



# **Design and Construction of a Small Scale Combined Weighing and Non-Weighing Lysimeter**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

A field experiment was conducted to study the consumptive use of water leaf (*Talinum triangulare*) on a constructed small scale combined weighing and non-weighing Lysimeter. This study considered the design and construction of a small scale lysimeter that combined the characteristics of a weighing and non-weighing. The main components of the lysimeter facility are mild steel, load cell, Arduino nano, micro secure digital (Micro SD) card, liquid crystal display (LCD) screen, real time clock (RTC) with model DS1307, moisture sensor, inner cylinder and outer cylinder. The installation depth of 0.4572 m with a known rectangular floor was constructed to house the outer cylinder height of 167.8 mm with a diameter 309.4 mm, inner cylinder height of 355.6 mm with a diameter 304.8 mm and a hole of 2 mm perforated at the bottom of the inner cylinder for easy drainage. The results on the data logged shows how much water is required for plant root extraction at various irrigation rates. The combined weighing and non-weighing lysimeter serve the purposes of determining the soil-water balance and water consumptive use of crops.

**Keywords:** *Evapotranspiration; loamy soil; moisture sensor; load cells; water leaf.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Surface energy balance is critical in crop production for monitoring water consumption and analyzing daily and seasonal water budgets through field experiments [1]. Water exchange between the soil surface and the atmosphere is critical for crop production, particularly during lengthy dry seasons [2]. Several technological developments in lysimeter, soil moisture depletion method, eddy correlation technique, water balance component analysis, energy-mass exchange, and crop coefficient method have been considered for estimating water loss of plants in agricultural fields due to evapotranspiration. Obviously, the lysimeter is the most common equipment used for the direct measurement of crop evapotranspiration and water balance components among the technologies listed [3]. The water balance in the soil and crop evapotranspiration determine through the combined lysimeter, influences irrigation schedule and water usage efficiency in soil [4,5]. A lysimeter is a vessel containing local soil that is placed with its top flush on the ground surface to examine several stages of the hydrological cycle, such as infiltration, runoff, evapotranspiration, and the removal of soluble elements in drainage. lysimeter is a one-of-a-kind tool for irrigation engineers to provide optimal water resource planning for agricultural productivity.

To assess the vegetative water usage, field report on the measurement was examined from [4] on the lysimeter facility with combined environmental and meteorological data for the crop period. The crop water requirements for growth performance is very important for irrigation planning and management system. As the amount of water consumed by vegetation for transpiration on the development of plant tissues and the unavoidable evaporation of soil moisture, snow, and captured precipitation connected with vegetable growth. This is the most accurate indicator of how much water is required for plant root extraction at various irrigation rates. Lysimeters of different types have been used to measure and study water use for a variety of crops. Several studies on crop water use in many different locations and growing environments with crop-coefficient curves have been developed. From the experimental work of [6], the results from one environment where different types of lysimeters have been used shows that most environment are capable to regulate water usage at different growth stages of crop.

As with crop coefficient, the determination of growth-stage-specific crop coefficients of maize and sorghum were observed [7]. Crop-coefficient curves have been generated from several studies on crop water use in a variety of locations and growth situations. According to [6] research, results show that one setting may not be easily transferred to another due to soil differences and air temperature. Installing lysimeters and gathering water use data for local conditions provides the data needed to design curves that are appropriate for the area. According to [8], the name "lysimeter" refers to a variety of targets such as suction cups, flux meters, and other devices. It's also worth noting that lysimeter kinds differ depending on the research topic. Although, there are two types of lysimeters namely weighing and non-weighing lysimeters with different sizes and shapes. Some are so small and are known as micro lysimeters or mini-lysimeter with varied designs and depths used to measure evaporation of water conducted in several field experiments [9]. The design variability is influenced by prevailing weather and climatic condition of the study area and the soil type [10]. Water leaf is widely grown in tropical regions like the Niger Delta as a leaf vegetable, its medicinal and nutritive value cannot be overemphasized as it helps regulate the heart by reducing the risk of related heart diseases and stroke by adequate supply of blood and oxygen to the needed areas [11]. Therefore, this study estimates the water consumptive use of water leaf on a small scale combined weighing and non-weighing lysimeter capable of data logging.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study Area

