

The Bibliometric Structure of Green Economy Research in Africa: Trends, Concentration, and Implications for Morocco

La structure bibliométrique de la recherche sur l'économie verte en Afrique : tendances, concentration et implications pour le Maroc

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Abstract

This article maps the scholarly landscape of green economy research in Africa through a bibliometric approach. It aims to identify the main publication trends, source concentration patterns, author visibility, and geographical configurations structuring the field, while drawing analytical implications for Morocco. The analysis covers the period 2010–2024 and is based on a corpus of 84 documents published in 66 sources by 272 authors. Using Biblioshiny, the study examines scientific production, citation dynamics, core journals, leading authors, and country-level publication patterns.

The findings reveal a rapidly expanding but unevenly consolidated field. Scientific output has accelerated markedly, particularly after 2020, while citation patterns remain more irregular. The literature is concentrated in a limited number of outlets, with *Sustainability* and *Sustainable Development* emerging as the most visible journals. At the author level, the field is shaped by a small group of recurring contributors, while geographically it is strongly polarized around South Africa, followed by the United Kingdom and China. These results indicate that green economy research in Africa is characterized by rapid growth, editorial concentration, partial intellectual stabilization, and marked territorial asymmetry. For Morocco, the study highlights not a dominant bibliometric position, but a promising and still underdeveloped research space within the African green economy agenda.

Keywords :

Green economy; Africa; bibliometric analysis; lexicometric analysis; thematic dynamics; Morocco.

Introduction

The transition toward a green economy has become one of the most visible normative and analytical frameworks through which contemporary debates on sustainable development, climate action, energy transformation, and inclusive growth are being rearticulated. In the African context, this transition carries particular strategic significance. The continent faces a complex and often contradictory developmental landscape marked by pressing socio-economic needs, persistent environmental vulnerabilities, uneven industrial trajectories, and growing exposure to global sustainability agendas. In such a setting, the green economy is not merely discussed as an environmental policy orientation; it is increasingly framed as a broader development pathway capable of reconciling economic growth, ecological preservation, and social resilience. Yet, despite the growing relevance of this theme, the academic literature remains fragmented across disciplines, countries, and thematic subfields, making it difficult to identify the major intellectual trends that have shaped the field over time.

This fragmentation is especially problematic for African scholarship. While research on green economy has expanded considerably in recent years, the field does not appear to have evolved in a linear or homogeneous way. Rather, it seems to have been structured through uneven patterns of scientific production, varying degrees of thematic consolidation, and a concentration of contributions around a limited number of publication outlets, authors, and national contexts. Such a configuration raises several important questions. Which themes have become central in the African green economy debate? Which countries and scholarly communities have most actively shaped this body of knowledge? To what extent does the literature privilege environmental, developmental, policy-oriented, or performance-related concerns? And how can this evolving research landscape help situate Morocco within broader African discussions on green transition?

These questions are particularly relevant because the literature often mobilizes the green economy as a broad umbrella concept, encompassing issues as diverse as renewable energy, carbon reduction, climate governance, sustainable development, foreign investment, economic performance, and ecological modernization. As a result, the field tends to accumulate concepts faster than it clarifies their relationships. In the African case, this conceptual breadth is further complicated by strong territorial asymmetries. Some national contexts, especially South Africa, appear more visible and more institutionally embedded in the literature than others, while several African countries remain marginal or only indirectly represented in existing scholarly production. Such unevenness suggests that beyond the simple growth of publications, what is

needed is a structured understanding of how the field has been intellectually organized, thematically differentiated, and geographically distributed.

Against this background, this article aims to map and structure green economy research in Africa by combining bibliometric and lexicometric approaches. Rather than attempting to measure the direct impact of green economy policies on development outcomes, the article focuses on the architecture of the literature itself. More specifically, it seeks to identify the main intellectual trends, thematic dynamics, and geographic patterns that have shaped the field, while drawing analytical implications for Morocco. This objective responds to a double need. On the one hand, it contributes to clarifying an expanding but still dispersed body of scholarship. On the other hand, it provides a more robust basis for positioning Morocco within African debates on green transition, not as a merely illustrative case, but as a potentially fertile research context whose specific trajectory deserves greater conceptual and empirical attention.

