

# Gender Contribution to the Agenda 2030



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**Abstract** Gender equity issues contribute to the policies of governments and companies. These matters become even more central facing the impacts produced by the Covid-19 Pandemic. The 2030 Agenda is a concrete commitment that various international institutions have made to ensure a better future for future generations. Governments are committed to ensuring a future without discrimination of any kind. The study aims to carry out a review of the literature on the topic of gender within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Through a mixed methodology, bibliometric analysis and literature analysis, the study aims to carry out a mapping of the state of the art on the relationship between Agenda 2030 and gender. The results show the presence of 3 clusters relating to the field of gender equality, governance, and gender empowerment. The study provides useful data for scholars who intend to contribute to the literature on these topics. This review of the literature is among the first to carry out a study on the subject with a qualitative–quantitative methodology.

**Keywords** Women · Gender studies · Sustainable development · Literature review · Bibliometrics

## 1 Introduction and Research Purposes

In recent years, policymakers and companies have paid ever greater attention to issues relating to the paradigm of sustainable development (Bebbington and Unerman 2018; Abhayawansa et al. 2021). Climate change or the generalized increase in inequalities are just some of the events that have posed the need to change priorities and reformulate strategies in a more development-oriented

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perspective that follows the criterion of sustainability before policymakers and private companies (Calderón Márquez et al. 2019). Therefore, the approach oriented purely to the protection of the environment is overcome by accepting issues related to different dimensions.

In this sense, the 2030 Agenda represents a fundamental step since for the first time a very large presence of Countries has committed themselves to actively contribute to the achievement of some specific objectives (Silva 2021). Specifically, the 169 members of the United Nations, aware of the need for a paradigm shift, have signed the commitment to achieve the 17 sustainable goals by 2030. Despite the goodness of the proposal, it should be noted that the 17 objectives, made up of a total of 189 sub-objectives, represent very ambitious objectives (Pizzi et al. 2021b).

Furthermore, several scholars who have approached have highlighted some critical issues. Among these, the interdependence between the various objectives and sub-objectives is highlighted. This makes a goal difficult to achieve if the related goals are not achieved. In addition, in the field of accounting, in emphasizing the importance of reporting the SDGs, several scholars have strongly emphasized the absence of specific guidelines that are, on the one hand, aid to businesses and the other that favor data comparability (Pizzi et al. 2021a).

Among the various issues dealt with by the United Nations, gender has been widely considered within the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. For example, there is a specific objective, goal 5, on gender equality (Monteiro et al. 2019). But, as highlighted above, thanks to the close connection between the different objectives, gender equity is interrelated with others.

Some scholars have highlighted the slow progress toward achieving the goal set by the 2030 Agenda (Eden and Wagstaff 2021). The difficulties already present were associated with the negative repercussions of Covid-19 which had a significant impact, especially on the female gender (Kogut and Mejri 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on gender equality by highlighting and widening existing inequalities. Yet, there is numerous evidence from scientific studies that demonstrate how gender diversity brings greater value to companies, with a positive impact on economic-financial and socio-environmental results (Paoloni and Lombardi 2018). In the literature, some have analyzed the contribution of women to sustainable development. However, a topic that has not been fully explored by management and accounting scholars.

In this context, the aim of this work is to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the state of the art regarding the relationship between gender and the 2030 Agenda?

RQ2: What are the areas that future studies should explore?

The study provides theoretical contributions as it identifies the most influential articles, journals, and authors on the topic and provides new questions for future research. In addition, it adopts a mixed methodological approach to reduce any bias resulting from the use of single methods.

The paper is structured as follows. In the following Sect. 2, the literature on gender and sustainability is set out. Next, the method and the findings of the literature analysis are shown in Sects. 3 and 4. Implications for future research and conclusions are presented in Sect. 5.

## 2 Gender and Sustainability

The study of the relationship between gender and sustainability is not a new topic in the literature (Paoloni and Lombardi 2018; Dal Mas and Paoloni 2020). It is a fact that the attention toward the gender has been gradually increasing in the last decades (Khandelwal et al. 2020). The attention of scholars and international institutions has been placed on women due to some critical issues that still occur today. Although women represent about 50% of the world population, the World Bank data shows that on average there are only 38% of working women in the world. Or even different is the evidence of the low percentage of women occupying management positions in the company as well as the greater difficulties that women entrepreneurs have to face compared to male entrepreneurs (Deng et al. 2021).

Faced with these critical issues, over the years, the scholars who have approached the issue have found various evidences of positive relationships between the presence of women at various levels and company performance (Glass et al. 2016; Elijido-Ten et al. 2019). Especially in the sustainability field, there are several contributions in the literature that agree in attributing an important role to women in improving the sustainability performance of companies (Eberhardt-Toth 2017; Martinez-Leon et al. 2020).