A field experiment was conducted at the Rivers State Demonstration Farm, Rivers State University, where the fabricated small scale device capable of combining both characteristics of a weighing and non-weighing lysimeter experimented. Port Harcourt is within the humid tropical climatic region characterized by two distinct seasons (wet and dry seasons) Chart 1. The demonstration farm coordinate is between 4°48'22.50"N and 6°58'5.74"E with an altitude of 274 mm above mean sea level, and an average annual rainfall of 2310.9 mm. The wet season occurs mainly between March and October while the dry season is experienced during the remaining months of the year (November to February). The study area is endowed with

sandy loam soil [12,13] with an area of 1m<sup>2</sup> cleared of vegetation in preparation for the installation of the lysimeter.

## 2.2 Design Consideration of Combined Weighing and Non-weighing Lysimeter

A cylindrical shaped design was chosen for the small scale lysimeter which consists of an inner and outer cylinder, fabricated from mild steel. The device combined the characteristics of a weighing and non-weighing lysimeter as shown in Figs. 1, 2 and 3. The weighing and non-weighing lysimeter was made from readily available and locally sourced material. The cylindrical shaped device has a depth of 0.4572m with an installation depth of 0.4318m, the bottom cover of the inner and outer canister perforated with 2 mm holes for easy drainage control. The facility depth as stated above is contrary to the design depth of 100 – 200 mm [14] to accommodate the rooting depth of water

leaf crop at maturity. The combined weighing and non-weighing lysimeter was filled with loamy soil and 2000ml of water was irrigated to saturate the soil. The combined mass of the facility and water leaf grown on the top soil of the lysimeter (40.42kg) was measured for a period of 2 weeks. A 16GB memory size of the micro secure data (Micro SD) card was used to store data for 336 hours.

## 2.3 Materials Selection

Materials for the weighing and non-weighing lysimeter were readily available and locally sourced materials to reduce the high cost of construction Plates 1 and 2. The materials components include; mild steel, Arduino Nano, soil moisture sensor, load cell, weighing sensor module, liquid crystal display (LCD) screen, real time clock (RTC) with model DS1307, and accessories. Mild steel of 5 mm thickness was used for the construction to ensure adequate strength and rigidity as shown in Plate 1.

