

PROFESSOR SARA SAVASTANO

SEPTEMBER 2025

Associate Professor of Economics

University of Rome Tor Vergata,
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2017: Awarded the Italian National Scientific Qualification (D.D. 1532-2016) as Full Professor in Economics (ECON-01/A), Economic Policy (ECON-02/A), and Agricultural and Food Economics (AGRI-01/A).

#EconomicsForImpact, #PolicyAndPractice, #DevelopmentEconomics, #CapacityBuilding,
#AcademicToPolicy, #ImprovedSkills #EducationAndJobCreation, #KnowledgeTransfer, #GlobalPartnerships

PERSONAL

Date of Birth: December 6th, 1972 in Chieti (IT) - Citizenship: Italian

LANGUAGE

Italian (native), English (Fluent), French (Fluent), Spanish (Fluent)

EDUCATION

P.h.D. in Economics, (Dottorato di Ricerca), University of Rome "Tor Vergata" - Italy (2003).

B.A. in Economics, (Laurea in Economia e Commercio), University of Rome "Tor Vergata" - Italy (1997).

Baccalaureat B – Economics - French School Lycée Chateaubriand de Rome

SOFTWARE

MS OFFICE Professional Plus 2021, STATA 19, R (Basic), ARCGIS (Basic),

Memberships: International Consortium on Applied Bioeconomy Research, International Association of Agriculture Economists, European Association of Agriculture Economist, Italian Association of Development Economists, Italian Association of Agricultural and Applied Economics

PROFILE

An accomplished economist and professor with extensive experience in development, agricultural, and food economics. My professional journey has taken me from **academia**—where I built a foundation in rigorous **research and teaching**—to international organizations like the **World Bank**, **FAO**, and **IFAD** where I have understood the real need **bridge the gap between research and policy**, between researchers and operational teams and highlighted the critical need to translate data and evidence into actionable solutions. This experience has instilled in me a core philosophy: "**Stop, Think, and Innovate.**" I am passionate about developing cost-effective, data-driven solutions and building the capacity of professionals at all levels. I build **strong partnerships and network** to generate and share knowledge, improve visibility and reputation. Now, back at the University, my mission is to train the next generation of economists and professionals. By equipping them with rigorous, both theoretical and evidence-based tools, I aim to **improve skills** to solve real-world problems, inform policy, and **drive meaningful job creation**.

2025- CURRENT

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMY AND FINANCE

UNIVERSITY OF ROME TOR VERGATA

2018-2025

DIRECTOR RESEARCH AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT DIVISION

IFAD - INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT

As Director of the Research and Impact Assessment Division at IFAD, I pioneered a strategic vision focused on transforming data into actionable evidence. Faced with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, I innovated a new framework for data collection and analysis that significantly reduced costs, built local capacity, and fundamentally enhanced the credibility of our evaluation work. My leadership enabled the organization to measure its long-term impact and set a new standard for scientific rigor in the development sector.

Key Achievements

1. *Pioneered a Cost-Effective, Agile M&E4I Framework*

I created the **M&E4I (Monitoring & Evaluation for Impact) framework** to generate sound, credible, and cost-effective data. This framework strategically integrated impact assessment and M&E surveys, allowing for the use of streamlined and rigorous surveys. By combining **baseline, midline, and endline data**, I was able to conduct robust causal analysis while substantially **reducing impact assessment costs**. This innovative approach not only ensured data was cost-effective but also improved the quality of M&E data and made it directly applicable to policy design.

2. *Led a Foundational Data Harmonization Initiative*

I launched and led the harmonization of a decade of household-level impact assessment (IA) data (IFAD10-IFAD12 IA data). This was a major strategic achievement that provided the institution with a unique **longitudinal dataset** by integrating socioeconomic information with georeferenced variables like GIS coordinates. This foundational work enabled a comprehensive **"Decade of Impact" analysis**, allowing for the first time the ability to measure the long-term effects of IFAD's contributions to rural transformation. This project significantly improved data quality, consistency, and reliability for robust causal analysis.

3. *Championed Transparency and Capacity-Building*

I am a champion of **data transparency and analytical capacity-building**. I instituted a pioneering three-tier external peer review process for all impact assessments. This process included a highly esteemed Advisory Panel, a rigorous peer review, and a commitment to **"push-button" data replication** to ensure computational reproducibility and build trust with policymakers. Complementing this, I developed and deployed user-friendly tools like **Data Kits** and **K-Packs** to simplify complex evaluation methods and make them more cost-effective. By embedding these tools into local systems, I empowered national institutions to build long-term analytical skills and take ownership of their development narratives.

