

True partnership with local African firms is key

The most effective way for Portuguese law firms to serve clients in Angola and Mozambique is to work closely with local firms that understand the nuances of the market

Collaboration with local firms in Africa is the best way for Portuguese law firms to serve clients operating in the continent, rather than simply sending lawyers from Lisbon to act as a shop front while operating with mere "back office teams", according to João Mayer Moreira, Vieira de Almeida & Associados (VdA) executive manager for international relations.

"Our strategy is to establish strong links and work closely with local law firms," he explains. "We believe a combination of Portuguese and domestic expertise is the best way to serve clients in these markets – in Angola and Mozambique, notably, we have evolved from a simple association model to fully integrated partnerships, but with local firms that are strong, rooted and regarded as local players in the market."

Moreira says this approach provides invaluable insight into both legal and local market issues. "The law and the legal system in Angola and Mozambique may be inspired by the Portuguese model but clients expect, and require, much more than legal knowledge," he remarks.

"These countries have strong cultural and political identities, while legislation and regulation are consistently evolving – this shapes the way business is done so it is critical to be able to advise clients on the law but also understand local nuances."

Moreira says local partners are fully aligned with VdA so they can offer an integrated service to clients with the same high standards. He adds the challenge is to stay as close as possible to each market without losing consistency, quality levels and a specialised or sector-focused approach – something achievable only with the adequate combination of teams.

"There is an increasing move towards using local law in countries like Angola and Mozambique so our partners are also able to benefit from VdA's experience," Moreira claims. "We have established programmes in Portugal to provide specialised training to young lawyers who want to work with our partner firms in Africa, which strengthens the links further and ultimately reinforces our local capabilities."



João Mayer Moreira

Opportunities emerging in Angolan banking and energy

Given the decrease in the price of oil, now is the right time for businesses in Angola to seek opportunities in other sectors, according to Abreu Advogados partner Fernando Veiga Gomes, co-head of the firm's Angolan Desk.

Veiga Gomes highlights a wide range of other industries in the country that offer potential for investors, with particularly promising opportunities in the banking, energy, distribution and food production sectors.

With regard to the banking sector, Veiga Gomes predicts increasing consolidation in the market in the coming years. "There are around 30 banks in Angola, but some of the banks are not stable so there will be a trend for mergers in the next few years," he adds.

The energy sector is another area where investors could expect to generate good returns. "Energy is relatively undeveloped in Angola," Veiga Gomes says. "There is opportunity for

investment in the distribution of water, for example". Meanwhile, distribution businesses are also a good bet, according to Veiga Gomes. "Angola needs to improve the distribution of goods so it is less dependent on importing goods," he says. Food production is another promising opportunity that is attracting supermarket chains to the country.

It is important to look for "long-lasting" investments in Angola, according to Veiga Gomes. "You need commitment to the local economy, so you need to find local partners and local businessmen you can work with," he says. "It's important that companies put their best people in Angola because if their people here have failed to deliver in Europe, they won't deliver in Angola."

A major challenge for investors is bringing money out of Angola. Veiga Gomes says: "The Bank of Angola is limiting payments out of Angola, this is a big concern as it will put some investors off."



Fernando Veiga Gomes