

1 The effect of mineral and organic nutrient input on yields and nitrogen balances in western  
2 Kenya

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4 **Running head:** Nitrogen balances in smallholder maize systems

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19 **Abstract:**

20 Soil fertility declines constrain crop productivity on smallholder farms in sub-Saharan Africa.  
21 Government and non-government organizations promote the use of mineral fertilizer and  
22 improved seed varieties to redress nutrient depletion and increase crop yields. Similarly,  
23 rotational cropping with nitrogen (N)-fixing legume cover crops or trees is promoted to improve  
24 soil fertility and crop yields. We examined maize grain yields and partial N balances on 24  
25 smallholder maize farms in western Kenya, where interventions have increased access to  
26 agricultural inputs and rotational legume technologies. On these farms, mineral fertilizer inputs  
27 ranged from 0 to 161 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> (mean = 48 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>), and maize grain yields ranged from 1-7  
28 tons ha<sup>-1</sup> (mean = 3.4 t ha<sup>-1</sup>). Partial N balances ranged from large losses (-112 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>) to large  
29 gains (93 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>) with a mean of -3 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>. Maize grain yields increased significantly with  
30 N inputs (from fertilizer and legumes) in 2012 but not in 2013 when rainfall was lower. Nitrogen  
31 inputs of 40 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> were required to produce 3 tons of maize ha<sup>-1</sup>. N balances varied both  
32 among farms and between years, highlighting the importance of tracking inputs and outputs on  
33 multiple farms over multiple years before drawing conclusions about nutrient management, soil  
34 fertility outcomes and food security. The addition of N from legume rotations was a strong  
35 predictor of grain yields and positive N balances in lower-yielding farms in both years. This  
36 suggested that legume rotations may be particularly important for buffering yields from climate  
37 variability and maintaining N balances in low rainfall years.

38

39 **Keywords:** Nitrogen balance; sub-Saharan Africa; maize yields; smallholder agriculture; legume  
40 rotations; improved fallow

41

## 42 **1. Introduction**

43 Continuous, low-input agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has removed nutrients from the  
44 soil without replenishing nutrient stocks (Moebius-Clune et al., 2011). As such, while most other  
45 regions in the tropics have seen increases in food production over the past fifty years, per capita  
46 yields in SSA have remained the same or even declined (Hazell and Wood, 2008). The “African  
47 Green Revolution” (AGR; Annan 2004) is an effort to increase use of nutrients, high-yielding  
48 seed varieties and extension services to increase low crop yields in SSA (Denning et al., 2009;  
49 Sanchez et al., 2009). Numerous national government agencies, non-government and  
50 international organizations support programs that provide these inputs at subsidized rates or  
51 through rural credit. Recent studies show that local cereal yields may double or even triple where  
52 adoption rates of both improved seeds and fertilizers are high (Denning et al., 2009; Nziguheba  
53 et al., 2010; Sanchez et al., 2007; Sanchez, 2015; Snapp et al., 2010).

54 The inclusion of legume cover rotations (often called “improved fallows”) on farms has  
55 been promoted as a strategy for soil fertility improvement in SSA for many years (Buresh and  
56 Tian, 1998; Kiptot et al., 2007; Scherr, 1995; Sileshi et al., 2008). Fast-growing tree, shrub, and  
57 herbaceous legumes are grown for six months to two years after which they are cut and the fields  
58 planted in a cereal crop. By fixing atmospheric N<sub>2</sub>, these legumes increase N inputs to a farm  
59 field. Their N contribution may partially replace or complement mineral fertilizer application  
60 while simultaneously increasing soil carbon (C) stocks (Sanchez, 2002). However, the amount of  
61 N<sub>2</sub> fixed by rotational legumes can vary from 24 to 142 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> depending on the species  
62 present and their plant density (Giller, 2001). Such technologies are often rapidly tested by  
63 farmers when introduced but widespread, continued adoption remains limited (Gathumbi et al.,

64 2002b; Kiptot et al., 2007). Negative nutrient balances remain common at the farm and even  
65 country-level in SSA (Cobo et al., 2010; de Graaff et al., 2011; Nandwa and Bekunda, 1998; Van  
66 den Bosch et al., 1998).

67         Intensification of agriculture with higher fertilizer rates typically leads to imbalances  
68 between inputs and outputs (Heathwaite et al., 1993; Liu et al., 2010; Oenema et al., 2003;  
69 Vitousek et al., 2009). Resulting nutrient surpluses can cause declines in soil biodiversity (Wood  
70 et al., 2015a) and nutrient loading of terrestrial, aquatic, and atmospheric systems (Forester et al.  
71 2007, Carpenter et al., 1998; Vitousek et al., 2009). These consequences occur widely in parts of  
72 the US, China, and Europe and have the potential to occur in locations such as SSA where  
73 nutrient inputs to farms may begin to increase substantially.

74         Because nutrient balances summarize the nutrient inputs and outputs of a farming system  
75 (Oenema et al., 2003), they are useful tools for farmers, extension agents, and policy makers  
76 when assessing the sustainability of the system. Nevertheless, these assessments must be  
77 considered in terms of the overall soil fertility status, the length of time that nutrient depletion  
78 has occurred, as well as other factors.

79         The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of farm management practices (e.g.,  
80 fertilizer and legume rotations) on grain yields and nitrogen balances in smallholder maize farms  
81 in East Africa. We wanted to (i) test if higher N inputs lead to higher maize grain yields and less  
82 negative N balances, (ii) quantify the amount of N contributed through rotational legumes and  
83 determine their effect on yields and N balances, and (iii) determine the importance of soil  
84 chemical and physical properties on maize yields and N balances. We hypothesized that farms  
85 with the highest fertilizer application rates would have the highest grain yields and more positive  
86 N balances (more surplus N) across all farms regardless of site-specific soil properties. We

87 expected farms receiving no or little fertilizer to have the lowest grain yields and negative N  
88 balances (N deficits). Finally, we hypothesized that farms cultivating rotational legumes would  
89 have intermediate maize grain yields and N balances. We expected maize grain yields to be  
90 positively correlated to N input and soil N concentrations and we expected that soils with legume  
91 rotations would have highest soil C content across all farms.

92 To test these hypotheses, we surveyed farmers participating in the Sauri Millennium  
93 Village Project, where agroforestry and rotational legume technology and trainings have been  
94 promoted since the early 1990s and where fertilizer subsidy programs were promoted from 2005  
95 to 2008.

96

## 97 **2. Methods**

### 98 *2.1. Study Sites*

99 This study was conducted on 24 maize farms in the Sauri village cluster of the Millennium  
100 Village Project (MVP) in Yala Division, Siaya District, Nyanza Province, Kenya (Fig 1). The  
101 area has a mean annual temperature of 24°C and an average monthly range from 14 to 34°C.  
102 Rainfall is bimodal with a mean annual precipitation of 1800 mm divided into a long rainy  
103 season from April to June and a short rainy season from September to December (Nziguheba et  
104 al., 2010; Palm et al., 2010). The soils are Kandiualfic Eutrodox (Ferralsols), and are well-  
105 drained sandy clay loams. Although the soils are derived from fertile volcanic parent materials,  
106 several decades of cultivation have rendered them highly depleted in soil organic matter, N and  
107 plant available phosphorus (P; Awiti et al., 2008; Bossio et al., 2005; Kimetu et al., 2008).

108 The farming system is maize-based, with other crops such as beans, sweet potatoes,  
109 bananas/plantains, cassava, kale, tomatoes, and onions (Dixon et al., 2001). Land area is limited

110 and farmers cultivate an average of 0.5 ha, with landholdings ranging from 0.1 to 1.6 ha with  
111 about 70% of the people living on less than \$1 per day (Chen and Ravallion, 2007). Average  
112 maize yields have remained at 1 ton per ha for the last decade (FAO, 2013) in comparison 3 tons  
113 ha<sup>-1</sup> in India, 5 in China and an average of 10 tons ha<sup>-1</sup> in the US and Europe (Sanchez, 2015).

114 A primary intervention of the MVP in Sauri is to increase maize yields through  
115 subsidized high-yielding maize varieties and mineral fertilizers (primarily diammonium  
116 phosphate [DAP] and urea). If mineral fertilizer is used, it is typically applied basally with about  
117 one-third of N added at planting as DAP and the remaining two-thirds applied 5-8 weeks later as  
118 urea when the maize has 4-5 “true leaves” (V4-V5 stage). Maize is planted with the onset of  
119 rains in late March-early April and it is harvested in late August after being allowed to dry in the  
120 fields.

121 Legume rotation systems have been promoted in Sauri for about 20 years and are also  
122 part of the MVP interventions. These types of short term maize-legume rotations are often called  
123 “improved fallows” if the legume is a tree or a shrub (Mafongoya et al., 2006). Here, we refer to  
124 them as “legume rotations” as the farmers variously used legume tree, shrubs, or herbaceous  
125 cover crops.

