

ANGOLAN LEGAL MARKET HOTTING UP - FCB&A

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Angola's booming economy has led to the market for legal services in the country becoming increasingly competitive, with clients increasingly asking for numerous quotes for legal work, according to Pedro Guimarães, partner at FCB&A.

Though Guimarães says his firm has not had to reduce rates, he acknowledges that law firms operating in Angola are having to become "less rigid on fees". He adds: "Clients are always asking for more than one quote so you know that your quotation will be benchmarked against others."

While Angola is well known for its oil reserves, the country's financial services sector is also creating plenty of work for lawyers. "Regarding financial services, there is a demand for more sophisticated products such as a greater offer in automated payment systems," says Guimarães. "There is also a card payment system, which is involving more banks and enabling more services to be offered at cashpoints." In addition, Guimarães says that more banks are joining the automated system to better enable bank transfers.

Meanwhile, one of the key concerns of oil industry clients in Angola is the foreign exchange restrictions that were introduced to the sector in 2012. As a result oil industry clients have to make certain payments not only in Angola, but also in the local currency. "This means services companies

operating in the oil sector have had to redesign the way they do business and redefine the activities they carry out in Angola," Guimarães says. "This often involves keeping sales of goods of foreign companies separate from the provision of services and incorporating new local vehicles to provide services and allow funds to be eventually repatriated."

One of the biggest challenges for law firms in Angola at present is hiring the best local lawyers, Guimarães explains. "There is a difficulty in getting highly qualified local lawyers," he says, adding that because there is a shortage of such lawyers, there is huge demand, and consequently they can charge "outrageous salaries".