Scholars who have been interested in corporate governance have shown various evidences of a positive relationship between female representation on the board and sustainable practices.

Recent work has shown that companies with a higher percentage of female directors are those with lower environmental impacts due to lower GHG emissions (Tingbani et al. 2020). Another study on global companies suggests that companies with different gender leadership teams are more effective in pursuing strategies aimed at protecting the environment (Glass et al. 2016). Other scholars have highlighted positive correlations with the social dimension. They suggest that companies with greater respect for gender equity are also those that have more attention to social issues such as human rights (Monteiro et al. 2021).

At the base of these empirical evidences, the scholars have highlighted some peculiar characteristics of women that would favor greater socially responsible behaviors. These studies emphasize the difference between men and women in their psychological traits, referring to values, altruism, or leadership styles (Chen et al. 2016). Some argue that while men socialize to be more autonomous and competitive, women tend to be more other-oriented (Glass et al. 2016). This would imply that women are more concerned than men about the links with the environment and with the human capital inside and outside the company (Stern et al. 1993). Furthermore, since women are sensitive to ethical issues and interested in others, they are also more inclined to stakeholder engagement (Pucheta-Martínez et al. 2020). These characteristics mean that women can positively influence socially responsible behavior and the CSR commitments of companies.

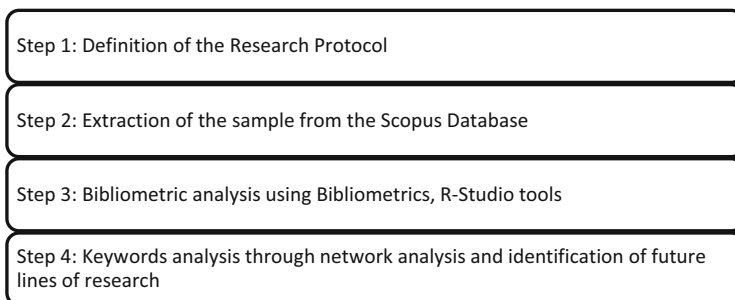
### 3 Research Approach

To answer the research questions, the study proposes to analyze the literature on the subject. This methodology allows to analyze the state of the existing literature and to map the treated areas, it allows to identify the research gaps that future studies can fill. We believe that the use of literature review methodologies is the most appropriate for answering research questions. Indeed, the purpose of the literature review is to measure the impact of contributions, identifying the most influential authors and journals, as well as the most important keywords (Lombardi and Secundo 2020). Furthermore, literature review works are useful for making a synthesis of the accumulated knowledge on the topic and for serving as a theoretical basis for future studies.

The method used is of a mixed type, a quantitative and qualitative approach was used (Tello et al. 2016). In the first phase, a bibliometric analysis was carried out, and subsequently, a literature review was conducted. The use of mixed methodologies is used in the literature by scholars to minimize the risks that would arise from the single use of both methodologies (Pizzi et al. 2021b; Caputo et al. 2021). The results of the various bibliometric analyses are aimed at identifying the most influential journals, authors, articles, and research topics. Qualitative analysis makes it possible to identify the areas covered by previous studies and define questions that future studies can explore.

The sample of articles was composed using Scopus, following the good practices identified by the scholars. The research was cross-validated using the Scopus database as well. Scopus and the Web of Sciences are two of the largest databases most used in literature review studies (Monteiro et al. 2019; Mora et al. 2019).

Figure 1 summarizes the methodological steps adopted to conduct the research. In the first phase, the authors met to define the research protocol. The following search string has been defined as follows: TS = (Women) OR TS = (Gender) OR TS = (Female) AND TS = (“Sustainable development goal”) OR TS = (SDGs). The search was set on titles, abstracts, and keywords. In addition, some filters have been put in place to narrow down the search. First, we have decided to focus on Business and Management magazines. Then only the articles were selected



**Fig. 1** Methodology. Source: Author's

excluding books, working papers, or contributions to conferences. Finally, articles in English were considered, thus excluding articles published in different languages. With these limitations, the final sample consists of 90 documents.

Regarding the analysis conducted, two software programs were used: Bibliometrics and Vosviewer. The first software is an R-studio application that is finding wide use in the literature (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017). It allows the statistical-quantitative analysis useful for bibliometric analyses. Otherwise, Vosviewer was used to carry out the analysis by keyword, useful for grouping keywords and identifying the different clusters present (Lombardi and Secundo 2020).