## 126 2.2. Farm surveys

127 To locate study farms, we visited 42 farmers’ fields in January of 2012. Initially, the farms were  
128 placed into three nutrient input categories: *high fertilizer*, *low fertilizer*, and *legume rotation* by  
129 visually assessing the amount of maize stover (stems and leaves) and presence of *Striga*, a  
130 parasitic weed species, and an indicator of low soil N (Franke et al., 2006). We identified sets of  
131 farms that were located within 200 m of one another and along the same contour or slope to  
132 control for soil type. Sets of farms included two or three of the different nutrient input categories.

133 Although the initial categorization of farms by management was useful for identifying farms  
134 with different practices, we found that a few farmers who added little fertilizer the first year,  
135 added considerably more the second year. This variability in inputs led us to eliminate the  
136 categorical approach, and all data were analyzed with N input for each year as a predictor  
137 variable instead of input category.

138 Farmers were interviewed several times in May and June 2012, once with a different  
139 researcher present, and once with no researchers present (only a translator) to determine  
140 historical maize yields, fertilizer and manure application (during the past ten years), additional  
141 crops or intercrops, farm age and management history. We found yield numbers were consistent  
142 among the multiple interview situations, but fertilizer reporting often differed. Farms where  
143 fertilizer data differed substantially or was inconsistent between interview sessions were  
144 excluded from the final set of study farms. Ultimately, we restricted our field monitoring to 24  
145 farms within seven villages (Fig 1) that met our criteria for dependability yield and fertilizer  
146 reporting. We then selected one field per farm on which to monitor inputs, management, and  
147 yield (Table S1). In July of 2012, we revisited farms and performed similar recall tests on  
148 fertilizer application in the long rains of 2013. In August 2013, and we measured farm field area  
149 by taking several waypoints along the farm perimeter using GPS (Garmin GPSMap 64).

### 150 *2.3. Soil sampling and analysis*

151 In May of 2012 soil samples were collected from each of the study fields at 0-20 cm and 20-50  
152 cm depths using a 7-cm diameter bucket auger. Samples were taken from eight random locations  
153 within the preselected field and composited at each depth (2 samples per farm). A sub-sample  
154 was retained for nutrient and texture analysis. Soil samples were sun-dried and sieved to 2 mm.  
155 Soil texture was determined using the hydrometer method (Gee and Bauder, 1986), organic C by



156 Walkley-Black wet oxidation (Nelson and Sommers, 1982), total N by the micro-Kjeldhal  
157 digestion method. Soil pH was determined by 1:2 soil to water slurry (Hanna combination  
158 pH/EC/TDS/temperature probe, HI 98129). Water holding capacity (WHC) was measured on  
159 soils that were fully saturated and allowed to drain for 2 hours at which time soils were then  
160 weighed, dried at 105°C for 48 hours (or until a constant weight was attained) and re-weighed.

161 In June 2012, we re-sampled soils for chemical properties using a 2-cm diameter soil  
162 probe; 20 samples were collected per field (0-20 cm) and composited. A subsample of sieved soil  
163 was sun-dried and used to determine extractable Ca, Mg, P, Al, B, Ba, Cu, Fe, Mn, Na, and Z  
164 (Mehlich III extraction; 5-g soil in 20 mL solution; 5 min shake; (Mehlich, 1984). The solution  
165 was analyzed on an inductively coupled plasma spectrometer (Varian Vista MPX Radial ICP-  
166 OES).

167 In October and November of 2012, we measured bulk density with a slide hammer using  
168 a stacked-ring method (Core Sampler Complete, AMS Idaho, USA). We used bulk density (g  
169 cm<sup>-3</sup>) to calculate soil N stock (0-20 cm and 20-50 cm), which was used a potential control  
170 variable in the statistical analysis.

#### 171 *2.4. Estimating maize yields*

172 In July 2012 and 2013, we established three 3-m x 3-m yield plots on each preselected maize  
173 field. Plot locations were randomized, but we avoided farm edges and unique features (such as a  
174 brick pits, large trees, shrubs, etc.). Farmers were asked not to remove any biomass from inside  
175 the plots until we returned (one month later; at the end of August 2012 and 2013) to harvest the  
176 plots. Maize plants within the plots were counted as were the total number of maize ears. All  
177 maize stover and ears were weighed in the field using a hanging balance. A sub-sample of stover  
178 was collected for moisture and nutrient determination. Maize ears were divided into three

179 categories: small, medium, and large and one ear from each category selected at random, shelled,  
180 and core and grain retained (note that ear = grain + fibrous core). Grain, core, and stover sub-  
181 samples were weighed fresh, oven-dried to a constant mass (60°C for 48 hours), and re-weighed  
182 dry to determine moisture content. Dry maize grain and core yields were estimated based on the  
183 total mass of cobs per plot and scaled to a hectare. Maize grain data alone were used to in the  
184 analysis of maize yields in tons ha<sup>-1</sup>. The dry weight equivalent stover was scaled from plot-level  
185 to a hectare (Appendix B). Maize tissue sub-samples (grains, cores, and stover) were ground (2  
186 mm mesh) and analyzed for C by ashing in a muffle furnace at 500°C and %N by Kjeldahl acid  
187 digestion and titrimetric determination. Nitrogen concentrations were used to calculate the  
188 amount of N leaving the field as harvest (in grains, cores, and stover), and all these data were  
189 used to calculate the amount of N leaving the field in the maize harvest, providing an excellent  
190 comparison of outputs among farms in the study.

#### 191 *2.5. Estimating N added through manure additions*

192 The amount of N added through manure can be highly variable from farm-to farm (Palm et al.,  
193 2001), therefore in April of 2013 (the beginning of planting season) we collected manure  
194 samples from all farms applying manure, and estimated moisture content. Manure subsamples  
195 were analyzed for C by dry ashing in a muffle furnace at 500°C and N by Kjeldahl acid digestion  
196 and titrimetric determination.

#### 197 *2.6. Estimating N added and recycled through legume rotations*

198 To estimate the amount of N fixed and recycled in legumes, we returned in the short rainy season  
199 (September 2013) to farms that used legume rotations. We observed plots and asked farmers to  
200 report the species planted, original planting density, thinning practices, wood harvesting and  
201 legume management. *Tephrosia candida* (shrub), *Mucuna pruriens* (herbaceous cover crop) and

202 *Crotalaria grahamiana* (shrub), were the primary species found in legume rotations on the study  
 203 farms. We used farmer reported and observed plant density combined with literature data  
 204 (Gathumbi et al., 2002b; 2002a; Ojiem et al., 2007) on the amount of N stored per plant to  
 205 calculate the total amount of N added through N fixation and recycling. Because farmers tend to  
 206 remove woody stems but incorporate fresh leaves, thus we subtracted the amount of N stored in  
 207 woody biomass from this value to estimate the net N contribution from the legume species to the  
 208 farm fields (Appendix C; Table S2).

### 209 2.7. Calculating N balances

210 This study used a partial nutrient balance metric, which was simply the difference between  
 211 nutrient inputs and harvest and residue outputs.

212 *Inputs.* We calculated N balances (Eq. 1) for the long rains of 2012 and 2013 from farmer-  
 213 reported data on the quantity of mineral N addition (DAP, urea, NPK, calcium ammonium nitrate  
 214 [CAN], and manure) plus the estimated amount of N fixed and recycled. Of the inputs applied,  
 215 DAP is 18% N, urea is 45% N, NPK is 20% N, and CAN is 26% N on a mass-basis. N inputs  
 216 through manure addition and legume rotations were calculated at the individual farm-level as  
 217 described above.

218 Eq 1:

$$219 \text{Inputs} \left( \frac{\text{kg N}}{\text{ha}} \right) =$$

$$220 (DAP * 0.18) + (urea * 0.45) + (NPK * 0.20) + (CAN * 0.26) + \left( \text{manure} * \frac{\text{kg}}{\text{ha}} * \frac{\%N}{100} \right) + (N_{\text{fixed}} - N_{\text{recycled}})$$

221

222 *Outputs.* We used harvest data from 2012 and 2013 to calculate the amount of N leaving the field  
 223 as harvest (as grain, core, and stover; Eq. 2). We assumed that stover was removed entirely from

224 the field, a common practice in this region (Mapfumo and Giller, 2001; Zingore et al., 2007). We  
225 used the following equation to calculate the farm field outputs:

226 Eq 2:

227 
$$\text{Outputs} \left( \frac{\text{kg N}}{\text{ha}} \right) = \left( \frac{\text{kg dry grain}}{\text{ha}} * \frac{\text{g N}}{\text{dry grain}} \right) + \left( \frac{\text{kg dry cobs}}{\text{ha}} * \frac{\text{g N}}{\text{dry cob}} \right) + \left( \frac{\text{kg dry stover}}{\text{ha}} * \frac{\text{g N}}{\text{dry stover}} \right)$$