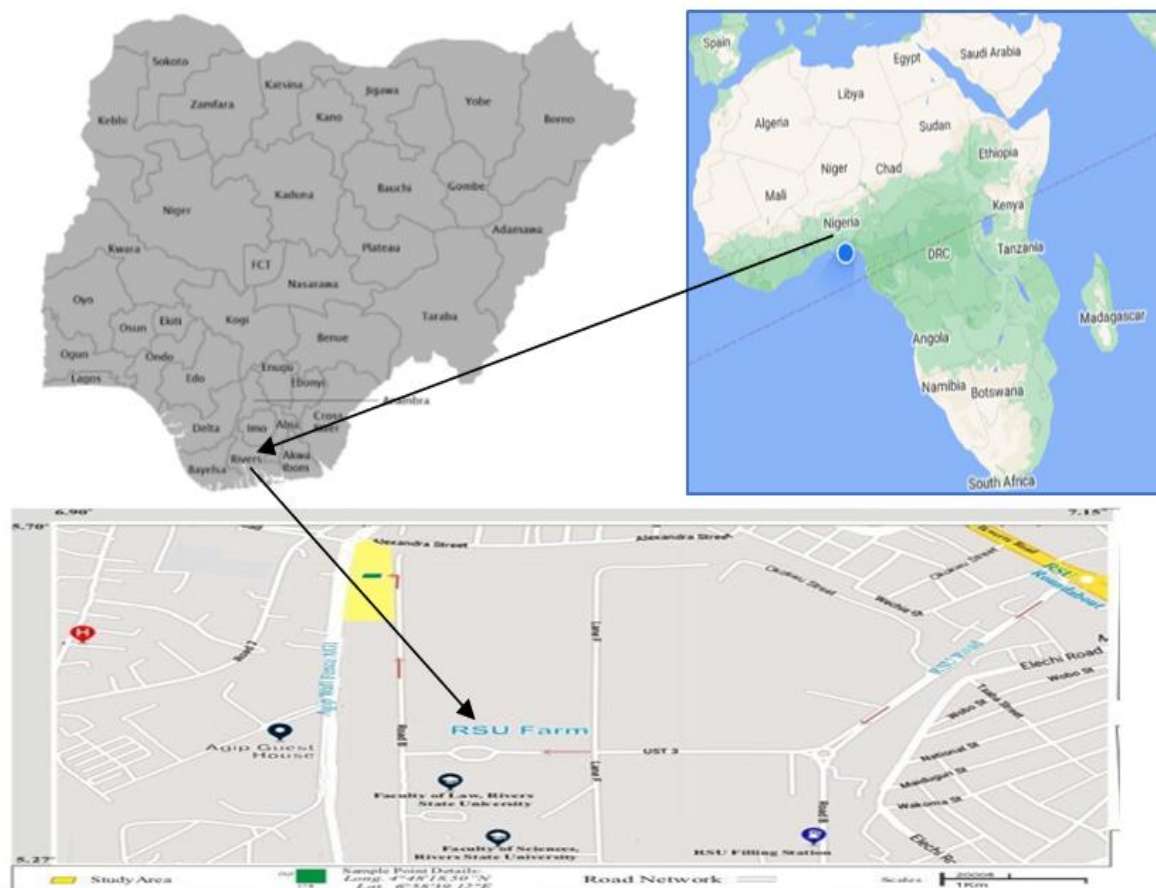


Chart 1. Map of Rivers State University indicating Demonstration Farm

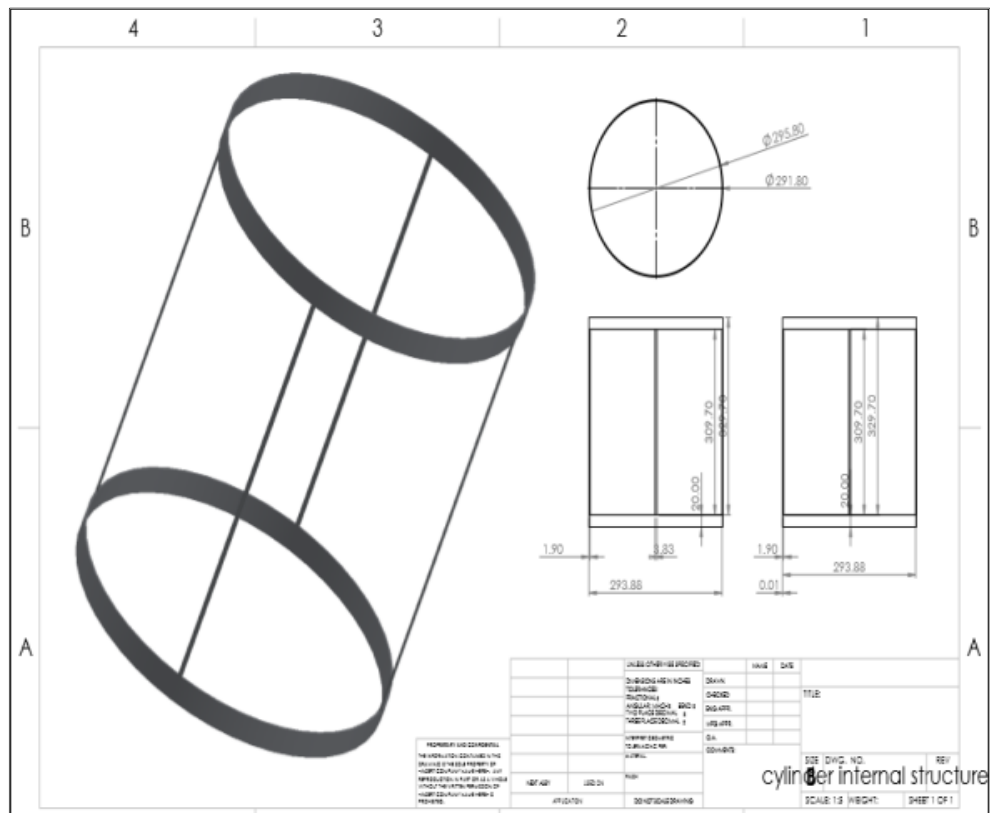