Leadership and Partnerships

My personal management philosophy is **"STOP, THINK, and INNOVATE."** This approach combines strategic reflection with innovation and mentorship. I leveraged my international academic network to strengthen IFAD's credibility and reputation, a practice I refer to as **"partnership for knowledge generation."** A key example is the international conference I organized in June 2022, on [Jobs, innovation and rural value chains in the context of climate transition: Bridging the gap between research and policy](#) which featured Nobel Laureate Joshua Angrist (MIT) and World Food Prize Winner David Zilberman (UC Berkeley). I also built strong collaborations with other Rome-based agencies (FAO and WFP) as well as the World Bank Office in Rome.

[VIDEO IFAD 2022 International Conference](#)

[Pics Day 1 ; Pics Day 2 ; Pics Day 3 ; Pics Day 3 Conference Dinner](#)

Working and Networking Workshop 2023

In June 2023, I launched a three-day Working and Networking workshop in collaboration with Rome-based UN agencies (RBAs), the World Bank, and the University of Palermo. Its primary goal was to deepen knowledge on climate change and innovation while fostering a unique, collaborative environment for scholars and experts to network for knowledge sharing and professional development.

A New Approach to Professional Development

This event went far beyond standard training by pioneering an interactive "[Working & Networking](#)" format. Unlike traditional workshops that often rely on one-way lectures, this multi-directional approach gave participants the opportunity to receive constructive feedback on their own research from senior scholars and international experts. It included hands-on sessions and case studies that demonstrated how international organizations use data for evidence-based policymaking, building a bridge between academic research and practical application. This stimulated a natural environment to know each other for future internships or short term collaboration. The workshop's success was marked by its high visibility on social media and its innovative format, which has since been adopted for subsequent conferences. A similar format was used to stimulate interactions between international expert and researchers at academic conference in 2023 at the European Association of Agriculture Economist Congress in Rennes, and at the African Association of Agriculture Economist and at the Congress of the International Association of Agriculture Economist in New Delhi. .

2016-2018

SENIOR ECONOMIST - DECIG

THE WORLD BANK

From 2016 to 2018, I served as a Senior Economist in the Development Research Group at The World Bank, focusing on the **Enabling the Business of Agriculture (EBA)** indicators. My primary responsibility was to develop the **Land Indicator for the EBA Reports** in collaboration with Klaus Deininger.

In this role, I also provided guidance on research and policy initiatives, and helped advance the overall EBA policy agenda. .I promoted and organized the ICABR 2018 Conference within the World Bank on "[Disruptive Innovations, Value Chains, and Rural Development](#)" a collaborative effort with different stakeholders within and outside the World Bank: academia, private sector, international academic associations in the field of agriculture and rural development, governments, Global Practices, Senior Staff and Managers, and Executive Board Members of the World Bank Group. For this conference, I secured a large grant to sponsor the participation of young scholars from Sub-Saharan Africa and negotiated a grant with the Italian government that allowed more than 100 Italian students to participate. This was a critical effort in promoting capacity building and offering career guidance to young scholars from developing countries. During the conference I have organized a mentorship and job creation event, the "[Speed Mentorship and Job Dating event](#)". The idea of the event was to link professors of the ICABR consortium with PhD and Master students who will attend the conference and receive feedback on their thesis. At the same time, managers of the World Bank will make a short 8 mn interview to post doc, PhD and master students for future internships or short term collaboration.

2008-2016

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

UNIVERSITY OF ROME TOR VERGATA

For eight years, I served as an Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Rome Tor Vergata, a period defined by a commitment to research, teaching, and academic leadership. I published **15 papers** in leading journals, including two in the prestigious *Journal of Development Economics* (JDE), and contributed to several books. My research efforts were supported by grants from major international organizations like the World Bank and FAO. Grants included three Letters of Agreement between my university department and FAO and the World Bank

In the classroom, I taught a wide array of subjects, from **micro and macroeconomics** to **monetary economics** and **cost-benefit analysis**, guiding both undergraduate and graduate students. A key part of my role was mentorship; I successfully supervised **15 undergraduate and 5 PhD students**, all of whom defended their theses. As the Director of External Relations and Placement for the Master of Science in Economics, I was able to place graduates in top-tier institutions, including the World Bank, FAO, IFPRI and IFAD.