## 228 2.8. Data analysis

229 We used a generalized linear model to examine if soil properties (WHC, pH, % clay, bulk  
230 density) and soil nutrients (% C and % N) differed among the seven villages and between the  
231 two depths (0-20 cm and 20-50 cm). We used linear mixed effects modeling (LMM) to analyze  
232 the mean effect of farm management strategy on yields and nutrient balances. Separate models  
233 were fit for years 2012 and 2013. Farm set ( $n = 9$ ) was fit as a random effect to address spatial  
234 clustering in the location of farms. Response variables were found to conform to normality  
235 assumptions using the Shapiro-Wilk test. We selected an initial, full model that included the  
236 following predictor variables: N addition (fertilizer + manure), soil N stock, percent clay, and a  
237 binary variable for whether a farm used legume rotation practices. A final, most parsimonious  
238 model was selected to minimize Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) using automated model  
239 selection with the *MuMIn* package (Bartoń, 2013). The final, reported model retained N addition  
240 and legume rotation as predictor variables. LMMs were implemented using the *lme4* package  
241 (Bates et al., 2013). We report  $P$ -values for each parameter and adjusted  $r^2$  as a measure of  
242 overall model fit. We report adjusted  $r^2$  values that represent the amount of variance explained  
243 by the fixed effects only and by the fixed effects and the random effects. The  $r^2$  values are  
244 calculated by adapting a previous approach for calculating non-adjusted  $r^2$  values for LMEs  
245 (Nakagawa and Schielzeth, 2012). Because the denominator degrees of freedom are not  
246 considered valid for the *lme4* package (Baayen et al., 2008), we estimated  $P$ -values following the

247 Satterthwaite approach to estimating denominator degrees of freedom using the *lmerTest*  
248 package (Kuznetsova et al., 2013).

249 We used a quantile regression approach to determine the effect of management on  
250 higher-vs-lower yielding farms and N budget (Cade and Noon, 2003). Quantile regression  
251 estimates relationships between predictor and response variables for separate quantiles of the  
252 response variable distribution. We defined quantile thresholds at 33, 66, and 99 percent. Separate  
253 models were fit for 2012 and 2013. Independent variables were included based on model  
254 selection used for the mean response regression defined above. Parameter values and associated  
255 confidence intervals are estimated using the Barrodale-Roberts iterative algorithm (Buchinsky,  
256 1998) and implemented using the *quantreg* package (Koenker, 2013). For a measure of model  
257 goodness of fit we report log likelihood values. For all statistical tests, we considered coefficients  
258 with  $P < 0.05$  significant and coefficients with  $P < 0.10$  marginally significant (Hurlbert and  
259 Lombardi, 2009).

260

### 261 **3. Results**

262 Soil properties (WHC, pH, percent clay, total organic soil C or total soil N) were similar among  
263 the villages. Soil bulk density (top and subsoil) was significantly different among the villages,  
264 but was not related to soil texture (Table 1 and 2). We found no significant statistical relationship  
265 between N fertilizer and soil properties or macro and micronutrient concentrations (Table S3).  
266 Overall, the 2013 growing season was very dry, with about 500 mm of rain between April and  
267 June compared with around 960 mm of rain in the same period in 2012 (Table 3). June is a  
268 critical growth period for maize in the region, and Kenya's Yala district received about 30 mm of  
269 rain in June of 2013 compared with nearly 300 mm in 2012 (Table 3).

270

271

### 272 3.1. Yields

273 Mean maize yields were similar between years (mean 3.4 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>, median 3.1 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>) but  
274 ranged widely among farms from 0.7 to 7.1 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>. Within-farm maize yields varied by 1.1  
275 tons on average between the two years, with differences in annual yield ranging from 0.04 to 3  
276 tons ha<sup>-1</sup> within a single farm. In 2012, maize yields increased significantly with N addition ( $p <$   
277 0.001; Table 4). Further, yields were also elevated on farms where legumes had been cultivated  
278 during the previous short rains (legume rotations; Fig 2A;  $p < 0.05$ ; Table 4). The effect of N  
279 addition on yields, represented by a standardized regression coefficient, was 85% greater than  
280 the effect of legume rotation (Table 4). In 2013, variation in maize yields was not significantly  
281 explained by either N addition or legume rotation (Table 4).

282 In 2012, the positive effect of N addition on yields was significant for farms in all yield  
283 quantiles (Fig S1 B, Table 4). By contrast, the positive effect of legume rotations on yield was  
284 only significant for the lower-yielding farms (0 and 33% quantiles; Fig S1 C, Table 4). The  
285 effect of mineral N addition was 43% greater than the effect of legume rotation for the lowest  
286 quantile farms and 17% greater for the 33% quantile farms. In 2013, we only observed a  
287 significant effect of N addition and legume rotation on the lowest-threshold farms, with the  
288 legume rotation effect being 57% stronger than the mineral N addition effect (Table 4; Fig S1 F).

### 289 3.2. Balances

290 Mean N inputs from mineral fertilizer were 45 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2012 and 50 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2013 and  
291 mean N inputs from manure were 8 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> in both years. We estimated that an average of 60 kg  
292 N ha<sup>-1</sup> were added by legume rotation (fixed and recycled) in 2012 and 68 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2013

293 (equivalent to about 1.1 Mg C ha<sup>-1</sup> in biomass each year). Although most farms received similar  
294 N inputs in the two years, a few farms received substantially different quantities of fertilizer  
295 between the two years (up to 58 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> difference; Fig 3). Not surprisingly the amount of N  
296 added by legume rotations differed within most farms between years because of differences in  
297 species and planting density. Further, on farms with legume rotations, about half the added N  
298 came from the legume residues with the other half coming from mineral fertilizer or manure.

299 In 2012, 13 farms had negative N balances (Fig 3A) and 15 farms had negative N  
300 balances in 2013 (Fig 3B). Balances ranged from -85 to 91 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2012 (mean = 4) and  
301 from -112 to 113 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> in 2013 (mean = -11). In 2012, balances for all farm fields with  
302 legume rotations were positive, and only two were marginally negative in 2013. Surpluses and  
303 deficits were both, on average, greater in 2013 than in 2012 (Fig 3). Within-farm balances varied  
304 by 29 kg of N ha<sup>-1</sup> between the two study years with 0.9 kg of N as the smallest and 109 kg N as  
305 the largest difference in N balances observed in a single farm (Fig 3).

306 In 2012, the effect of N addition on N budgets was 15% greater than the effect of legume  
307 rotations, and in 2013 the effect was 30% greater (Table 5). In 2012 and 2013, the positive effect  
308 of N addition on N balances was largest and most significant for farms with more positive N  
309 balances (Table 5; Fig S2 B and E). The positive effect of legume rotations was consistent across  
310 all quantiles (Table 5; Fig S2 C and F).

311

#### 312 **4. Discussion**

313 Although soil physical and chemical properties were largely similar, we found large between-  
314 and within-farm variation in maize yields and N balances between the two study years. Most  
315 studies of nutrient balances examine only one growing season and build hypotheses around the

316 effect of management practices on nutrient surpluses or deficits based on that single snapshot.  
317 Our results demonstrate a great deal of variation in inputs and outputs within farms from year to  
318 year, and that a snapshot approach may not adequately capture the inter-annual variability in N  
319 dynamics in smallholder farming systems. Further, differences in N balances between years  
320 were driven primarily by the variation in maize yields instead of variation in nutrient inputs  
321 (which remained the same in most farms between the two years, Fig 3). The decoupling of maize  
322 yields and nutrient inputs in the second year of the study lends support to this finding, which we  
323 attribute to moisture limitation during the growing season in 2013.

#### 324 *4.1. Yields*

325 Average maize yields (3.4 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>) were lower than those recorded several years earlier  
326 (5.1 tons ha<sup>-1</sup>; Nziguheba et al., 2010), but still close to AGRA's 3 tons ha<sup>-1</sup> target for SSA. In  
327 2012, when there was sufficient rainfall during the maize growing season, N additions were a  
328 strong predictor of yields on all farms. However, in 2013, when rainfall during the growing  
329 season was significantly lower, maize yields were not correlated with N addition. Maize is  
330 typically planted between the end of March and the beginning of April in this region. Thus, the  
331 first reproductive stage (R1) falls in the first 2-3 weeks in June (a very dry month in 2013; Table  
332 3), and a critical time for silking, which may explain the lack of correlation between yields and N  
333 inputs in 2013 (Folberth et al., 2013). In maize, moisture stress during pollination stages can  
334 cause delayed silking (R1), reduce the amount of viable pollen, and lead to yield reductions as  
335 high as 50% (*i.e.*, a 3-8% reduction for each day of stress; Shaw, 1988; Rhoads and Bennett,  
336 1990). The decoupling of maize yields and N addition in 2013 indicated that during a dry year,  
337 moisture availability may be a more important factor determining yield than N addition. Planting  
338 date is also especially important during dry years. To maximize yields, maize is planted



339 immediately following the onset of rains as delay of planting can lead to yield reductions of as  
340 much as 34 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> for each day delayed (Fakorede, 1985). As climate change alters the  
341 variability of rainfall patterns in this region (Stige et al., 2006), it will be even more important to  
342 collect multiple years of data when evaluating yields and constructing N balances.