Fig. 1. Internal structure of cylinder

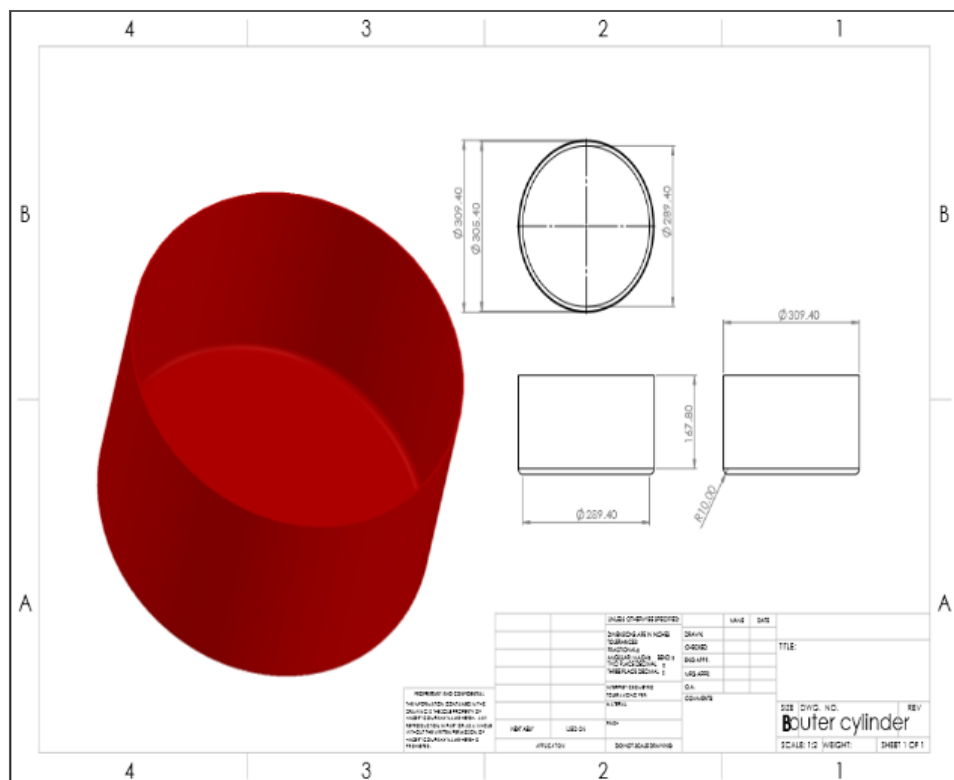
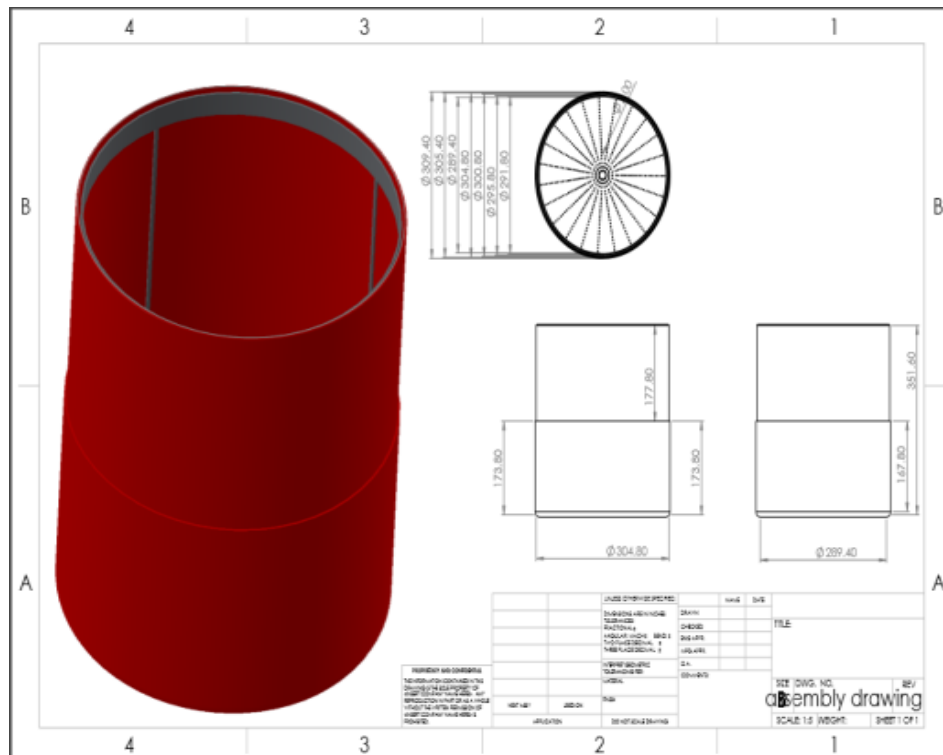