Beyond teaching, I was deeply involved in building academic networks and organizing events. I have an unparalleled record as a conference and workshop organizer, most notably a program on **impact evaluation** I co-organized with my colleague Prof. Daniela Vuri in collaboration with MIT, taught by renowned economist Joshua Angrist <http://economia.uniroma2.it/masteringmetrics>. Since 2011, I have been a regular participant at the World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty. I also founded and served as the secretary general for the **International Consortium on Applied Bioeconomy Research (ICABR)**, a network of 18 international universities and research centers. My time at the university was a testament to my dedication to advancing economic knowledge, nurturing future economists, and fostering global collaboration.

2005-2008

SENIOR ECONOMIST - EVALUATION UNIT OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT

ITALIAN MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

From 2005 to 2008, I served as a Senior Economist at the Unit of Evaluation of the Italian Ministry of Economic Development, where I played a central role in the **evaluation of public investment**. I contributed to develop, test, and disseminate rigorous methodologies for evaluating projects and programs at every stage, from initial planning to completion.

I co-authored a key publication on **guidelines for financial and economic analysis** for projects in critical sectors like infrastructure, water, and agriculture. My responsibilities also included supervising and monitoring feasibility studies submitted by Italian regions and provinces for both European and national funding. I was responsible for assessing the full spectrum of these projects, from their financial viability and cost-effectiveness to their broader **socio-economic impact**, ensuring they aligned with national economic policy.

2000-2005

WORLD BANK – FAO – ITALIAN PRIVATE SECTOR

CONSULTANTS

Free Lance consultant for the World Bank and FAO in applied research projects in agriculture and rural development that led to publication in peer-reviewed journal.

ORBITER, RIMET:

Consultant, Feasibility Studies, and Financial and Economics Cost Benefit Analysis for Infrastructure and Services Projects

1995-1999

AFRICAFFE'

Business owner and manager of the AFRICAFFE', a small pub restaurant. I was responsible for the establishment's overall success, from financial management and staff supervision to menu and inventory oversight. My role also involved creating a welcoming atmosphere for customers and promoting the business through engaging events. As the resident chef, I curated the menu, and as an event organizer, I hosted a variety of live music, artistic events, and disco nights to attract and entertain our customers.

GRANTS

World Bank-CEIS

- **2018:** Capacity building for Sub-Saharan African scholars on agriculture and rural development
- **2015:** Learning program for Sub-Saharan African scholars on impact evaluation, empirical methods, and modern econometric practices.

World Bank - CEIS

- **2013:** Land and Poverty Reduction.

FAO - CEIS

- **2015:** Evidence-based policy and program support for the FISP and CSA Strategic Road Map in Malawi and Zambia.
- **2014:** Knowledge products to support effective policymaking for Climate-Smart Agriculture and Social Protection.
- **2012:** Smallholder agriculture in transition: behavior, constraints, and policies in Ethiopia and Kenya.

PUBLICATIONS

REFEREED PUBLICATIONS: JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. Hossain M., Mendiratta V., and **S. Savastano**, (2024). Agricultural and rural development interventions and poverty reduction: Global evidence from 16 impact assessment studies. GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY, vol. 43, 100806, ISSN: 2211-9124, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2024.100806>
2. Timu, A. G., Hazell, P., and **S. Savastano**, (2024). An approach for assessing whether agricultural projects help smallholders transition to better livelihood strategies: A Malawian case study. FOOD POLICY, vol. 128, 102728, ISSN: 0306-9192, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2024.102728>.
3. Pinca V., Valle S., De Muro P., **Savastano S.**, and S. Severini, (2024). "Assessing the economic, social and environmental potential of wild and domesticated olive growing options in a far Western District of Nepal." AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS, ISSN: 0308-521X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2023.103841>
4. Songsermsawas, T., Mabiso, A., Arslan, A., Chiarella, C., and **S. Savastano**, (2023). Agricultural value chains and food security in the Pacific: Evidence from Papua