343         The study soils are Ferralsols, which may suffer from quick soil fertility declines after  
344 vegetation is removed (Sileshi et al., 2010) because soils acidify, increasing both free aluminum  
345 concentrations and P fixation (Stocking, 2003). Although soils in our study were not critically  
346 acidic, we did find that yields were higher in low-yielding farms with legume rotations,  
347 suggesting that their inclusion may provide a strategy to buffer yields against variation in rainfall  
348 while raising productivity of low fertility soils. Our research fits into a large body of work that  
349 highlights the benefits of the legume rotations. Biomass from legume rotations may improve  
350 water-use efficiency (Sileshi et al., 2011; Torquebiau and Kwesiga, 1996), increase soil C  
351 sequestration (Montagnini and Nair, 2004; Takimoto et al., 2008), enhance microbial activity  
352 (Wood et al., 2015b), and decrease soil temperatures (Swift and Woomer, 1993) all of which  
353 provide more stable growing conditions for maize and slow or reverse soil fertility decline  
354 (Sileshi et al., 2010).

355         An interesting policy implication of this research is that where there are low returns to  
356 investment in mineral fertilizers, such interventions may not always be profitable, especially on  
357 highly degraded soils (Duflo et al., 2008; Marenya and Barrett, 2009a; 2009b). Inclusion of  
358 legume rotations with fertilizer may increase returns on investments as well as improve soil  
359 fertility. Such policies would not necessarily replace fertilizer intervention programs in Africa,  
360 but they should match available technologies with local conditions in order to enhance farm  
361 productivity and food security.

362  
363 *4.2. Balances*

364 We found a large range of N balances among smallholder farms that shared the same climate,  
365 soils, and infrastructure. There is evidence for high spatial variation in soil fertility and  
366 management within and among smallholder farms (Zingore et al., 2007), and our research shows  
367 that this translates into spatial heterogeneity in N balances. Further, we show that the balance  
368 between nutrient inputs and outputs can vary substantially from year to year within a single farm.  
369 As nutrient balances are often used to assess food security and soil fertility outcomes across  
370 SSA, it is important to examine multiple years of data before drawing conclusions about the  
371 consequences of land management practices.

372 Inter-annual variation in N balances was largely driven by differences in maize yields  
373 rather than variation in N inputs. Efforts to buffer yields against variations in rainfall will likely  
374 play a key role in supporting both high yields and positive nutrient balances. Fields with legume  
375 rotations maintained yields greater than 2.5 tons ha<sup>-1</sup> across both years, and tended to have  
376 positive N balances even in the drier year. Legume fallows may therefore provide similar  
377 benefits to longer-term agroforestry fallows by buffering yields and supporting positive N  
378 balances in rain-fed systems (Albrecht and Kandji, 2003; Verchot et al., 2007). Further, we  
379 restricted our analysis to N balances from the long rainy season, and farmers who didn't plant  
380 legumes in the short rainy season cultivated maize, legumes (soya, groundnut), or vegetables  
381 (sweet potato). In general, fertilizer applications in the short rains are very low (in our study  
382 more than half the farms didn't apply any fertilizer or manure), and thus N added through  
383 legume rotation practices would only become more important for maize yields and N balances if  
384 we included data from the short rains which would likely result in larger negative balances.

385           Although most farms received similar N inputs in the two years, a few farms received  
386 substantially different quantities of fertilizer between the two years (up to 58 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>  
387 difference; Fig 3). Smallholder farmers in SSA often operate at the economic margin, and  
388 agricultural investments are often a lower priority than school fees, medical treatments, etc. In  
389 addition to climatic variability, shifts in crop disease pressure and markets may also push  
390 nutrient balances into “the red”. Planting legumes during the short rains may thus provide a  
391 financial buffer for farmers in cases where household priorities shift investments away from the  
392 farm. Regardless of their many benefits, barriers exist to widespread adoption of legume  
393 technologies. Farm area is limited across most of western Kenya, and if the primary growing  
394 season is dry, a second maize crop often replaces the legume rotation during the short rains to  
395 make up for low yields. Clearly the adaptive capacity of smallholder farmers in SSA is limited  
396 by reliance on variable climate and markets. Legume fallows and other agroforestry practices,  
397 coupled with fertilizer inputs, may allow farmers to simultaneously feed their families and  
398 replenish their soils. We have a limited understanding of the role that legume rotations and  
399 agroforestry may play in helping smallholder farmers adapt to shifts in climate and markets  
400 (Verchot et al., 2007), and future research in this area is critical.

401           In general, farmers in this study were applying slightly less mineral N (45-50 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>)  
402 than was recorded in the same region several years earlier (80 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>; Nziguheba et al., 2010).  
403 Nevertheless, farmers were able to attain 3 tons of maize ha<sup>-1</sup> if they applied at least 40 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup>  
404 <sup>1</sup>, similar to the minimum application rate recorded in Zimbabwe of 60 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> (Zingore et al.,  
405 2007). Farms with positive N balances produced on average 35 kg of grain per kg N applied,  
406 which is substantially more efficient than the average N efficiency of smallholder farms in SSA  
407 of 12-16 kg of maize per kg N applied (Nziguheba et al., 2010). Farmers who applied more N

408 than was exported in harvests tended to have N surpluses as high or higher than those reported in  
409 farms in the Midwestern US (Vitousek et al., 2009). Although farms are far smaller in SSA than  
410 Iowa and fertilizer applications are less, fertilizer application rates are increasing across SSA and  
411 this has the potential to increase N inputs to African lands (if  $75 \text{ kg N ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$  is achieved) by 6  
412  $\text{Tg N yr}^{-1}$  (Hazell and Wood, 2008; Monfreda et al., 2008). This could have potential  
413 consequences for N releases to the atmosphere and surface waters and future research should  
414 investigate the potential pathways for and environmental consequences of N losses should  
415 fertilizer N application in SSA continue to increase.

416

## 417 **5. Conclusions**

418 There were large spatial and temporal differences in grain yields and N balances within and  
419 among smallholder farmers. Differences in N balances were driven primarily by variation in  
420 maize yields between the two study years. This suggests that a snapshot approach to evaluating  
421 N balances in smallholder systems may lead to erroneous conclusions regarding food security or  
422 soil fertility outcomes. While yields tracked N inputs in 2012, they were decoupled from N  
423 inputs during 2013 when conditions were drier. Legume rotations, coupled with N fertilizer  
424 applications, may help maintain yields and positive N balances on the marginal lands and during  
425 drier years. Future research should investigate their potential role in improving the adaptive  
426 capacity of smallholder farmers to climate and market risks.

427

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433

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614

615 **Tables**616 **Table 1:** Characteristics of topsoil (0-20 cm) in different sub-locations of the Sauri cluster.

<b>Sublocation</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>No. Farms</b>	<b>pH</b>	<b>Water Holding Capacity (%)</b>	<b>Sand (%)</b>	<b>Clay (%)</b>	<b>C (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>Bulk Density (g/cm<sup>3</sup>)***</b>
Anyiko	Tatro	2	5.71	42.93	12.62	31.00	1.89	0.17	1.25 ac <sup>1</sup>
Sauri	Madiri	3	5.28	37.43	12.47	28.57	1.94	0.18	1.17 ac
Marenyo	Ng'utmbaka	2	5.08	37.87	13.90	29.80	1.73	0.12	1.29 a
Nyamninia	Muhanda	2	5.66	41.47	9.73	34.55	2.05	0.16	1.06 ac
Nyawara	Nyamayoya B	3	5.23	31.44	6.00	36.53	1.92	0.15	0.98 b
Sauri	Sauri B	7	5.58	26.24	15.67	29.94	1.87	0.16	1.16 ac
Nyawara	Uyonga B	3	5.19	22.17	8.80	35.82	1.81	0.15	1.10 bc

617 Means presented by village.

618 <sup>1</sup> Within a column, values with different letters are significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ). Where \*\*\* indicates  $P < 0.0001$ .

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621 **Table 2:** Characteristics of subsoil (20-50 cm) in different sub-locations of the Sauri cluster.

Sublocation	Village	No. Farms	pH	WHC (%)	Sand (%)	Clay (%)	C (%)	N (%)	Bulk Density (g/cm <sup>3</sup> )**
Anyiko	Tatro	2	5.72	36.52	12.20	30.20	1.82	0.17	1.32 abc <sup>1</sup>
Sauri	Madiri	3	5.18	31.40	6.06	34.07	1.73	0.16	1.35 a
Marenyo	Ng'utmbaka	2	5.13	32.47	12.06	30.60	1.27	0.09	1.36 ac
Nyamninia	Muhanda	2	5.92	---	5.38	40.70	1.70	0.16	1.13 b
Nyawara	Nyamayoya B	3	5.34	36.67	12.00	30.13	1.66	0.13	1.17 bc
Sauri	Sauri B	7	5.46	33.29	16.44	29.76	1.51	0.12	1.31 a
Nyawara	Uyonga B	3	5.21	35.99	6.87	40.96	1.56	0.12	1.21 abc

622 Means presented by village.

623 <sup>1</sup> Within a column, values with different letters are significantly different ( $P < 0.05$ ). Where \*\* indicates  $P < 0.001$ .