Fig. 2. Outer housing of load cell



**Fig. 3. Combined Weighing and Non-weighing Lysimeter Assembly**



**Plate 1. Young water leaf grown on the lysimeter facility**



**Plate 2. 2 weeks old water leaf grown on the weighing and non-weighing lysimeter facility**

## 2.4 Arduino Nano

The size of Arduino Nano was 1.7 x 0.73 inches built on a board (ATMegat328p) as the microcontroller mounting headers for PCB application. The Arduino Nano has 8bit, 16MHz, AVR type microcontroller board that controls all other components and houses the source code that governs the operations of the system. The board comes with a built-in Arduino boot loader that makes it compactable with the Arduino IDE. On the board are 14 digital input/output pins, six of which are Pulse Width Modulation (PWM) pins, eight Analog-Digital Converter (ADC) pins, an onboard 16MHz resonator, a reset button, special peripheral pins such as I<sup>2</sup>C and SPI pins, and holes for mounting headers. The Arduino Nano requires a power supply of 5 to 12V DC with a minimum current of 500 mA.

## 2.5 Soil Moisture Sensor

Three soil moisture sensors used in this study uses capacitance to measure the water content of soil by measuring the dielectric permittivity of the soil. These sensors are placed at various depths in the inner canister of the lysimeter. It consists of three pins, VCC, GND and Signal, where the VCC was connected to the 5V supply pin of the Arduino Nano, GND connected to the Arduino common GND and Signal pin of the three sensors connected to Analog pins A0, A1 and A2 of the Arduino Nano. The relation between the measured property and soil moisture was calibrated considering environmental factors such as soil type, temperature, and electric conductivity.

## 2.6 Load Cell

A resistive load cell capacity of 40kg with 5V was placed beneath the inner canister of the lysimeter which transduces the load acting on the device into an electronic signal. A known weight of soil was used to determine the resulting weight displayed on the LCD screen, logged on the SD card in an interval of 30mins. The electronic signal could be voltage change, current change or frequency change depending on the type of load cell and circuitry used. However, this study uses a Resistive load cell on the principle of piezo-resistivity.

## 2.7 Weighing Sensor Module

The lysimeter facility was built with a 24 high precision A/D (Analog to Digital) converter with a

weighing sensor module of HX711 chips that has two analog input channels which can gain up to 128 when programmed.

## 2.8 Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) Component

The display unit comprises a 16x2 LCD screen and a 10K potentiometer for contrast control of the LCD. The LCD is powered by the same 5V DC used in powering the controller. Six pins of the LCD were connected to the controller, namely pins; E, RS, 11, 12, 13, 14. The LCD screen displays the percentage of soil moisture content and the soil weight.

## 2.9 Micro Secured Data (Micro SD) Card

The adapted micro secured data (Micro SD) card on the lysimeter facility is equipped with an SPI interface via the file system driver to enable interfacing, reading, and writing of files through a microcontroller. The SD card can be read, logged, or formatted directly from the Arduino Integrated Development Environment using the SD card library.

## 2.10 Real Time Clock (RTC)

The clock and calendar provide seconds, minutes, hours, day, date, month, and year information. At the end of the month, date is automatically adjusted for months with fewer than 31 days, including corrections for leap years. The clock operates in either the 24-hour or 12- hour with AM / PM indicator. The DS1307 has a built-in power-sense circuit that detects power failures and automatically switches to the backup supply. Timekeeping operation continues while the part operates from the backup supply.

