School no. 67 "Manguxi"		
10	Medium Agrarian Institute of Andulo	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
11	Medium Institute of Administration and Management of Kuito	Education	Cabinda
12	Liceu de Cabinda	General Education	
13	Health Technician Training School of Cabinda	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
14	Medium Institute of Economics of Cabassango	Education	Cuando Cubango
15	Health Technician Training School of Menongue	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
16	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Environment of Menongue	Education	
17	Health Technician Training School of C. Norte	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	Cuanza Norte
18	Medium Agrarian Institute of Cuanza Norte	Education	
19	Teaching School "Comandante Benedito"	Teacher Training	
20	National Petroleum Institute (Sumbe)	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	Cuanza Sul
21	Medium Agrarian Institute of Waku Kungo	Education	
22	School "11 de Novembro" - Xangongo	General Education	
23	Health Technician Training School of Ondjiva	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	Cunene
24	Medium Institute of Administration and Management of Ondjiva	Education	
25	Medium Agrarian Institute of Caála	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
26	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Catchiungo	Education	Huambo
27	Paula Frassinetti	Preschool Education	
28	School Complex no. 454 - Chibia	General Education	
29	Medium Agrarian Institute of Tchivinguiro	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	Huíla
30	Medium Institute of Economics of Lubango	Education	
31	Teaching School "Comandante Liberdade" Lubango	Teacher Training	
32	Complex "Sagrada Família" – Kilamba Kiaxi	Preschool Education	Luanda
33	Medium Institute of Economics of Luanda (IMEL)		
34	Medium Industrial Institute of Luanda (IMIL)	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
35	National Institute of Telecommunications (ITEL)	Education	
36	Medium Technical Institute of Hospitality and Tourism		
37	Teaching School "Mutu-Ya-Kevela"	Teacher Training	
38	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Dundo "28 de Agosto"	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	Lunda Norte
39	Teaching School "11 de Novembro"	Teacher Training	
40	Secondary School "Mona Quimundo"	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
41	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Saurimo	Education	Lunda Sul
42	Medium Agrarian Institute of Malanje	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
43	Medium Institute of Administration and Management of Luena	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
44	Complex "Nossa Senhora de Fátima"	Preschool Education and General Education	Namibe
45	School Complex n.º 37M/annex to Teaching School	General Education	
46	Maritime School Complex "Hélder Neto"	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	
47	Medium Technical Agrarian Institute of Kapangombe	Education	
48	Medium Agrarian Institute of Negage	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	Uíge
49	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Uíge	Education	
50	Medium Polytechnic Institute of Soyo	Technical-Professional Secondary Education	Zaire
51	Health Technician Training School of Mb. Kongo	Education	

Source: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2021, p.8).



## The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

The project covers some professional training centers of the National Professional Training System of four provinces of the country, two are from the capital of the country, Luanda, and the remaining four are from the provinces of Cabinda, Lunda Sul, and Moxico, as shown in Table 3.

**Table no. 3 Nominal List of Professional Training Centers integrated into the Project**

No.	School/Institute	Subsystem	Province
1	Liceu de Cabinda	National Professional Training System	Cabinda
2	CINFOTEC Talatona		Luanda
3	CINFOTEC Rangel		Luanda
4	Citadel “Jovens do Sucesso de Kalakala		Lunda Sul
5	Saurimo Integrated Employment and Professional Training Center		Moxico
6	Integrated Employment and Professional Training Center “Dr. António Agostinho Neto”		

Source: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2021, p.9).

In the fifty-seven professional education and training institutions of the country, the project will intervene in five areas, namely: (i) Elaboration of the School Educational Project; (ii) Improvement of the material and budgetary conditions of the schools; (iii) Improvement of professional skills and working conditions of teachers; (iv) improvement of school management processes; and (v) promotion of external evaluation of student learning. In each of the five areas of intervention of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools, specific and priority actions to be developed in five years are defined and planned, as can be understood in its Terms of Reference (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2021, pp.4-5):

**1. Elaboration of the School Educational Project.** This important document of strategic planning and democratic management of the school allows for identifying the principles, mission, values, objectives, results, goals, and deadlines of its assumption and the strategies according to which the school proposes to fulfill its educational function, the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools intends to intervene so that the educational projects of school to elaborate fundamentally the budget to be approved for the school and contemplate as a priority the interventions that follow insofar as their implementation depends on the performance of the schools.