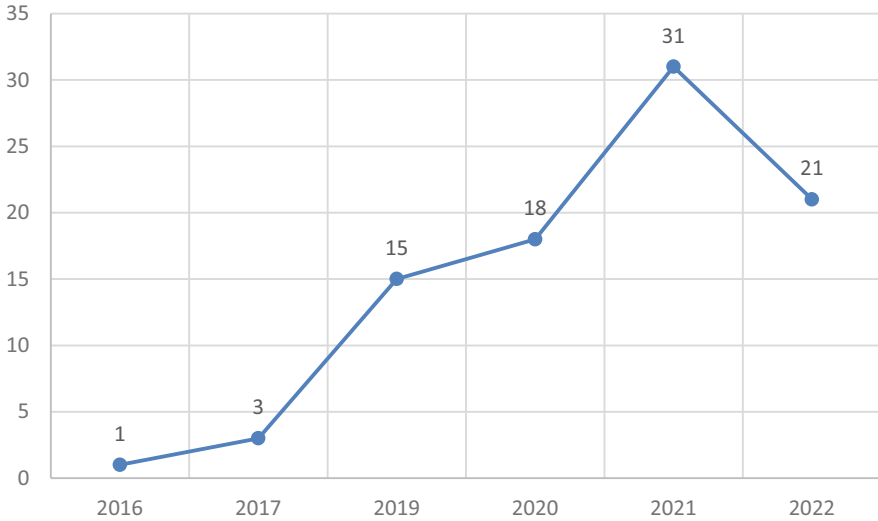
## 4 Primary Results

Figure 1 shows the annual production from 2016. The data is consistent with the publication of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015. The figure shows a trend increase in contributions on the topic from year to year, with the peak that was obtained in 2021. The growth between 2019 and 2020 turned out to be the lowest in the period considered. On the contrary, contributions between 2020 and 2021 almost doubled. The data for 2022 suggest that the positive trend can also be confirmed in this last year (Fig. 2).

The analysis by source (Table 1) reveals how Journal of Cleaner Production is the magazine that has published the major contributions on the topic (9). Following are Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Gender In Management with 7 and 5 articles published. The presence of generalist magazines or different fields highlights the multidisciplinary nature of the topic.

Table 2 highlights the authors who have published major contributions on the topic. As you can see, there are no authors who have distinguished themselves. The presence of authors with more than 2 works on the subject under analysis was not found.

Table 3 shows the articles that have contributed most to the debate on the topic as well as those that have been most taken as a reference. The work that stands out most is a work published in Journal of Cleaner Production (101 citations) followed by an article by Chaudhary et al. (2020) published in Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management. Among the articles cited by the articles in the sample, we find the contribution of Alarcón and Cole (2019) in the field of tourism. Among the first 3 places, we find the contribution of Rosati and Faria (2019a, 2019b). The presence among the local citations of a few interconnections among the scientific works confirms the multidisciplinary nature of the theme already highlighted in the previous analyses.



**Fig. 2** Annual Production. Source: Author’s elaboration through biblioshiny for Bibliometrix

**Table 1** Source

Sources	Articles
Journal of Cleaner Production	9
Journal of Sustainable Tourism	7
Gender in Management	5
Statistical Journal of The IAOS	3
Business and Human Rights Journal	2
Business Strategy and Development	2
Cities	2
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	2
Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	2
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	2

Source: Author’s elaboration through biblioshiny for Bibliometrix

Figure 3 shows a map of the globe from which it is possible to obtain two types of information. From the different shades of blue it is possible to see which countries have contributed most to the theme. The United States, India, and Europe (Italy and Spain) are among the countries with the highest production of scientific works on the subject. The red curves show the collaborations between scholars from different countries. The major collaborations on the subject concerned England and Spain and Finland and South Africa. No relevant collaborations were found between the Asian and American contexts.

**Table 2** Author

Authors	Articles
ASONGU S	2
GERSHON O	2
KUSAIRI S	2
MUHAMAD S	2
ZAMRI N	2
ABBAS F	1
ABD MAJID N	1
ABIDIN AFZ	1
ABUBAKAR IR	1
ACHA-ANYI P	1