Methodologically, the article relies on a combined bibliometric and lexicometric design. The bibliometric stage makes it possible to examine the temporal evolution of publications, the most influential sources, the most visible authors, the geographic distribution of scientific production, and the thematic relationships emerging from co-word structures. The lexicometric stage complements this perspective by exploring the semantic organization of the corpus and identifying the dominant lexical classes that structure the discourse on green economy in Africa. The interest of this combined approach lies precisely in its ability to move beyond descriptive counting and toward a more integrated reading of the field, one that captures both its formal scientific structure and its deeper thematic composition.

The article makes three main contributions. First, it provides a structured overview of the development of green economy research in Africa over the 2010–2024 period. Second, it highlights the thematic nuclei around which the field has been organized, particularly the strong articulation between green economy, sustainable development, energy transition, environmental economics, and climate-related concerns. Third, it argues that Morocco occupies a promising yet insufficiently consolidated position within this research agenda, which opens space for more context-sensitive and theoretically grounded studies. In this sense, the article does not simply inventory the literature; it seeks to show how the field has been constructed, what tensions and asymmetries characterize it, and where future research may be most productively directed.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The next section presents the methodological framework and explains the criteria used to build and analyze the corpus. The

third section reports the main bibliometric results and discusses the intellectual structure of the field. The fourth section develops the lexicometric analysis and examines its thematic dynamics. The final section discusses the main implications of these findings for African scholarship in general and for Morocco in particular, before concluding with directions for future research.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

This study is based on a bibliometric research design aimed at mapping and structuring the literature on green economy research in Africa. The use of this approach is aligned with the purpose of the article, which is to identify the main publication trends, intellectual patterns, and geographical configurations that characterize the field. Rather than examining the substantive effects of green economy policies, the study focuses on the external architecture of the literature by analyzing publication growth, source concentration, author prominence, and country-level participation. In doing so, it seeks to provide a systematic overview of how green economy research in Africa has evolved and how it is currently organized within the scholarly landscape.

2.2 Bibliometric corpus

The bibliometric dataset covers the period from 2010 to 2024 and consists of 84 documents published in 66 sources.

Table 1: Main information about bibliometric dataset

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2010 :2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	66
Documents	84
Annual Growth Rate %	25,85
Document Average Age	2,93
Average citations per doc	14,88
References	0
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	407
Author's Keywords (DE)	305
AUTHORS	
Authors	272
Authors of single-authored docs	12
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	

Single-authored docs	12
Co-Authors per Doc	3,4
International co-authorships %	29,76
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	70
book	1
article, early access	1
conference paper	1
review	1

Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

The corpus includes 272 authors, among whom 12 are authors of single-authored documents. The collaboration profile of the dataset indicates an average of 3.4 co-authors per document and an international co-authorship rate of 29.76%. The corpus also includes 305 author's keywords and 407 Keywords Plus, which provides a sufficiently rich basis for identifying the conceptual and thematic orientation of the field. In addition, the average age of the documents is 2.93 years and the average number of citations per document is 14.88. Journal articles dominate the dataset, with 70 articles, while the remaining documents are distributed across a very limited number of books, early access articles, conference papers, and reviews.

2.3 Bibliometric analysis

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using Biblioshiny in order to examine the structural configuration of green economy research in Africa over the 2010–2024 period. This stage was based on the final corpus of 84 documents published across 66 sources and involving 272 authors. The analysis focused on a set of complementary indicators selected for their ability to reveal the main structural characteristics of the field. These indicators include annual scientific production, average citations per year, most relevant sources, core sources by Bradford's Law, sources' local impact by H-index, source production over time, most relevant authors, authors' production over time, corresponding authors' countries, country scientific production, and country production over time.

The purpose of this stage was threefold. First, it aimed to identify the temporal evolution of the field by examining publication growth and citation patterns over time. Second, it sought to assess the degree of concentration of the literature across publication outlets and authors by identifying the most visible journals and the most recurrent contributors. Third, it examined the geographical configuration of the field through the distribution of corresponding authors' countries and the distinction between domestic and international collaboration patterns. Taken together, these indicators make it possible to map the external structure of the literature and to identify the main intellectual and geographical tendencies shaping green economy research in Africa.

2.4 Analytical logic

The analytical logic of this article follows a bibliometric mapping approach. The analysis begins with the temporal dimension of the field through annual scientific production and average citations per year. It then examines source structure and journal influence through the most relevant sources, Bradford's Law, and local impact by H-index. The next step focuses on author visibility and continuity through the identification of the most relevant authors and their production over time. Finally, the geographical dimension of the field is explored through corresponding authors' countries, world scientific production, and country production over time. This sequential reading makes it possible to move from descriptive bibliometric indicators toward a more structured interpretation of the intellectual landscape of green economy research in Africa.