**2. Improvement of Material and Budgetary Conditions of Schools.** In this area of intervention, the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools intends to allocate more funds to schools. Assume that the schools should have spaces, equipment, laboratories, libraries, computer equipment, internet access, manuals, and other pedagogical materials necessary to ensure that students have opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes corresponding to the exit profiles of each Education and Teaching Subsystem and the Professional Training System. Among the materials and means to be allocated to schools, the project highlights technological means, so that new teaching and learning opportunities are created that allow the school community to develop its activities in a more global environment of exchanges and ensure their easy integration into the job market. In this area of intervention, the digitization of pedagogical resources is established as a challenge. To this end, the project proposes that the budget concept of these schools must obey the idea of cost per student (as opposed to spending per student) in which the ideal training is first projected, and then the costs necessary to guarantee this training is determined.

**3. Improvement of Professional Skills and Working Conditions of Teachers.** Considering the importance of well-trained teachers for the improvement of educational quality, the project plans to implement the measures registered in the National Program for the Training and Management of Teaching Staff, namely: (i) Attract and select for the initial training of teachers candidates with better preparation; (ii) Ensure that, in the initial teacher training courses, the appropriate opportunities are provided for acquiring the professional qualification required for future teaching performance and only obtain professional certification for teaching those who have acquired it; (iii) Recruit for teaching, in sufficient numbers, the best candidates from among those who have professional qualification, duly certified and obtained in courses recognized by the Ministry of Education as qualification for teaching; (iv) Create essential working conditions to make quality professional teaching performance possible; (v) Implement pedagogical supervision as a process of reflective analysis of the daily work practices of teachers and construction of alternatives that respond to the real needs of their improvement teacher performance, as well as a mechanism for the circulation of good practices among peers; and (vi) Provide teachers in service with training opportunities, focused on improving teaching practices and pedagogical coordination in school and with a significant amount of tutorial support.

**4. Improvement of School Management Processes.** In this area of intervention, it is intended to ensure that reference schools are run by professionals knowledgeable in the educational process, with specific training, especially in school management. It also envisages establishing a model for access to the position of the school principal, which initially should be the public tender model

## The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools

for access to the position of the school principal, to promote transparency in the process, while ensuring a selection based on the quality of the work proposal that candidates propose to develop in school.

**5. Promotion of External Evaluation of Student Learning.** In this area, the project plans to institutionalize external evaluation to identify the advantages of creating reference schools in the learning of students.

These areas of intervention and their strategic actions were defined in one of the implementation stages of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools, specifically in the second stage which refers to characterization and planning. The project provides four stages of implementation, namely: (i) launch, (ii) characterization and planning, (iii) development, and (iv) conclusion (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2021, p.7) whose periods and objectives are described in the table below.

**Table no. 4 Implementation stages of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**

Stages of the Project	Designation	Period	Objective
FIRST	Launch	3rd quarter of 2020 until the end of 1st quarter of 2021.	Preparation of the implementation process, namely the creation of the executive structures of the project, selection of the schools to be covered, and first moments of information about and dissemination of the Project.
SECOND	Characterization and planning	Until the 1st quarter of 2022.	Planning of the project and, specifically, of the intervention in each of the Reference Schools.
THIRD	Development	4th Quarter of 2021 until the year 2026.	Implementation in the field.
FOURTH	Conclusion	4th Quarter of the year 2026.	Systematization of the lessons learned from the PCER in view of the process of adaptation and generalization of pedagogical experiences in other schools.

**Source:** Elaboration of the author based on the Terms of Reference of the Project.

### ANALYSIS OF THE AGENDA SETTING OF THE PROJECT FOR THE CREATION OF REFERENCE SCHOOLS

To support our analysis of the agenda setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools, we rely on Souza (2006) who, in the analysis of the cycle of a public policy, emphasizes the process of defining the agenda and asks why some issues enter the policy agenda, while others are ignored.