Source: Author’s elaboration through biblioshiny for Bibliometrix

**Table 3** Document

Global cited			Local cited	
Paper	Total citations	TC per Year	Document	Local citations
ROSATI F, 2019, CORP SOC RESPONSIB ENVIRON MANAGE	101	25.25	ALARCÓN DM, 2019, J SUSTAINABLE TOUR	6
CHAUDHARY R, 2020, CORP SOC RESPONSIB ENVIRON MANAGE	82	27.333	EDEN L, 2021, J INT BUS POLICY	2
ALARCÓN DM, 2019, J SUSTAINABLE TOUR	63	15.75	ROSATI F, 2019, CORP SOC RESPONSIB ENVIRON MANAGE	2
MONTEIRO NBR, 2019, J CLEAN PROD	58	14.5	VILLARINO MEJ, 2022, STAT J IAOS	1
PLA-JULIÁN I, 2019, FUTURES	32	8	FREUND D, 2021, TOUR MANAGE PERSPECT	1
ABUBAKAR IR, 2019, UTIL POLICY	29	7.25	ONG F, 2021, J SUSTAINABLE TOUR	1
YARRAM SR, 2021, J CLEAN PROD	24	12	BARRIOS LM, 2020, J CLEAN PROD	1
LIAO H, 2019, J CLEAN PROD	23	5.75	KATO K, 2019, J SUSTAINABLE TOUR	1
CERVELLÓ-ROYO R, 2020, J BUS RES	20	6.667	EBRAHIMI R, 2022, HUM SOC SCI COMM	0
MANOLIS EN, 2021, J CLEAN PROD	17	8.5	PHASHA TN, 2022, HUM SOC SCI COMM	0

Source: Author’s elaboration through biblioshiny for Bibliometrix

### 4.1 Keyword Analysis

Figure 4 shows the keywords analysis performed with the Vosviewer software. This analysis is functional to respond to RQ2, the figure highlights the presence of

### Country Collaboration Map

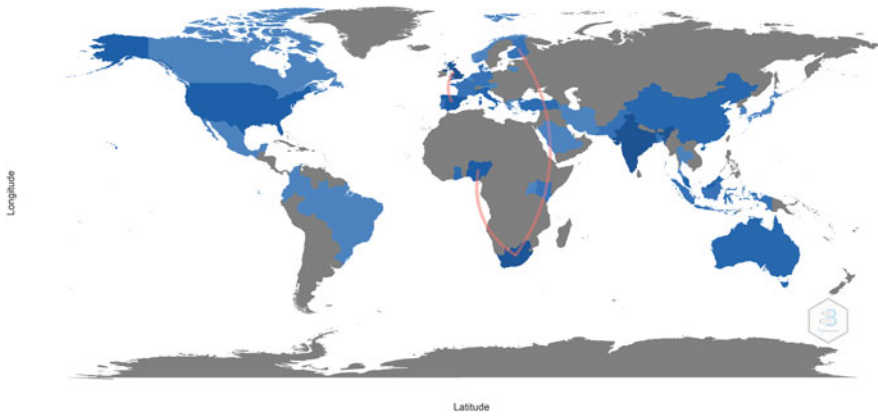


Fig. 3 Country Collaboration. Source: Author’s elaboration through biblioshiny for Bibliometrix

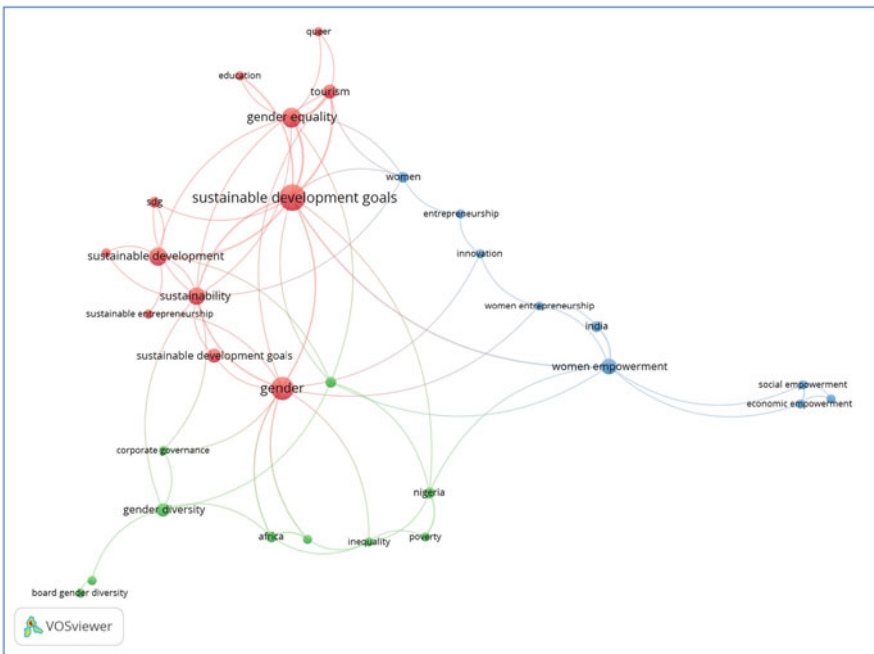


Fig. 4 Keyword analysis. Source: Author’s elaboration through Vosviewer

3 clusters. The red cluster includes all the studies that have analyzed sustainable development and the specific contribution to SDG 5 gender equality. The green cluster refers to studies that have dealt with the topic of gender from an internal



company perspective. Blue is the cluster that refers to women's entrepreneurship and women empowerment.