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632 **Table 3:** Rainfall (in mm) over the primary maize growing season in Yala, Kenya in 2012 and 2013.

<b>Month</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
April	466	318
May	200	177
June	293	29
July	40	60
August	162	177
September	262	180
Growing Season Total	1424	940

633



635 **Table 4:** Regression results of grain yield response to N addition and legume rotations for 2012 and 2013.

	Mean		Quantile							
	2012	2013	2012				2013			
			0	0.33	0.66	0.99	0	0.33	0.66	0.99
N addition	2.22****	0.85	1.71***	1.66**	1.72*	4.27**	0.81**	0.82	1.81	2.29
Legume rotation	1.20**	0.38	1.20*	1.42*	1.50	-0.58	1.27****	0.80	-0.73	-1.26
Intercept	3.34****	3.31****	1.93****	2.43****	3.30****	5.81****	1.83****	2.23****	3.97****	6.18****
<i>Goodness of fit</i>										
FE Adj. R2	0.40	0.05								
RE Adj. R2	0.78	0.29								
Log Likelihood			-31.74	-36.38	-41.09	-46.22	-35.22	-41.74	-47.75	-48.59

636 Models are fit for overall mean response and for individual quantiles to examine the influence of management on higher-vs.-lower

637 yielding farms. Coefficients are of standardized variables and thus represent the relative effect of each variable within a model.

638 Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is reported for fixed effects alone and fixed effects + random effects in linear mixed models. Log likelihood is reported as

639 a measure of model goodness of fit for quantile regression. \* P < 0.1, \*\* P < 0.05, \*\*\* P < 0.01, \*\*\*\* P < 0.001

640

641

642

643 **Table 5:** Regression results of the relationship of nitrogen (N) balances with N additions and legume rotation for 2012 and 2013.

	Mean		Quantile							
	2012	2013	2012				2013			
			0	0.33	0.66	0.99	0	0.33	0.66	0.99
N addition	49.76*****	73.93*****	4.76	46.85**	63.26*****	61.61*****	28.84	62.92**	78.40*****	78.67*****
Legume rotation	43.09*****	56.97*****	52.16**	23.43	44.62***	54.32*****	70.52**	63.25**	45.65**	62.01*****
Intercept	25.42**	27.05**	-10.88	15.41*	32.28*****	47.48*****	-23.16***	14.50	42.63*****	54.13*****
<i>Goodness of fit</i>										
FE Adj. R2	0.70	0.77								
RE Adj. R2	0.76	0.78								
Log Likelihood			-109.83	-108.92	-102.36	-99.10	-117.59	-116.01	-110.48	-104.14

644 Models are fit for overall mean response and for individual quantiles to examine the influence of management on higher-vs.-lower N

645 balance farms. Coefficients are of standardized variables and thus represent the relative effect of each variable within a model.

646 Standard error is reported in parentheses. Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is reported for fixed effects alone and fixed effects + random effects in linear

647 mixed models. Log likelihood is reported as a measure of model goodness of fit for quantile regression. \* P &lt; 0.1, \*\* P &lt; 0.05, \*\*\* P

648 &lt; 0.01, \*\*\*\* P &lt; 0.001

649 **Figure Captions**

650 **Fig 1.** Site map of village and farm sets within the study area.

651 **Fig 2.** Mean farm yields as a function of N addition. N addition is measured as the amount of N  
652 added as mineral fertilizer and manure. Separate regression lines are visualized for farms that use  
653 legume rotation practices and those that do not. Mean yields significantly increase with N  
654 addition and legume rotation for 2012, but not for 2013. Results from multiple regression of  
655 yields against N addition and legume rotation and presented in Table 4.

656 **Fig 3.** Farm balance calculations by farm for two seasons (A) 2012 and (B) 2013 all units are in  
657 kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> season<sup>-1</sup>.

658 **Fig 4.** Mean N balance as a function of N addition. N balance is calculated as the surplus or  
659 deficit of N per field after one season of cultivation (long rains only). N addition is measured as  
660 the amount of N added as mineral fertilizer and manure. Separate regression lines are visualized  
661 for farms that use legume rotation techniques and those that do not. N surplus (positive N  
662 balance) is significantly greater with both N addition and legume rotation for both 2012 and  
663 2013. Results from multiple regression of yields against N addition and legume rotation and  
664 presented in Table 5. Dashed lines represent a neutral (zero) balance where N inputs and outputs  
665 are equal.

666



667  
668 **Appendix A:** Coefficients from quantile regressions.

669 **Fig S1.** Coefficients from quantile regression of yield against N addition and legume rotation for 2012 (A  
670 – C) and 2013 (D – F). Regression models were fit separately for four quantiles of yield: 0.0, 0.33, 0.66,  
671 0.99 (x-axis). The coefficients for N addition and legume rotation are represented by points, while the  
672 gray envelope represents standard error of coefficient estimates. Increasing coefficient values with  
673 quantile (e.g. B) suggests that the given variable has a stronger effect on yields on higher yielding farms.  
674 Decreasing coefficient values (C) suggest that the given variable has a relatively higher impact on yields  
675 on lower yielding farms.

676  
677 **Fig S2.** Coefficients from quantile regression of N balance against N addition and legume rotation for  
678 2012 (A – C) and 2013 (D – F). Regression models were fit separately for four quantiles of yield: 0.0,  
679 0.33, 0.66, 0.99 (x-axis). The coefficients for N addition and legume rotation are represented by points,  
680 while the gray envelope represents standard error of coefficient estimates. Increasing coefficient values  
681 with quantile (e.g. B, E) suggests that the given variable has a stronger effect on N balance on higher  
682 yielding farms. Decreasing coefficient values (C, F) suggest that the given variable has a relatively higher  
683 impact on N balance on lower yielding farms.

684  
685

686  
 687 **Appendix B:** Calculating biomass removal using field data

688 To calculate dry grain, core, and stover removal we calculated the ratio of the total ear (grain + core) that  
 689 was either grain or core, then all components were dried at 65 °C for 48 hours and re-weighed to  
 690 determine the dry to wet ratio for the two components. These ratios were multiplied by the number of  
 691 ears per plot and data were scaled to tons ha<sup>-1</sup>. For stover removal, we used the ratio of wet to dry stover  
 692 subsamples to calculate the quantity of dry stover per plot and scaled to tons ha<sup>-1</sup>. Because whole plants  
 693 were uprooted in the field, we subtracted the proportion of mass attributable to roots (22% of the total  
 694 plant mass; (Anderson, 1988). We averaged grain, core, and stover removal across the three plots and  
 695 reported these yields in terms of maize grain, core, and stover (all of which are removed from the field  
 696 upon harvest).

697 
$$\text{Dry grain } \left(\frac{\text{ton}}{\text{ha}}\right) = \left(\frac{\text{mass fresh grain}}{\text{mass fresh ear}}\right) = \left(\frac{\text{mass dry grain}}{\text{mass dry ear}}\right) * \left(\frac{\text{kg ears}}{\text{plot}}\right) * \left(\frac{1 \text{ plot}}{9 \text{ m}^2}\right) * \left(\frac{10,000 \text{ m}^2}{1 \text{ ha}}\right) * \left(\frac{1 \text{ ton}}{1000 \text{ kg}}\right) \quad \text{Eq. B1}$$

698 
$$\text{Dry core } \left(\frac{\text{ton}}{\text{ha}}\right) = \left(\frac{\text{mass fresh core}}{\text{mass fresh ear}}\right) = \left(\frac{\text{mass dry core}}{\text{mass dry ear}}\right) * \left(\frac{\text{kg ears}}{\text{plot}}\right) = \left(\frac{1 \text{ plot}}{9 \text{ m}^2}\right) * \left(\frac{10,000 \text{ m}^2}{1 \text{ ha}}\right) * \left(\frac{1 \text{ ton}}{1000 \text{ kg}}\right) \quad \text{Eq. B2}$$

699 
$$\text{Dry stover } \left(\frac{\text{ton}}{\text{ha}}\right) = \left[\left(\frac{\text{mass fresh stover}}{\text{stew}}\right) = \left(\frac{\text{mass dry stover}}{\text{mass fresh stover}}\right) * \left(\frac{1 \text{ plot}}{9 \text{ m}^2}\right) * \left(\frac{10,000 \text{ m}^2}{1 \text{ ha}}\right) * \left(\frac{1 \text{ ton}}{1000 \text{ kg}}\right)\right] * 0.78 \quad \text{Eq. B3}$$

700

701  
702 **Appendix C: Calculating N fixation and recycling from legume rotations**

703 To calculate the amount of N contributed by N<sub>2</sub>-fixation of legume rotation species, we combined field,  
704 interview, and literature data. Farms were visited in the short rains of 2013, and farmers were interviewed  
705 on-site regarding the density and management of legume rotations. We calculated plant density per  
706 species (some farmers had mixed rotations) per hectare. We used literature data on the amount of N per  
707 plant (Gathumbi et al., 2002b; 2002a; Ojiem et al., 2007) to calculate quantity of N stored in aboveground  
708 biomass per hectare ( $N_{legume_{total}}$ ). As the farmers tended to harvest the woody biomass for fuel, we  
709 removed the amount of N stored in woody biomass ( $N_{wood}$ ) from the total. Data on percent of the plant  
710 that is wood was garnered from the same studies. The remaining N ( $N_{legume_{net}}$ ) is considered to be a  
711 combination of N fixed (about 74%) and N recycled (about 26%).