- New Guinea and Solomon Islands. GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY, vol. 39, 100719, ISSN: 2211-9124, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2023.100719>.
5. Tiwari S., **Savastano S.**, Improtta M., and P. Winters, (2022), "Rural economic activities of people with disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa", OXFORD DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, vol. 50, p. 321-335, ISSN: 1360-0818, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2022.2039606>
 6. Kilic, T., Zezza, A., Carletto G., and **S. Savastano**, (2017), "Missing(ness) in Action: Selectivity Bias in GPS-Based Land Area Measurements", WORLD DEVELOPMENT, Volume 92, April 2017, Pages 143–157, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.11.018>
 7. Binswanger H.P., and **S. Savastano**, (2017), "Agricultural Intensification: The Status in Six African Countries", FOOD POLICY, Volume 67, February 2017, Pages 26–40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2016.09.021>
 8. Deininger, K., **Savastano, S.** and F. Xia, (2017), "Smallholders' Land Access in Sub-Saharan Africa: A new landscape?", FOOD POLICY, Volume 67, February 2017, Pages 78–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2016.09.012>
 9. Coromaldi, M., Pallante G., and **S. Savastano**, (2015), "Adoption of modern varieties, farmers' welfare, and crop biodiversity: Evidence from Uganda", ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS, Vol. 119, November, pages 246-258, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2015.09.004>
 10. Carletto G., **Savastano S.**, and A. Zezza, (2013), "Fact or Artefact: The Impact of Measurement Errors on the Farm-Productivity Relationship", JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS, Volume 103, July 2013, Pages 254–261, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2013.03.004>, and World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 5908, December 2011
 11. Deininger, K., **Savastano S.**, and G. Carletto, (2012), "Land Fragmentation, Cropland Abandonment, and Land Market Operation in Albania", WORLD DEVELOPMENT vol. 40, issue 10 October, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.010>, and World Bank Policy Research Working Paper n. 6032 (April 2012)
 12. Deininger, K., Carletto, G., **Savastano S.**, and J. Muwongue, (2012), "Can diaries help in improving agricultural production statistics? Evidence from Uganda" JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS, Volume 98, Issue 1, Pages 42-50 (May 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2011.05.007>
 13. Becchetti, L., and **S. Savastano**, (2010). "The money-happiness relationship in transition countries: evidence from Albania," TRANSITION STUDIES REVIEW, Springer, vol. 17(1), pages 39-62, May, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11300-010-0135-5>
 14. **Savastano S.**, and P.L. Scandizzo, (2009), "Optimal Farm Size in an Uncertain Land Market: the Case of Kyrgyz Republic", AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, 2009, vol. 40, issue s1, pages 745-758, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1574-0862.2009.00412.x>
 15. Kilic, T, Carletto, G, Miluka, J, and **S. Savastano**, (2009), "Rural Non-farm Income and Its Impact on Agriculture: Evidence from Albania", AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS Volume 40 Issue 2, Pages 119 – 263, March 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1574-0862.2009.00366.x>

16. Feder G., and **S. Savastano**, (2006), "The Role Of Opinion Leaders In The Diffusion of New Knowledge: The Case Of Integrated Pest Management", WORLD DEVELOPMENT Vol. 34 No. 7 (July 2006) and World Bank Policy Research Working Paper n. 3916, May 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.12.004>

BOOK

1. Ruggeri Laderchi, C. and **S. Savastano**, (2013), Poverty and Social Inclusion in the Western Balkan Countries, Springer, ISBN 978-1-4614-4944-7, VIII, 321

BOOK CHAPTERS

1. Scandizzo, P.L. and **S. Savastano**, (2017), "Revisiting the farm size productivity relationship: New evidence from sub-Sahara African countries", In Agriculture and Rural Development in a Globalizing World, edited by Prabhu Pingali and Gershon Feder, Chapter 3 Earthscan Food and Agriculture Series. London: Routledge
2. Feder, G. and **S. Savastano**, (2017), "Modern agricultural technology adoption in sub Saharan Africa: a cross-country analysis", In Agriculture and Rural Development in a Globalizing World, edited by Prabhu Pingali and Gershon Feder, Chapter 2 Earthscan Food and Agriculture Series. London: Routledge
3. Larson D., **Savastano, S.**, Murray, S., and Palacios-Lopez, A., (2015) "Are women less productive farmers ? how markets and risk affect fertilizer use, productivity, and measured gender effects in Uganda," in "In Pursuit of an African Green Revolution", by Keijiro Otsuka, and Donald Larson, Springer. and Policy Research Working Paper Series 7241, The World Bank

