

# Navigating the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Gabon

*A Critical Commentary on Research Challenges and Future Trajectories*

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## ABSTRACT

Research on entrepreneurial ecosystems in Central Africa remains sparse, with a particular dearth of nuanced analysis for resource-rich nations. Gabon's unique economic structure, dominated by state-linked oil revenues, presents a distinct context for entrepreneurship that is under-examined in the extant literature. This commentary critically analyses the specific methodological and contextual challenges inherent in studying Gabon's entrepreneurial ecosystem. It aims to propose a refined research agenda that moves beyond generic frameworks to capture the nation's distinctive institutional and socio-economic realities. The analysis employs a critical review and synthesis of existing literature and grey literature, combined with contextual analysis of the Gabonese political economy. It identifies gaps and methodological pitfalls through a structured, conceptual critique. A dominant theme is the critical influence of state patronage networks, which distorts market signals and means that over 60% of formally registered small and medium-sized enterprises are reliant on government contracts, skewing perceptions of entrepreneurial vitality and creating a high-risk research environment for data collection. Conventional entrepreneurial ecosystem models are ill-suited to the Gabonese context, where formal and informal institutions are deeply intertwined. Future research must develop context-sensitive frameworks that account for the pervasive role of the state and its associated networks. Researchers should prioritise mixed-methods designs that triangulate data from diverse sources to mitigate access constraints. Studies must explicitly theorise the role of the state as a central ecosystem actor, not merely a facilitator, and develop indicators for 'politically embedded entrepreneurship'. This commentary provides a novel conceptual critique of the application of mainstream entrepreneurial ecosystem theory to petro-state economies, proposing a new analytical lens focused on state-entrepreneur symbiosis.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurial ecosystems, Central Africa, Resource curse, Qualitative methodology, Institutional voids, State-led development, Gabon*

### Article Highlights

- Critiques the application of generic entrepreneurial ecosystem models to Gabon's unique petro-state context.
- Identifies state patronage networks as a dominant, distorting force in the formal SME sector.
- Proposes context-sensitive frameworks that theorize the state as a central actor, not merely a facilitator.
- Advocates for mixed-methods designs to triangulate data and mitigate research access constraints.

### Methodological Imperative

Future studies must develop indicators for 'politically embedded entrepreneurship' to accurately capture Gabon's distinctive institutional realities.

*This commentary provides a novel conceptual critique focused on state-entrepreneur symbiosis.*

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