712 
$$N_{legume_{net}} = N_{legume_{total}} - N_{wood} \quad \text{Eq C1}$$

713 where, 
$$N_{wood} = \frac{W_{aurs}}{ha} + \frac{\% N_{in wood}}{plant} \div 1000 \quad \text{Eq C2}$$

714 and 
$$N_{legume_{total}} = \frac{kg N}{ha \cdot yr} \quad \text{Eq C3}$$

715

716 **Table S1:** Farm field-level data. All units in kg N ha<sup>-1</sup> unless otherwise noted.

Farm ID	Sub Location	Village	Area (ha)	Year	Min N	Man N	N fix	N recyc	Yield (ton/ha)	Core (ton/ha)	Stover (ton/ha)	Yield	Core	Stover	Balance stoverON	Balance stoverOFF
1	Sauri	Madiri	0.66	2012	72	14	0	0	3	1	3	35	6	18	45	27
2	Sauri	Madiri	0.46	2012	59	5	0	0	2	0	3	30	2	20	32	12
3	Sauri	Madiri	1.33	2012	19	2	52	36	3	1	3	35	4	19	70	51
4	Sauri	Sauri B	2.12	2012	27	29	0	0	4	1	5	45	6	33	5	-28
5	Sauri	Sauri B	0.51	2012	9	0	0	0	1	0	1	8	1	4	0	-4
6	Sauri	Sauri B	1.58	2012	30	9	52	36	5	1	4	58	6	18	64	46
7	Nyawara	Nyam B	0.65	2012	41	0	0	0	2	1	3	31	4	17	6	-11
41	Nyawara	NyamB	0.12	2012	11	0	0	0	1	0	1	11	1	4	-1	-5
9	Nyawara	Nyam B	1.10	2012	81	0	44	16	4	1	4	41	5	24	95	71
10	Nyawara	Uyonga B	2.59	2012	42	19	0	0	3	1	3	42	5	17	14	-3
36	Nyawara	Uyonga B	0.12	2012	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	15	1	8	-17	-24
12	Nyawara	Uyonga B	0.70	2012	78	0	31	10	6	2	5	75	9	31	35	3
19	Sauri	Sauri B	3.68	2012	85	5	0	0	6	2	6	79	10	33	0	-33
20	Sauri	Sauri B	0.35	2012	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	19	2	19	-22	-41
21	Sauri	Sauri B	1.04	2012	96	9	52	36	6	1	3	79	6	23	108	85
30	Sauri	Sauri B	0.79	2012	69	17	31	10	5	1	7	65	9	51	53	2
32	Nyamn	Muhanda	1.10	2012	148	13	0	0	4	1	3	45	5	20	111	91
40	Nyamn	Muhanda	0.19	2012	16	7	0	0	1	0	1	18	1	6	3	-4
35	Nyawara	Uyonga B	0.26	2012	86	13	0	0	3	1	3	35	4	27	60	33
37	Nyawara	Uyonga B	1.31	2012	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	16	2	10	-17	-27
38	Anyiko	Tatro	1.66	2012	54	28	0	0	4	1	3	52	5	14	24	11
39	Anyiko	Tatro	0.95	2012	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	20	2	11	-20	-30
22	Marenyo	Ng'utmb	1.94	2012	52	15	0	0	7	1	8	83	9	60	-25	-85
23	Marenyo	Ng'utmb	1.27	2012	18	3	0	0	4	1	4	42	5	18	-27	-46
1	Sauri	Madiri	0.66	2013	72	34	0	0	3	1	6	37	6	27	63	35
2	Sauri	Madiri	0.46	2013	38	5	0	0	2	1	3	25	3	16	15	-1
3	Sauri	Madiri	1.33	2013	21	3	60	28	3	1	4	31	4	20	77	57
4	Sauri	Sauri B	2.12	2013	27	29	0	0	4	1	5	66	5	26	-16	-42

5	Sauri	Sauri B	0.51	2013	11	0	0	0	3	0	4	36	3	25	-27	-53
6	Sauri	Sauri B	1.58	2013	60	37	74	27	5	1	4	56	6	23	136	113
7	Nyawara	Nyam B	0.65	2013	96	0	0	0	2	1	6	23	4	32	69	37
41	Nyawara	Nyam B	0.12	2013	19	0	0	0	2	0	3	21	2	13	-4	-17
9	Nyawara	Nyam B	1.10	2013	107	0	44	16	4	1	11	52	4	119	111	-9
10	Nyawara	Uyonga B	2.59	2013	42	19	0	0	6	2	11	93	10	70	-42	-112
36	Nyawara	Uyonga B	0.12	2013	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	12	1	10	-14	-24
12	Nyawara	Uyonga B	0.70	2013	90	0	25	7	4	1	8	70	6	51	47	-5
19	Sauri	Sauri B	3.68	2013	85	7	0	0	5	1	14	65	7	76	20	-57
20	Sauri	Sauri B	0.35	2013	0	0	0	0	5	1	5	56	6	30	-62	-91
21	Sauri	Sauri B	1.04	2013	96	5	24	17	3	1	6	40	4	33	98	65
30	Sauri	Sauri B	0.79	2013	69	17	88	23	6	1	9	84	9	69	105	36
32	Nyamn	Muhanda	1.10	2013	148	13	0	0	3	1	5	36	4	28	121	93
40	Nyamn	Muhanda	0.19	2013	7	7	0	0	1	0	2	21	2	12	-9	-21
35	Nyawara	Uyonga B	0.26	2013	86	13	0	0	2	1	7	30	5	49	65	16
37	Nyawara	Uyonga B	1.31	2013	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	30	4	22	-34	-56
38	Anyiko	Tatro	1.66	2013	40	0	0	0	2	0	4	24	2	16	14	-2
39	Anyiko	Tatro	0.95	2013	0	0	0	0	3	0	6	41	2	22	-44	-65
22	Marenyo	Ng'utmb	1.94	2013	72	9	0	0	7	1	8	93	7	58	-19	-77
23	Marenyo	Ng'utmb	1.27	2013	18	1	0	0	4	1	8	54	4	38	-40	-78

718

719 **Table S2:** Net N contributions of legume rotations to the overall farm N economy (See Eq C1-C3).

Village (Farm)	Species	Density (plants/ha)	Plant N (g/plant)	Wood N (g/plant)	Biomass N (kg/ha)	N wood (kg/ha)	N added by legumes (kg/ha)
Madiri (3)	T. candida	13333	8.4	1.9	112.5	25.3	87.2
Sauri B (6, 21)							
Sauri B (30)	Mucuna	16667	2.5	---	41.7	0.0	41.7
Uyonga B (9)	T. candida	6667	4.6	1.1	30.7	7.1	23.6
Uyonga B (9)	C. grahamiana	6667	7.2	1.7	48.0	11.6	36.4

720 <sup>1</sup> Plant densities were calculated based on plant spacing in active legume rotations and via farmer interviews. Farm IDs are listed in parentheses,  
721 and can be cross-referenced with Farms in Table S1.

722 <sup>a</sup> Calculated from reported data in Gathumbi et al., 2002a; 2002b

723 <sup>b</sup> Calculated from data reported in Ojiem et al., 2007

724

725

726

**Table S3:** Macro and micronutrient concentrations (ppm) in soils collected from 0-10cm in different sub-locations of the Sauri cluster.