REFEREEING

American Journal of Agriculture Economics, Eastern European Economics, Food Policy, Agricultural Economics, Journal of Agriculture Economics, AgBioForum, Agricultural and Food Economics, International Journal of Biotechnology, World Development

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

International Consortium on Applied Bioeconomy Research (ICABR)

- **2021:** Plenary Speaker, "Food Systems & SDGs: Actions Taken and Challenges Ahead," XXV ICABR Conference, Ravello, Italy.
- **2020:** Plenary Speaker, "Promoting digital agriculture in response to COVID-19," ICABR Webinar.
- **2020:** Plenary Speaker, "Agriculture Production in Africa," ICABR Online Conference.
- **2019:** Plenary Speaker, "Exploring the role of innovation, finance and regulation regarding the development of sustainable food and health systems," 23rd ICABR Conference, Ravello, Italy.
- **2009-2016:** Conference organization and session presenter, Ravello, Italy.

Annual World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty

- **2012-2018:** Conference organization and presentation, Washington D.C., USA.

Italian Development Economists Association (SITES)

- **2021-2024:** Plenary Speaker, Naples.
- **2018:** Plenary Speaker and presented a paper at a conference, Rome, Italy.
- **2014 & 2015:** Presented papers at conferences, Florence, Italy.

International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE)

- **2024:** Plenary and organized a session, New Delhi.

- **2021:** Presentation at Organized session at a Congress online.
- **2015:** Presented a paper at a Congress, Milan, Italy.
- **2012:** Presented a paper at a Congress, Iguassu, Brazil.
- **2009:** Presented a paper at a Congress, Beijing, China.

European Association of Agricultural Economists (EAAE)

- **2011:** Presented a paper at a Congress, Zurich, Switzerland.
- **2010:** Presented a paper at a Conference, Berlin, Germany.
- **2007:** Presented a paper at a Conference, Budapest, Hungary.

African Association of Agricultural Economists (AAAE)

- **2013:** Presented a paper and organized a session at a Congress, Hammamet, Tunisia.
- **2010:** Presented a paper at a Congress, Cape Town, South Africa.

International Agricultural Trade Research Consortium (IATRC)

- **2013:** Presented a paper at a Conference, Seville, Spain.
- **2012:** Presented a paper at a Conference, San Diego, USA.

Italian Association of Agricultural and Applied Economics (AIEAA)

- **2013:** Presented a paper at a Conference, Parma, Italy.
- **2012:** Presented a paper at a Conference, Trento, Italy.
- **2010:** Presented a paper at a Conference, Campobasso, Italy.

Centre for the Study of African Economies (CSAE) Conference

- **2018:** Presented a paper at a conference at the University of Oxford.

Other Engagements

- **2021:** Plenary Speaker, "3rd Edition International School for Advanced Training. Impact Evaluation of Development Policies."
- **2021:** Speaker at a webinar on the "World Development's editorial vision, research priorities and future directions."
- **2019:** Plenary Speaker, IAMO Forum, Halle, Germany.
- **2009:** Invited Speaker at The 2009 Pre-G8 Summit Conference, "Global Financial Crisis: National Solutions, Geopolitical Impacts," Rome.
- **2008:** Invited Speaker at the Italian Ministry of Economic Development, "Social Accounting Matrix and Impact Evaluation."
- **2008:** Invited Speaker at the University of Trento, "Land Market in Eastern European Countries."
- **2007:** Invited Speaker at a FAO workshop on "Rural Farm and Non Farm Linkages," Rome.
- **2006:** Invited Speaker at a FAO workshop on "Governance, Coordination and Distribution along Commodity Value Chains," Rome.

SKILLS & INTERESTS Cycling, Trekking, Italian Cooking, Parties with friends and colleagues

Neuroeconomics, Behavioral Economics

AAWE: American Association of Wine Economists

Conference: Bozen (Italy) 2012

Beeronomics: The Economics of Beer and Brewing

Conferences: Leuven (Belgium) 2009, Munich (Germany) 2011

Choconomics: Economics and Politics of Chocolate *Conference: Leuven (Belgium) 2012*

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for research and selection purposes (D.Lgs. n.196/2003).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. Nobile', written in a cursive style.