The author points out that some aspects of the public policy cycle focus more on the participants in the decision-making process, and others, on the process of formulating public policy. Each participant in each process can act as an incentive or as a veto point. In this line of thought, the question of how governments define their agendas is answered in three ways (SOUZA, 2006):

The first focuses on problems, that is, problems enter the agenda when we assume that we must do something about them. The recognition and definition of problems affect the results of the agenda. The second response focuses on the policy itself, that is, how to build collective awareness about the need to face a given problem. This construction would take place via the electoral process, via changes in the parties that govern, or via changes in ideologies (or in the way of seeing the world), allied to the strength or weakness of interest groups. According to this view, the construction of collective consciousness about a given problem is a powerful and determining factor in defining the agenda. When the starting point of public policy is given by politics, the consensus is constructed more by bargaining than by persuasion, whereas when the starting point of public policy is found in the problem to be faced, the opposite process takes place, that is, persuasion is the way to build consensus. The third response focuses on participants, who are classified as visible, e.g., politicians, media, parties, pressure groups, etc., and invisible, such as academics and bureaucracy. According to this perspective, the visible participants define the agenda, and the invisible ones, the alternatives (SOUZA, 2006, p. 30).

To analyze the project under study, we opted for two forms of analysis of the three defined by Souza (2006), namely, focusing on (i) the problems that motivated the formulation of the policy, that is, the transformation of the situation into a public problem and, (ii) the participants in the decision-making process. Thus, we seek to understand what elements were considered for the formulation of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools and identify the visible and invisible participants who intervened and influenced the agenda-setting.

#### Analysis of the project definition from a public problem

Analyzing the reference term of the project, we found that it aims to respond to two main problems of education in Angola, the democratization of access to school and the improvement of the quality of education. Regarding access to school, the project integrates a set of initiatives that have been developed to expand the education system to raise the qualification levels of Angolans:

## **The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**

During the last eighteen years, the Angolan Government has implemented various social policies aimed at the continuous expansion of the Education, Teaching, and Professional Training Systems and the consequent increase in the qualification levels of the Population. (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2021, p.2).

The guarantee of the right to education, through the greater provision of enrollment for the school-age population, especially children and adolescents is a clear concern, as the problem of democratization of access to school has been characterized as old (PAXE and BRÁS, 2021). These authors point out that there is still “little capacity in the offer due to lack of classrooms for classes of thirty-six students, lack of qualified teachers to attend children both in early childhood education and primary education” (PAXE and BRÁS, 2021, p.489). Added to this, the authors point out the issue of the limited offer of classrooms to serve children up to 11/12 years old and the fact that the few rooms that exist are not prepared for the particularities of this age group.

The concern about the problem of access to school is also raised in the National Education Development Plan 2030 (PNDE-2030). Despite the document bringing data that signal an improvement in this aspect in recent years, the concern remains. For example, data on schooling for the period 2004-2011 reveal the increase in student numbers reaching the universe of 40,729,056. If these numbers are desegregated, we find that primary education grows by 61.3%, from 3,022, 461 to 4,875,868. In the first cycle of general secondary education, its number grew by 68.1%, specifically from 197,735 to 619,841. In turn, the second cycle of technical professional secondary education grows 51%, from 67,328 to 139,350. Teacher training is up 37.3% from 61,616 to 98,234. We highlight the modality of special education with a growth of 50.34% - from 11,710 to 23,593 students (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2017).

According to Paxe (2021), this growth of people looking for school signals the trend of democratization of access to school when investments in infrastructure (classrooms) and teachers, for example, are guaranteed by the State. For the reference data period (2004-2011), the total number of classrooms available went from 36,011 in 2004 to 56,857; and the evolution of the teaching staff went, in general, from 113,523 to 233,160, an increase of 51.3%. These two factors are also highlighted by the legislation in favor of guaranteeing access to education.

In the Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System of 2001 (Law No. 13/01, of 31st December), corresponding to the data period, the free enrollment, and access to materials for primary education (Initiation – 6th class), is the exemption from payment of any fee or services provided at school (PAXE, 2021). On access, the existing universal lessons are generally functional, thus fitting the duty of governance to serve children, even today, not served by the education system, or those whose families consent to costly financial efforts to keep them in private educational institutions.