2.5 Delimitation of the study

This article is deliberately limited to the bibliometric exploration of the field. It does not include the lexicometric examination of textual content, which is reserved for a separate and complementary study. The present paper therefore focuses exclusively on publication metadata and bibliometric indicators in order to identify the growth, concentration, visibility, and geographical distribution of green economy research in Africa. This delimitation strengthens the internal coherence of the article by aligning its research objective, methodological design, and analytical scope.

A final methodological clarification nevertheless remains necessary for the submitted version of the article. While the chapter clearly reports the characteristics of the final bibliometric corpus and the outputs generated through Biblioshiny, it does not yet present the full document retrieval protocol in a sufficiently explicit manner, particularly with regard to the databases used, the exact search equation, the screening process, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. These elements should be added in the final version in order to reinforce transparency and reproducibility.

3. Bibliometric Structure of the Field

3.1 Descriptive overview of the corpus

The bibliometric corpus covers the period from 2010 to 2024 and consists of 84 documents published across 66 sources. It brings together 272 authors, including 12 authors of single-authored documents, with an average of 3.4 co-authors per document and an international co-authorship rate of 29.76%.

Figure 2: Results of the analysis of the Metadata



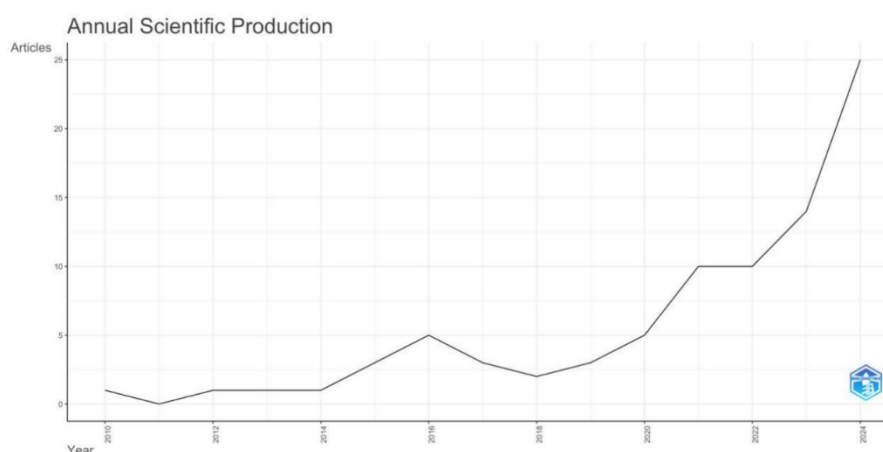
Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

The dataset also contains 305 author's keywords and 407 Keywords Plus, indicating a relatively rich terminological base for examining the intellectual and thematic contours of green economy research in Africa. In addition, the average age of the documents is 2.93 years and the average number of citations per document reaches 14.88, suggesting that the field is both recent and sufficiently visible to support a structured review. Journal articles clearly dominate the corpus, with 70 articles, while the remainder is distributed across a much smaller number of books, early access articles, conference papers, and reviews.

3.2 Temporal dynamics of publication and citation

The annual scientific production reveals a field that remained limited in volume during the first half of the period before entering a phase of marked acceleration.