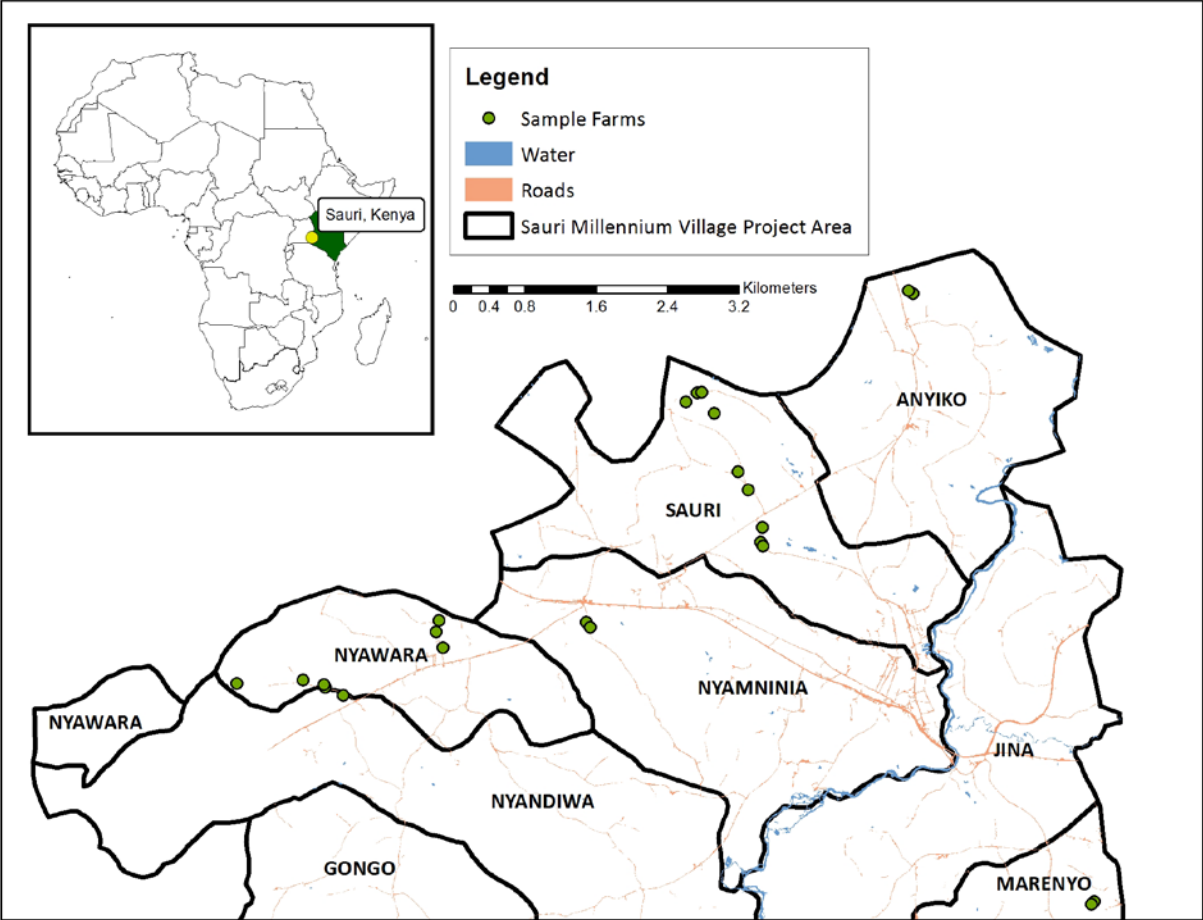
Sublocation	Village	Ca	K	Mg	P	Al	B	Ba	Cu	Fe	Mn	Na	Z
Anyiko	Tatro	1181.0	188.0	192.5	15.5	273.0	0.5	120.0	2.5	12.0	232.0	46.0	9.5
Sauri	Madiri	836.0	166.3	142.0	13.7	291.7	0.4	84.7	4.7	12.7	272.7	58.7	9.0
Marenyo	Ng'utmbaka	<i>no data</i>											
Nyamninia	Muhanda	1277.0	147.5	157.0	23.5	303.5	0.5	129.0	3.5	8.0	192.5	44.0	8.5
Nyawara	Nyamayoya B	944.7	88.3	121.7	14.7	245.3	0.4	100.7	11.3	11.7	188.3	48.0	9.0
Sauri	Sauri B	841.1	118.1	116.4	13.1	290.9	0.4	93.0	7.1	14.1	261.3	58.3	9.6
Nyawara	Uyonga B	814.4	134.6	124.8	15.4	271.0	0.4	94.6	5.0	12.4	199.0	50.4	8.0