These efforts, which should be continuous, may find in the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools a force for the democratization of access to education. This democratization is necessary insofar as the number of children without access to school or leaving school remains worrying. For example, in 2019 the number of children who will have been left out of the education system throughout the country will be more than one million, three hundred and two thousand, seven hundred and sixty (1,302,760) children (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2019). Therefore, the project aims to improve the right of children and youth to quality education, to comply with the provisions of article 14 of Law No. 17/16, of October 7th, as amended by Law No. 32/20, of August 12th, since the notorious expansion of the school network has not been accompanied with the proper quality of teaching and learning. About the quality of teaching as one of the elements considered in the agenda-setting of the project under analysis, by its reference term, it is noticed that the concern goes towards giving schools the material, financial and human conditions for the improvement of the quality of education that is recognized by the government as a citizen right and foreseen in the Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System:

[...] the right to quality education is the right to meaningful learning, the Government of Angola enshrines, in article 14 of Law No. 17/16, of October 7th, as amended by Law No. 32/20, of August 12th, that in the exercise of educational activity, educational institutions must observe high standards of performance and achieve the best results in the scientific, technical, technological and cultural domain, and in the promotion of quality, excellence, merit, and innovation. (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2021, p.2).

It is evident, in these terms, the concern of the proponent of the project under analysis – the government of Angola, through the President of the Republic and its auxiliary bodies – the formulation of a policy that considers a problem that can be characterized as public, because the guarantee of democratization of access to school and the improvement of educational quality affects the public because education is also seen as a public good linked to the project of the country.

### **Identification of visible and invisible participants in the agenda-setting**

The second element of our analysis in this study has to do with the identification of visible and invisible participants in the process of the agenda-setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools. For this identification, we consider the perspective of Sousa (2006) that characterizes the visible participants as politicians, the media, parties, and pressure groups, while the invisible ones can be academics and the bureaucracy. According to the author, the visible participants define the agenda, and the invisible ones, the alternatives.

## **The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**

In the context of the project under analysis, starting from both its reference term and Presidential Order No. 11/21 of January 22nd establishing its Management Committee, it can be understood that the definition of the project agenda had politicians as visible participants, that is, the President of the Republic and one of its auxiliary bodies, namely the Office of the Minister of State for Economic Coordination. The initiative was presidential and then the project was submitted to the Ministry of Education in order to improve and operationalize it, considering the need for the Angolan government to formulate policies aimed at “achieving the objectives inscribed either in the “Education For All” agenda or in the 2030 agenda for “a quality, inclusive, equitable and lifelong education for all”, set by UNESCO (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2021, p.2).

It is important to note that according to the organization and functioning of the auxiliary bodies of the President of the Republic of Angola, the Office of the Minister of State for Economic Coordination is the auxiliary body of the President of the Republic responsible for assistance, advice and technical support linked to the productive sector and the economy. From the point of view of political and procedural management, this office coordinates the policies and programs of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy and Planning (ANGOLA, 2019).

In this sense, and considering that educational policies and programs and teaching are part of the social sector and, as such, are objects of coordination of the Office of the Minister of State for the Social Area, one can conjecture the occurrence of some deviation in the pattern of public policy formulation in the context of the government of Angola, which can certainly be analyzed as a potential imposition of the agenda of this auxiliary body of the President of the Republic, ignoring the technicians and bureaucrats of the educational sector, as well as their social partners. In other words, if one considers the organization and functioning of the government of Angola, the “mission of defining, proposing, coordinating, executing and controlling the educational policy of the levels of Pre-School, Primary, and Secondary Education” is of the Ministry of Education (ANGOLA, 2020c).

The analysis also allows us to consider that there was no intervention from other visible participants, such as the media, political parties, and pressure groups, with the main emphasis on the unions, even though the media, especially the public media, has been used to simply advertise the project and its proponent (in this case the President of the Republic of Angola). It is a program conceived because the government intends that educational institutions meet high-performance standards and achieve the best results in the scientific, technical, technological, and cultural domains, and in promoting quality, excellence, merit, and innovation.