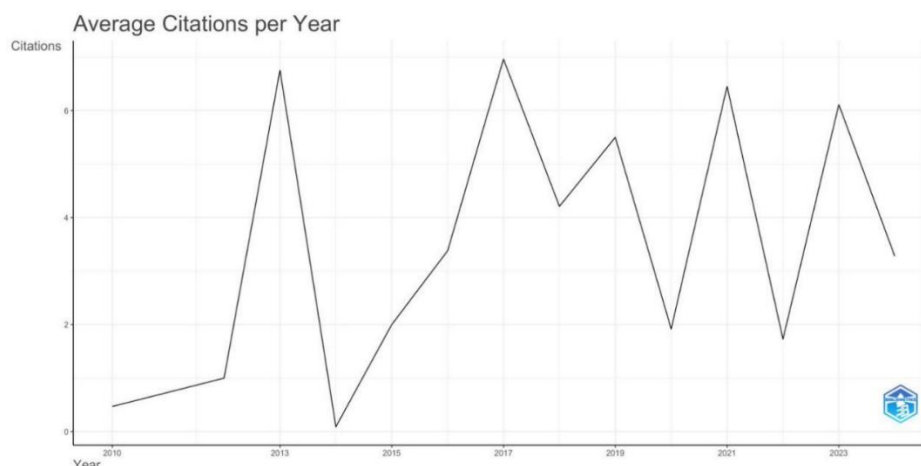
Figure 3: Annual Scientific Production



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After a very modest start between 2010 and 2015, publication output rises to five articles in 2016, then slows down slightly in 2017 and 2018, before increasing again from 2019 onward. The most significant shift occurs in the most recent years of the corpus: five publications are recorded in 2020, ten in 2021, ten again in 2022, fourteen in 2023, and twenty-five in 2024. This trajectory indicates that green economy research in Africa has moved from a relatively fragmented and low-volume field to a much more rapidly expanding area of scholarship.

The evolution of average citations per year follows a more irregular pattern.

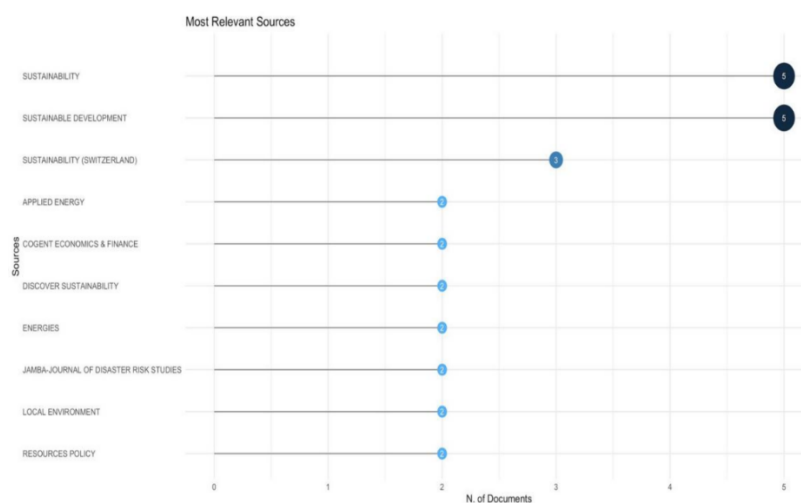
Figure 4: Average Citations per Year

Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

Unlike publication output, which displays a relatively clear upward trajectory in recent years, citation intensity fluctuates considerably across the period. Peaks appear in 2013 and 2017, and high citation averages re-emerge in 2021 and 2023, while weaker citation levels are observed in years such as 2014, 2020, and 2022. This contrast is important. It suggests that the quantitative expansion of the field has not been perfectly matched by a linear process of citation consolidation. In other words, the field is growing quickly, but its intellectual stabilization remains uneven.

3.3 Source concentration and journal influence

The source structure of the corpus shows a relatively concentrated publication landscape. Two journals, *Sustainability* and *Sustainable Development*, each contribute five documents, making them the most represented outlets in the dataset. They are followed by *Sustainability (Switzerland)* with three documents, while several other journals, including *Applied Energy*, *Cogent Economics & Finance*, *Discover Sustainability*, *Energies*, *Jàmbá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, *Local Environment*, and *Resources Policy*, contribute two documents each. This distribution indicates that the field is not dispersed uniformly across publication outlets; rather, it is organized around a limited group of journals that act as recurrent channels for green economy scholarship in the African context.