The red cluster highlights the close relationship between sustainable development goals and gender equality. Some authors argue that the process is slow toward achieving the goal of gender equality (Eden and Wagstaff 2021). Other studies have highlighted the problems relating to the mining sector. A study has shown the difficulties and gender discrimination that women suffer in certain contexts but at the same time highlights the need for a change of direction to reduce gender inequalities (Monteiro et al. 2019). Also interesting is the presence of works that have focused on the tourism sector. Emblematic is the work of some authors who highlight how there can be no sustainable tourism without the dimension of gender equality (Alarcón and Cole 2019). Several studies in recent years have focused on the relationship between tourism and gender equality (Bidegain Ponte and Enríquez 2016; Dashper et al. 2022).

Within the green cluster, corporate governance appears to be of significant importance. Over the years, increasing importance has been attributed to this body. Several studies have highlighted the positive relationships between diversified boards and financial and sustainability performance (Paoloni and Lombardi 2017a; Paoloni and Lombardi 2018). The articles in this cluster agree in considering the relevance of adequate female representation in governance or top management roles for those companies that intend to pursue corporate objectives oriented toward the perspective of sustainable development (Orazalin and Mahmood 2021; Yarram and Adapa 2021). Also interesting is a work that has studied the relationship between culture and the propensity to communicate and carry out behaviors oriented toward sustainable development (Rosati and Faria 2019a). The study highlights how companies operating in less masculine contexts disclose more information relating to the SDGs. This underlines the stringent link between women and the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

Cluster blue incorporates studies that have analyzed gender from the perspective of entrepreneurship and empowerment (Chakraborty and Biswal 2022). Some scholars argue that the promotion of female entrepreneurship is one of the main sub-objectives of SDG5 (Bastian et al. 2019). Global efforts are needed to promote and support female entrepreneurship as a means of enhancing gender equality and social development. Some argue that female entrepreneurship can help alleviate poverty, improve health care and education, and reduce environmental damage (Ebrahimi et al. 2022). Finally, some highlight how, especially in some contexts, education is essential to encourage good practices by women entrepreneurs (Mason and Siqueira 2014; Paoloni and Lombardi 2017b).

## 5 Primary Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

Answering the first research question, this study aims to map the state of the art on the relationship between women and sustainable development by investigating the areas that have been analyzed by scholars. The 2030 Agenda is very clear, there can be no sustainable development without gender equality. The literature that has analyzed the issue by investigating the phenomenon from different angles and contexts agrees with this statement. Several authors agree that gender inequalities persist and are still deeply rooted in some contexts (Vijayarasa and Liu 2022).

Studies on the subject have highlighted a double link between the 2030 Agenda and women. On the one hand, the contribution that the 2030 Agenda can make in the fight against inequalities and women's emancipation is important (Chakraborty and Biswal 2022). The attention placed on these issues, together with the policies implemented by governments to direct and raise awareness of certain behaviors of the community, represent fundamental steps to guarantee these rights to all citizens of the globe. On the other hand, scholars have also emphasized the opposite relationship, that is, the contribution of women to the achievement of goals (Rosati and Faria 2019b; Martinez-Leon et al. 2020). Attention to others, attention to environmental issues, and social issues that women have shown to have compared to men can represent a positive driver that can encourage the adoption of socially responsible behavior by companies (Bidegain Ponte and Enríquez 2016).

Thus, the study highlighted 3 different clusters that express more specifically the link between gender and the 2030 Agenda. Future studies can start from the issues examined in the analysis of clusters for the preparation of future research. Future studies could answer some questions that remain unexplored. Below are some questions that need to be better investigated by future studies.

- The potential of women's social entrepreneurship in addressing the goals of the 2030 Agenda
- Research on broader forms of entrepreneurship (social, rural, eco) and their contribution to the goals of the 2030 Agenda
- The role of women, at various company levels, about the reporting practices of the SDGs
- Contribution of women entrepreneurs to sustainable tourism
- Role of education for women's empowerment.

These are just a few points that we believe need more contributions. As already highlighted, this is a topic that, given its recent discussion, is still in an initial phase and, consequently, presents ample space for future studies. Ultimately, the study therefore responds to RQ2 by identifying research gaps that should be filled by future research.

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