727 Means presented by village. Arsenic, cadmium, chromium, molybdenum, nickel, and lead were all below &lt;0.1 ppm.

728

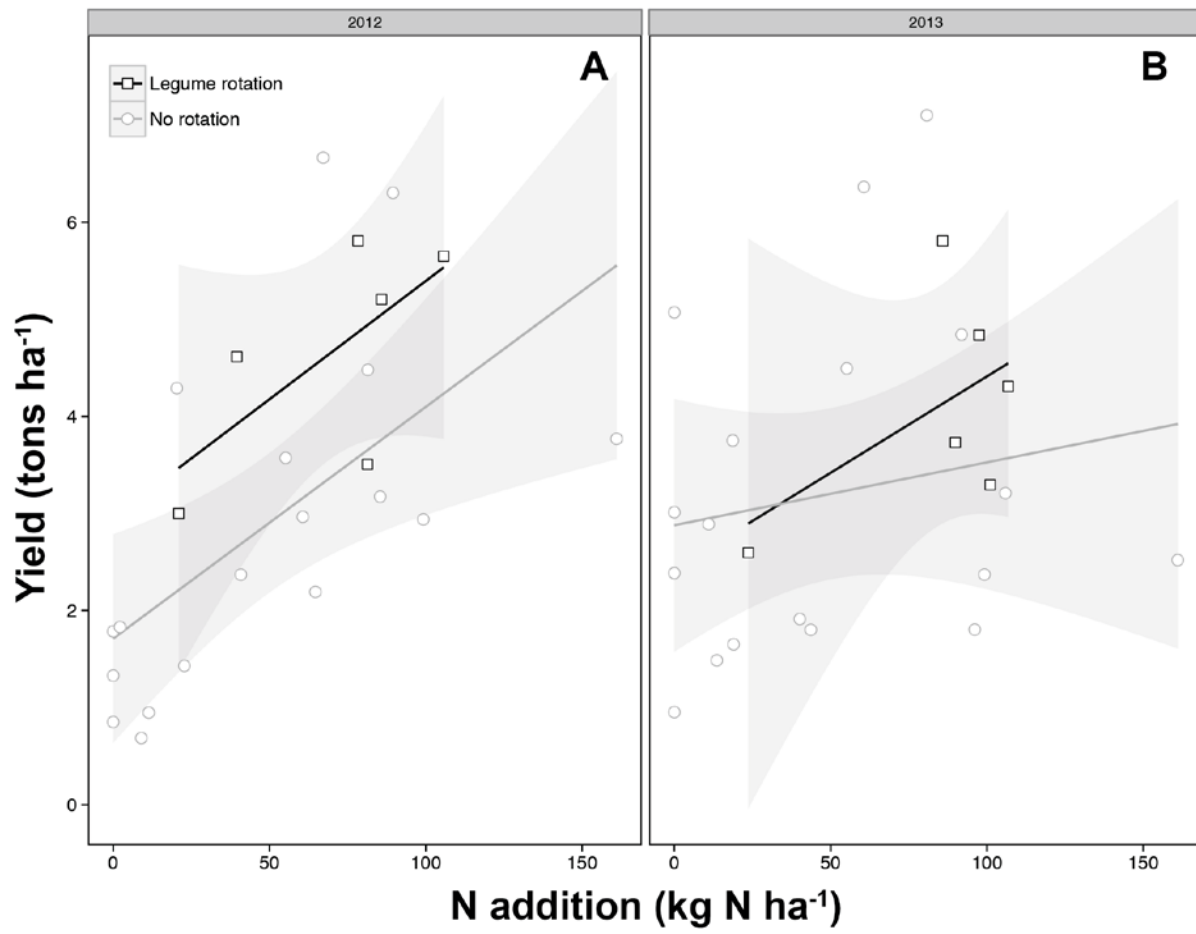
729

Fig. 1

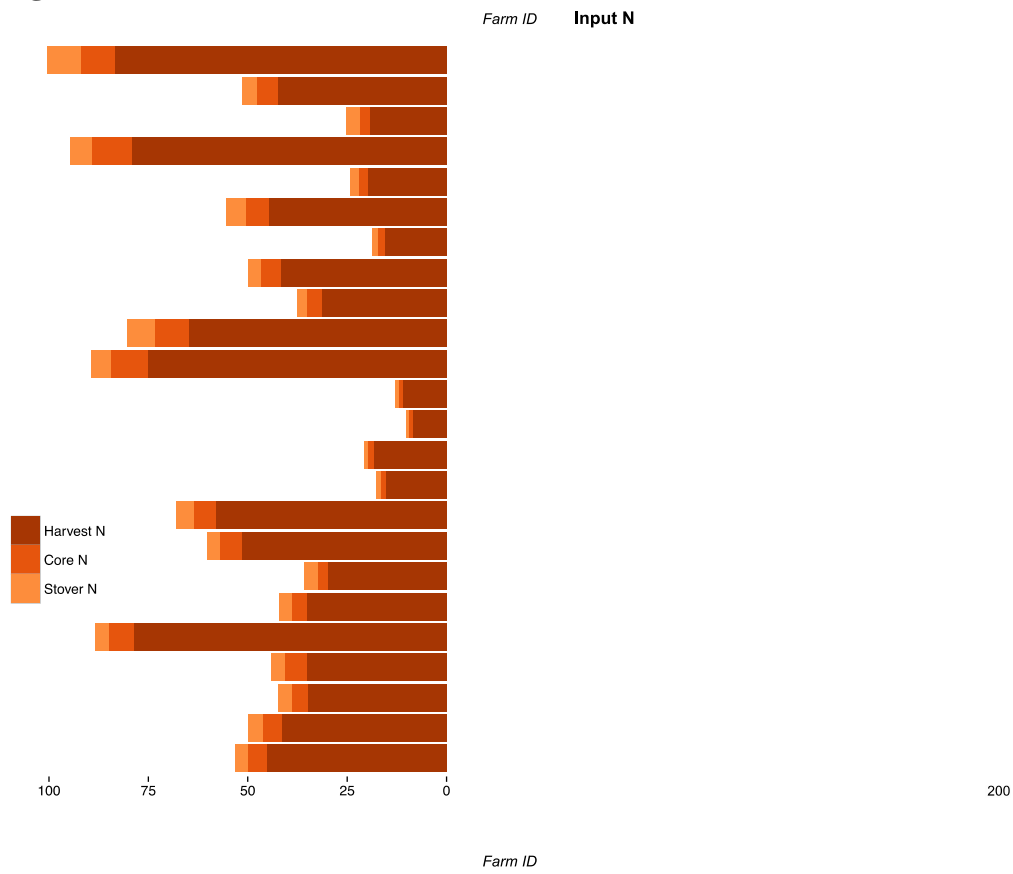




**Fig 2**

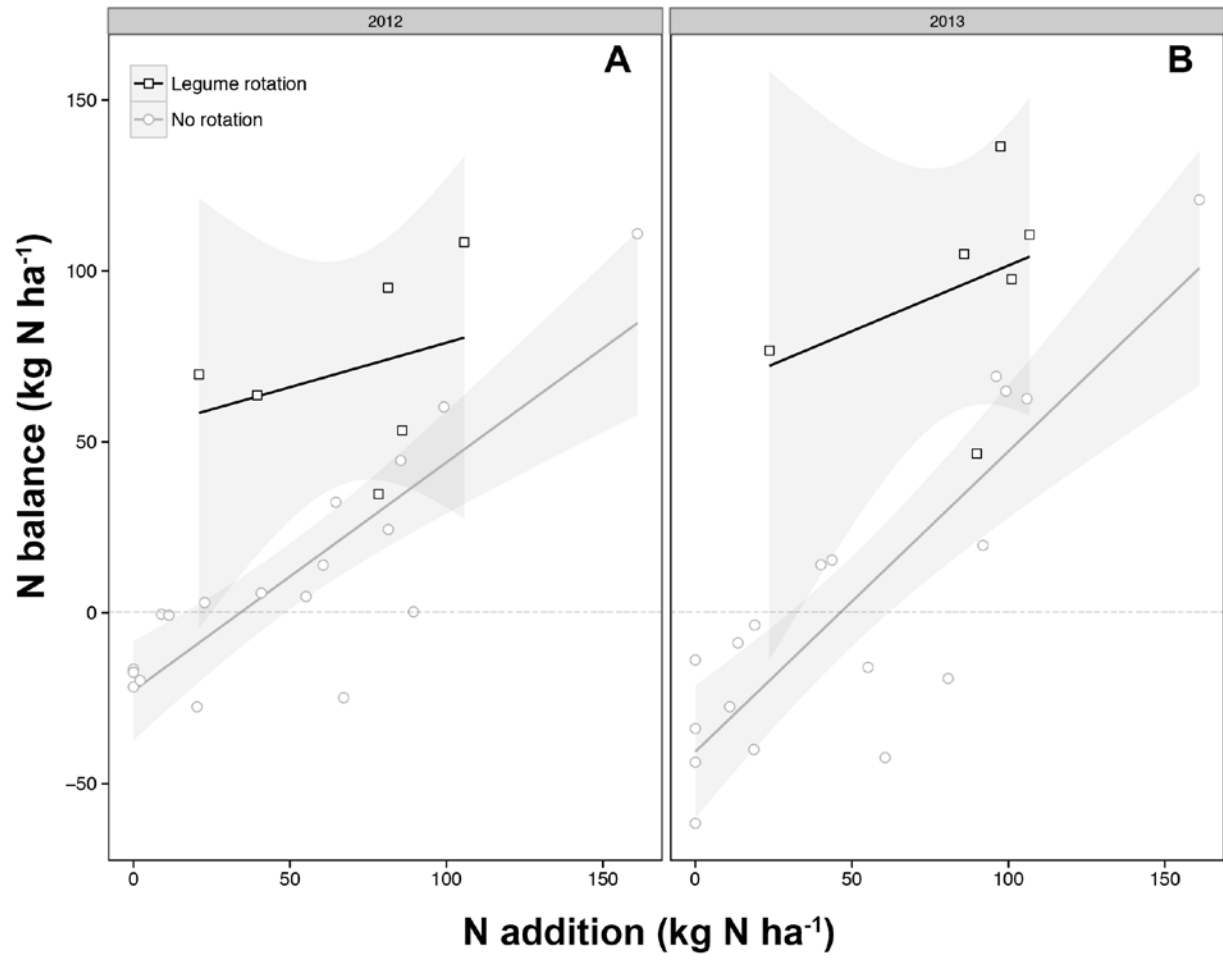


**Fig 3**

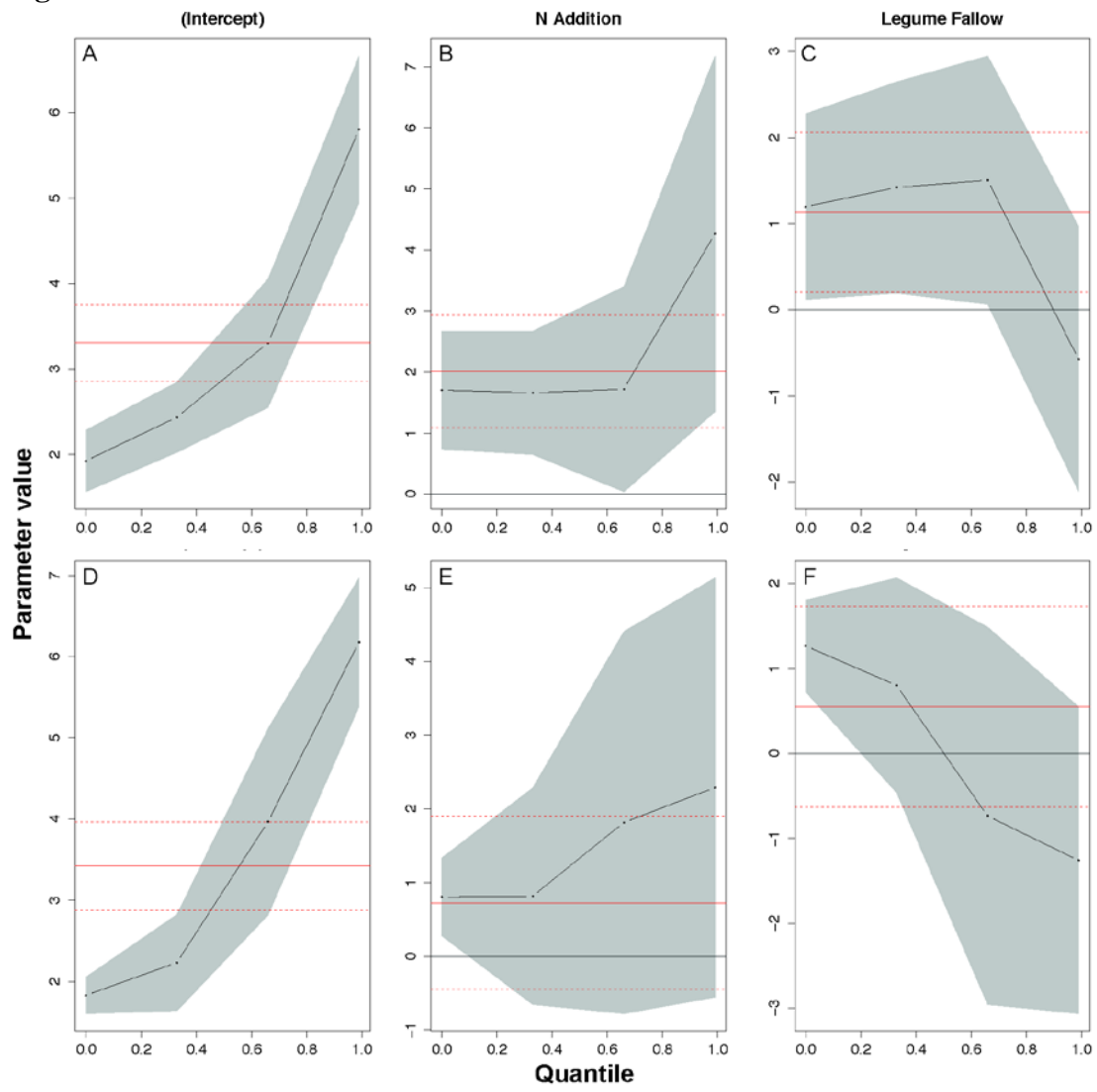


3  
-16.86  
-11.94  
-2.05  
-0.94  
+15.77  
+20.57  
+35.12  
+36.91  
+52.14  
+54.65  
+93.05

**Fig 4**



**Fig S1.**



**Fig S2.**