Figure 5: Most Relevant Sources

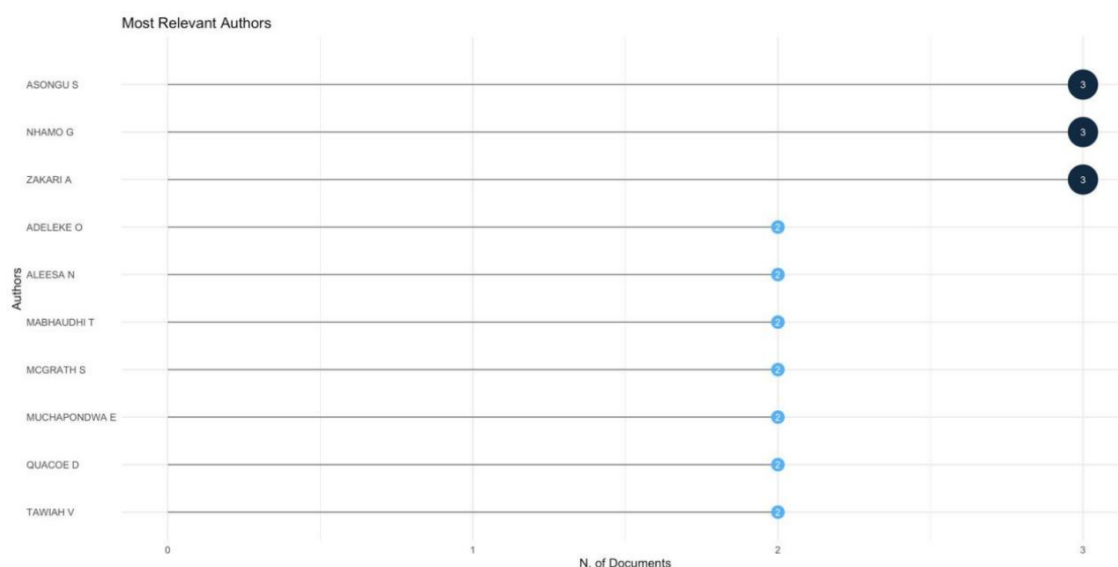
Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

This concentration is reinforced by the Bradford's Law output, which points to the existence of a relatively small core of sources structuring the literature. The local source impact by H-index leads to the same conclusion. *Sustainability* and *Sustainable Development* reach the highest local H-index value in the corpus, with $H = 4$, while a second group of journals such as *Cogent Economics & Finance*, *Energies*, *Jamba: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, *Resources Policy*, *South African Journal of Science*, and *Sustainability (Switzerland)* cluster around $H = 2$. Altogether, these results show that the field is organized around a restricted set of journals combining both productivity and local influence, rather than around a large and evenly distributed publication base.

The temporal evolution of source production adds a further layer of interpretation. The most active outlets do not all follow the same rhythm. Some journals appear earlier in the timeline and accumulate publications gradually, whereas others become more visible only in the later years of the period. This suggests that the structuring of the field has not been static. It has evolved through successive waves of journal engagement, with some outlets playing an early anchoring role and others joining the conversation more recently as green economy themes gained visibility.

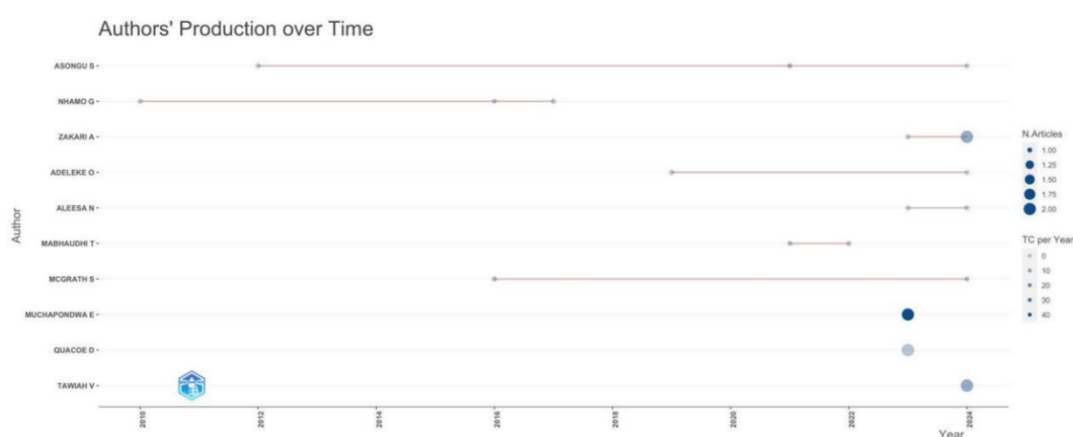
3.4 Author visibility and continuity

The author-level analysis reveals a field that is not dominated by a very small number of hyper-prolific scholars, but rather by a limited set of recurring contributors. Three authors stand out most clearly in the corpus: Asongu S., Nhamo G., and Zakari A., each with three publications. They are followed by a second group of authors, including Adeleke O., Aleesa N., Mabhaudhi T., McGrath S., Muchapondwa E., Quacoe D., and Tawiah V., each contributing two publications. This pattern suggests that the field remains relatively open, while still showing the emergence of a small nucleus of recurrent authors.