We understand that perhaps, it would be productive to identify an eventual intervention of more visible participants and even invisible participants with emphasis on the intervention of academics and researchers in the agenda-setting of this program of Angolan educational policy, but the absence of accessible documents<sup>1</sup> to the public about this project does not allow such an approach now.

However, it is possible from the reference term of the project and the presidential order that creates its management committee to realize that it is another public policy formulated in the modality top-down, that is, centralized, starting in a central office for the locals, which in the context of Angola is accepted, considering that the country has a policy of centralization and concentration in the public administration, in which the formulation of a public policy is usually the initiative of the central government.

It is important to state that despite this, in the context of education, the Basic Law of the Education and Teaching System provides in its article 10th the general principle of democracy establishing that “all individuals directly involved in the teaching and learning process, as an education agent or partner, have the right to participate in the organization and management of structures, modalities, and institutions affected by education”. Paxe (2014) points out that, in both the educational system and the school, the management processes are based on the centralizing culture, which conditions the appropriation of formal school education processes as a collective issue, and the permanent search for the appropriate means to carry out education.

In a way, the modality adopted for the formulation of the reference schools project violates the constitutional precept of socio-political participation of citizens, as expressed in article 52nd of the Constitution of the Republic “every citizen has the right to participate in political life and in the direction of public affairs, directly or through freely elected representatives, and to be informed about the acts of the State and the management of public affairs” (ANGOLA, 2010). It is thus evident that this modality from top to bottom drawbacks the socio-political participation, which is essential for democracy in education.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study sought to perform an analysis of the policy agenda-setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools in Angola, based on analytical models from the field of Political Science referring to agenda-setting, seeking to understand what elements were considered for the formulation of the policy (transformation of the project in a public problem) and identify the visible and invisible

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<sup>1</sup> One of the main problems of studying the policies and programs of the Angolan government today is access to information, as there is no open access database of both legislation and official reports. In the context of this study, access to the reference term (ToR) of the project and the presidential order setting up its management committee was not equally easy, especially the ToR, which is not public.

## **The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**

participants who intervened and influenced, or both, the process of defining its agenda, through documentary analysis, based on the legislation of the education sector and the reference term of the project.

The absence of publicly accessible documents related to the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools greatly conditioned the objective we set out to achieve, having significantly limited our analysis. However, we can understand that the project aims to provide 51 schools from the different subsystems of preschool education to high school and 6 professional training centers from the 18 provinces of the country, with human, material, and financial conditions to ensure greater service to school-age citizens, through access to quality education, by (i) strengthening the professional skills of teachers; (ii) improving the material and budgetary conditions of educational institutions, and school management processes; and (iii) promoting the external evaluation of the learning of students.

In general, the project reinforces the actions of the Angolan government to achieve the objectives inscribed in the “Education for All” agenda and the 2030 Agenda, that is, to guarantee quality, inclusive, equitable, and lifelong education for all. The intervention in the schools and professional training centers covered by the project will be carried out for five years, being implemented in four stages, ranging from the launch of the project in the third quarter of 2020, characterization and planning during the year 2021, development through the implementation of the program on the ground during the fourth quarter of 2021, until its completion in the last quarter of 2026.

The analysis of the agenda setting of this project allows us to conclude that from a theoretical point of view, it can be considered that the modality adopted for the policy agenda setting of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools was top-down, that is, centralized, having had as its only visible participants politicians, namely the President of the Republic and his auxiliary bodies, especially the Office of the Minister of State for Economic Coordination, configuring a deviation in the standard of public policy formulation of the Angolan government. As for the transformation of the subject into a public problem, we can see that for the formulation of the project, the government considered two of the main problems of the education and teaching system, which are the democratization of access to school and the need to improve educational quality.

In general, it is evident the need to carry out more studies on educational policies in Angola, especially within the public policy cycle, to understand how the different phases and stages of the policy-making process are planned and observed in the different policies, programs, and projects of the education and teaching sector. On the other hand, it is necessary that the Ministry of Education provides open access to its website and to a database with information, reports, and other documentation on public programs and projects in the education and teaching sector.

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# **The Policy Agenda Setting in Angolan Education Policies: Analysis of the Project for the Creation of Reference Schools**