

The Gender of Leadership in SMEs: An Unresolved Debt to Sustainable Development

Zuray Melgarejo

Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

Abstract

Leadership in Colombian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is influenced by gender-related factors that affect their economic performance. Despite progress toward equity, women still face significant barriers to accessing leadership positions and participating in companies' social capital.

This study aims to analyze the impact of gender on leadership and the economic performance of Colombian SMEs, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly gender equality (SDG 5) and decent work (SDG 8).

From a theoretical standpoint, biological and social differences between men and women are considered to influence business management practices. Prior research has shown that female leadership contributes distinctive values to organizations, yet women's participation remains limited in many sectors.

A quantitative, explanatory methodology will be employed, consisting of two phases. First, the study will identify the predominant leadership characteristics in SMEs and their relationship with gender. Second, it will examine how these characteristics impact firms' economic performance.

This research seeks to advance the academic and policy debate on gender and leadership within organizational contexts, offering empirical evidence from a setting that remains largely understudied. It also aims to highlight the persistent structural inequities that hinder inclusive business development and to provide recommendations that contribute to the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Ultimately, this work calls attention to the need for a gender-conscious approach in SME leadership strategies as a pathway to more equitable and sustainable economic outcomes.