Figure 6: Most Relevant Authors

Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

The production-over-time figure further refines this observation. It shows that some authors display continuity across several years, while others appear more episodically or more recently in the corpus.

Figure 7: Author Production Over Time

Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

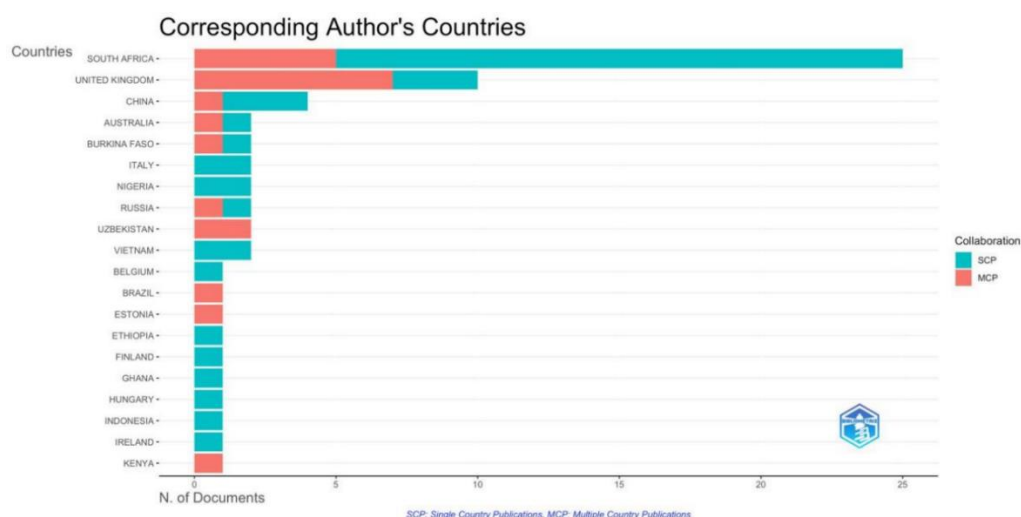
This distinction matters because it indicates that the field combines both sustained scholarly involvement and newer forms of entry. As a result, green economy research in Africa appears not as a fully stabilized author network, but as an expanding domain in which a few visible contributors coexist with a broader and still-developing authorship base.

3.5 Geographical configuration of the field

The geographical distribution of corresponding authors highlights a highly asymmetrical field. South Africa occupies the leading position by a clear margin, followed by the United Kingdom and China. A second group of countries, including Australia, Burkina Faso, Italy, Nigeria, Russia, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Belgium, Brazil, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Ghana, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, and Kenya,

appears with more limited publication counts. This distribution immediately suggests that green economy research on Africa is not produced exclusively within Africa itself. Rather, it emerges through a mixed geography combining African and extra-African academic spaces.

Figure 8: Corresponding Author's Countries

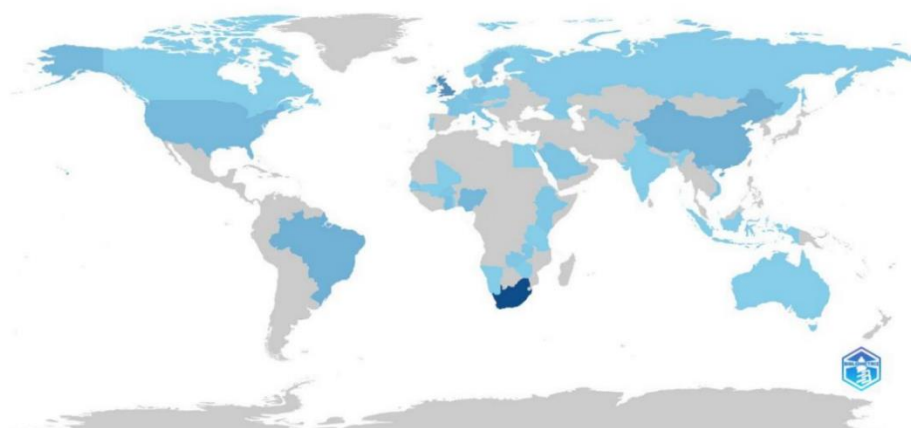


Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

The distinction between SCP and MCP in the corresponding authors' countries figure also provides a useful indication of collaboration patterns. South Africa does not merely stand out in terms of total volume; it also appears as a key node in both domestic and international publication activity. The United Kingdom and China similarly illustrate the external and collaborative dimensions of the field. This confirms that the literature is shaped by both national research capacities and transnational academic linkages.

Figure 9: Corresponding Author's Countries

Country Scientific Production



Elaborate by authors via Biblioshiny under R-studio

The world map and the country production over time graph reinforce this reading. South Africa emerges as the principal geographic anchor of the field, while the United Kingdom occupies a strong secondary

position. Other countries such as the United States, China, Brazil, and Nigeria also display visible trajectories, especially in the later years of the period. Overall, the temporal pattern at country level confirms that the field has become more internationalized over time, while remaining strongly polarized around a few leading countries. In this configuration, Morocco does not yet appear as a dominant bibliometric node, which is precisely why the article treats it as an analytical implication rather than as the central quantitative core of the corpus.

4. Discussion

The bibliometric findings reveal that green economy research in Africa has entered a phase of clear expansion, but that this growth has not yet translated into a fully stabilized and evenly structured field. The rise in annual scientific production, especially from 2020 onward, indicates that the topic has gained substantial academic visibility over the last few years. However, the uneven evolution of average citations per year suggests that the intellectual consolidation of the field remains less linear than its quantitative growth. In other words, the field is expanding rapidly in terms of publication output, but its recognition and stabilization through citation dynamics continue to fluctuate. This combination of acceleration and uneven consolidation is often characteristic of research domains that are gaining policy relevance and interdisciplinary appeal, yet are still negotiating their theoretical and methodological boundaries.

A second important result concerns the concentration of the literature across publication outlets. Although the corpus includes 66 sources, the field is clearly structured around a limited core of journals, with *Sustainability* and *Sustainable Development* occupying a particularly prominent position, followed by a smaller group of recurrent outlets. The Bradford and H-index results reinforce this observation by showing that visibility and influence are concentrated in a restricted set of journals rather than dispersed across a wide and balanced publication ecosystem. This suggests that green economy research in Africa, while expanding, still relies on a relatively narrow editorial infrastructure. Such concentration may help provide coherence and cumulative visibility, but it may also limit the diversity of theoretical traditions, regional perspectives, and disciplinary approaches represented in the field.

The author-level findings point in a similar direction. The field is not dominated by a very small number of highly prolific scholars, yet it is clearly shaped by a restricted nucleus of recurring contributors, particularly Asongu S., Nhamo G., and Zakari A. This pattern indicates an intermediate stage of intellectual structuring. On the one hand, the field remains sufficiently open to accommodate new entrants and heterogeneous contributions. On the other hand, it already shows the emergence of recognizable scholarly anchors who contribute to its continuity and visibility. This is an important result because it suggests that the intellectual organization of green economy research in Africa is neither fully fragmented nor fully stabilized. Rather, it is progressively consolidating around a limited but still evolving community of contributors.

The geographical configuration of the field is perhaps the most revealing result of the analysis. South Africa occupies a central and dominant position, both in terms of publication volume and in its role within domestic and international collaboration patterns. The United Kingdom and China also stand out as major contributors, while several other countries appear in more peripheral positions. This confirms that the literature on green economy in Africa is not produced exclusively from within the continent, but emerges through a mixed geography that combines African and extra-African research spaces. This result has important implications. It means that the intellectual production of the field is shaped not only by African development concerns, but also by external academic agendas, international collaboration networks, and broader global debates on sustainability and transition.

This asymmetrical geography also raises a deeper epistemic issue. If a large share of the literature is concentrated around a few countries and a limited number of publication channels, then the field may risk presenting a partial image of Africa while appearing to speak about the continent as a whole. The centrality of South Africa is understandable given its research infrastructure and visibility, but it may also generate a disproportionate representation of its experience relative to other African contexts. From this perspective, the bibliometric mapping suggests that the field is not only structured by thematic priorities, but also by unequal research capacities and uneven international integration. This is a key point for understanding both the strengths and the blind spots of current green economy scholarship in Africa.

These results also help clarify the position of Morocco within the field. Morocco does not emerge as a dominant bibliometric node in the corpus, either at the level of source concentration, author prominence, or country-level visibility. However, this absence should not be read as evidence of irrelevance. On the contrary, it points to an important research opportunity. Morocco appears less as a consolidated center of publication within the current corpus than as a promising and still underdeveloped analytical space. Given the country's growing engagement with renewable energy, sustainability strategies, and green transition policies, the bibliometric results suggest that Morocco deserves more explicit scholarly attention within African green economy research. In this sense, the article's contribution is not to artificially magnify Morocco's current bibliometric weight, but rather to show that the existing structure of the literature leaves clear room for a stronger Moroccan research agenda.

Taken together, the discussion points to a field characterized by four main features: rapid recent expansion, editorial concentration, partial intellectual consolidation, and strong geographical asymmetry. These features indicate that green economy research in Africa has reached a stage where mapping the field is no longer merely descriptive, but analytically necessary. Such mapping makes it possible to identify who shapes the field, through which journals, from which countries, and under what patterns of collaboration. This is precisely what gives the bibliometric perspective its value. Rather than treating the literature as a neutral accumulation of publications, it reveals the architecture through which the field is being constructed.

From a broader perspective, the findings invite future research to move in at least three directions. First, more work is needed on underrepresented African contexts in order to reduce the current territorial imbalance of the literature. Second, future studies should explore more explicitly the intellectual links between green economy, development, energy transition, and sustainability governance, especially in contexts where these questions are not yet bibliometrically visible. Third, more nationally grounded and theoretically explicit research is needed in the Moroccan case, so that Morocco can be integrated into the African scholarly conversation not only as a policy example, but as a fully articulated research context. In that sense, the bibliometric analysis offered here should be seen as a foundation for future empirical and conceptual developments rather than as an endpoint in itself.

Conclusion

This article set out to map and structure the scholarly landscape of green economy research in Africa through a bibliometric perspective. Based on a corpus of 84 documents published between 2010 and 2024, the analysis shows that the field has undergone a clear process of expansion, especially in recent years, while remaining marked by uneven patterns of intellectual consolidation. The growth of annual scientific production confirms the increasing visibility of green economy as an academic topic in the African context. However, the more irregular evolution of citation patterns suggests that the field is still in a phase of progressive stabilization rather than full maturity. In this sense, green economy research in Africa appears as a rapidly growing domain whose scientific architecture is becoming more visible, but not yet fully balanced or homogenized.

The results also reveal that this literature is structured around a relatively concentrated editorial and scholarly core. A limited number of journals, particularly *Sustainability* and *Sustainable Development*, play a central role in organizing the publication landscape, while a restricted set of recurring authors contributes to the continuity of the field. This configuration indicates that the literature is no longer scattered in a purely fragmented way, yet it has not reached the level of diversification that would characterize a fully stabilized domain. The field is therefore situated in an intermediate stage, combining consolidation around visible publication channels and contributors with the continued arrival of newer journals and authors.

One of the most significant findings of the study concerns the geographical asymmetry of knowledge production. South Africa clearly emerges as the main bibliometric anchor of the field, followed by the United Kingdom and China, while other countries occupy more secondary or peripheral positions. This result shows that research on green economy in Africa is shaped by a mixed geography of knowledge production, combining African and extra-African academic spaces. It also suggests that the literature is not only organized by thematic relevance, but also by unequal research capacities, international collaboration networks, and differentiated access to publication visibility. From this perspective, the bibliometric structure of the field reflects broader asymmetries in the production and circulation of scientific knowledge on African green transitions.

For Morocco, the analysis does not point to a dominant bibliometric position within the current corpus. Yet this relative absence should not be interpreted as marginality in substantive terms. On the contrary, it highlights an important research opportunity. Morocco appears less as a fully consolidated publication hub than as a promising and still underexplored analytical space within the African green economy agenda. Given its increasing engagement with renewable energy, sustainability strategies, and green transition policies, the Moroccan case deserves stronger scholarly integration into the continental literature. The contribution of this article therefore lies not in overstating Morocco's current bibliometric visibility, but in showing that the present structure of the field leaves clear room for a more explicit Moroccan research trajectory.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by providing a structured overview of the growth, concentration, and geographical organization of green economy research in Africa. It shows that bibliometric mapping is not merely a descriptive exercise, but an analytical tool for identifying how a field is being built, who shapes it, through which outlets, and from which territorial locations. At the same time, the article opens several directions for future research. More work is needed on underrepresented African contexts, on the diversification of publication spaces, and on the strengthening of nationally grounded yet internationally connected research agendas. In this respect, Morocco constitutes a particularly relevant case for future studies seeking to enrich and rebalance the African scholarly conversation on green economy.

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