# 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 3.1 Input Parameters

From the field experiment, data were collected on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February and concluded on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March. Water leaf was grown on clean agricultural soil in the lysimeter and measured to be 40.42 kg. Graphical representation of data logged at an interval of 30 mins was recorded as shown in Figs. 4, 5, 6, and 7 respectively.

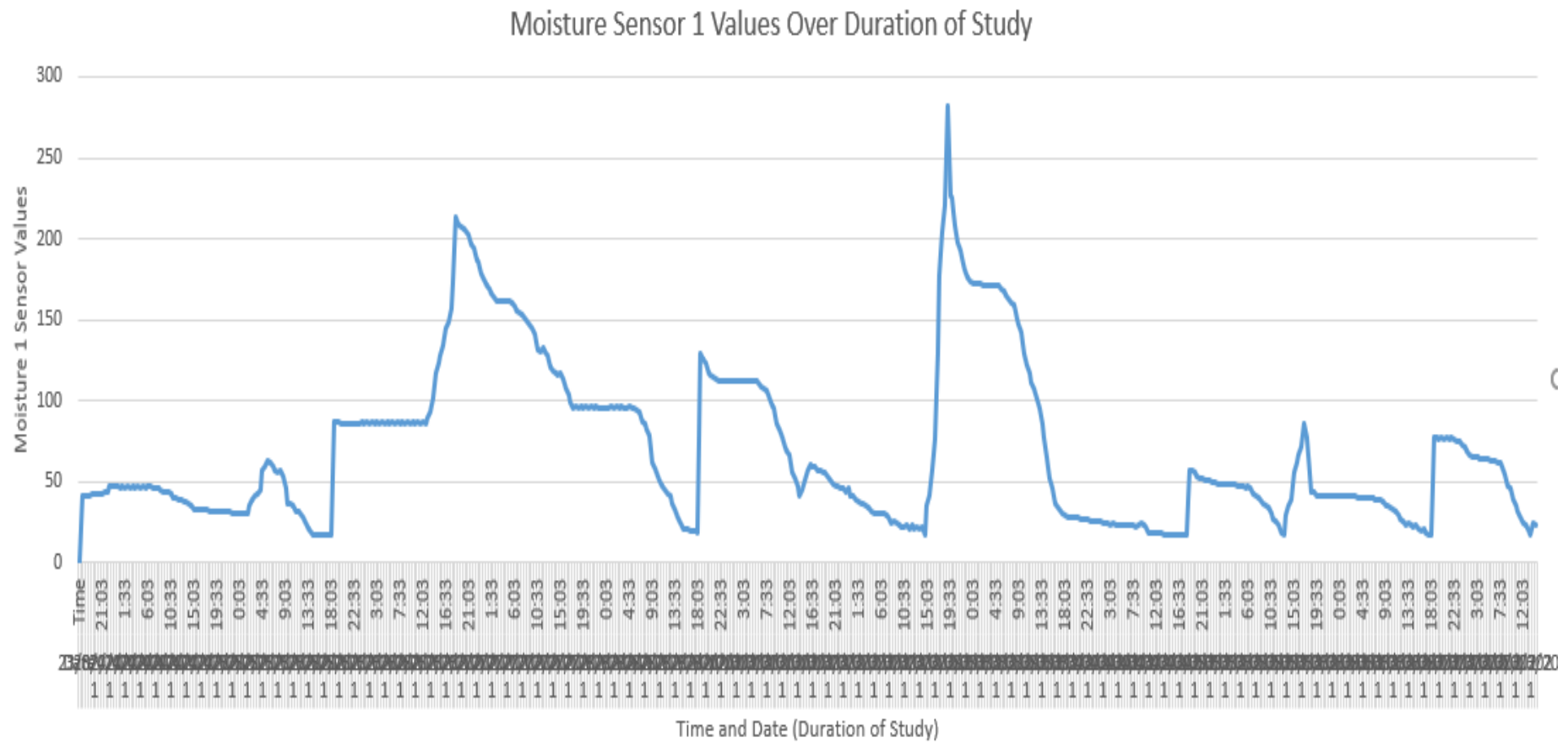
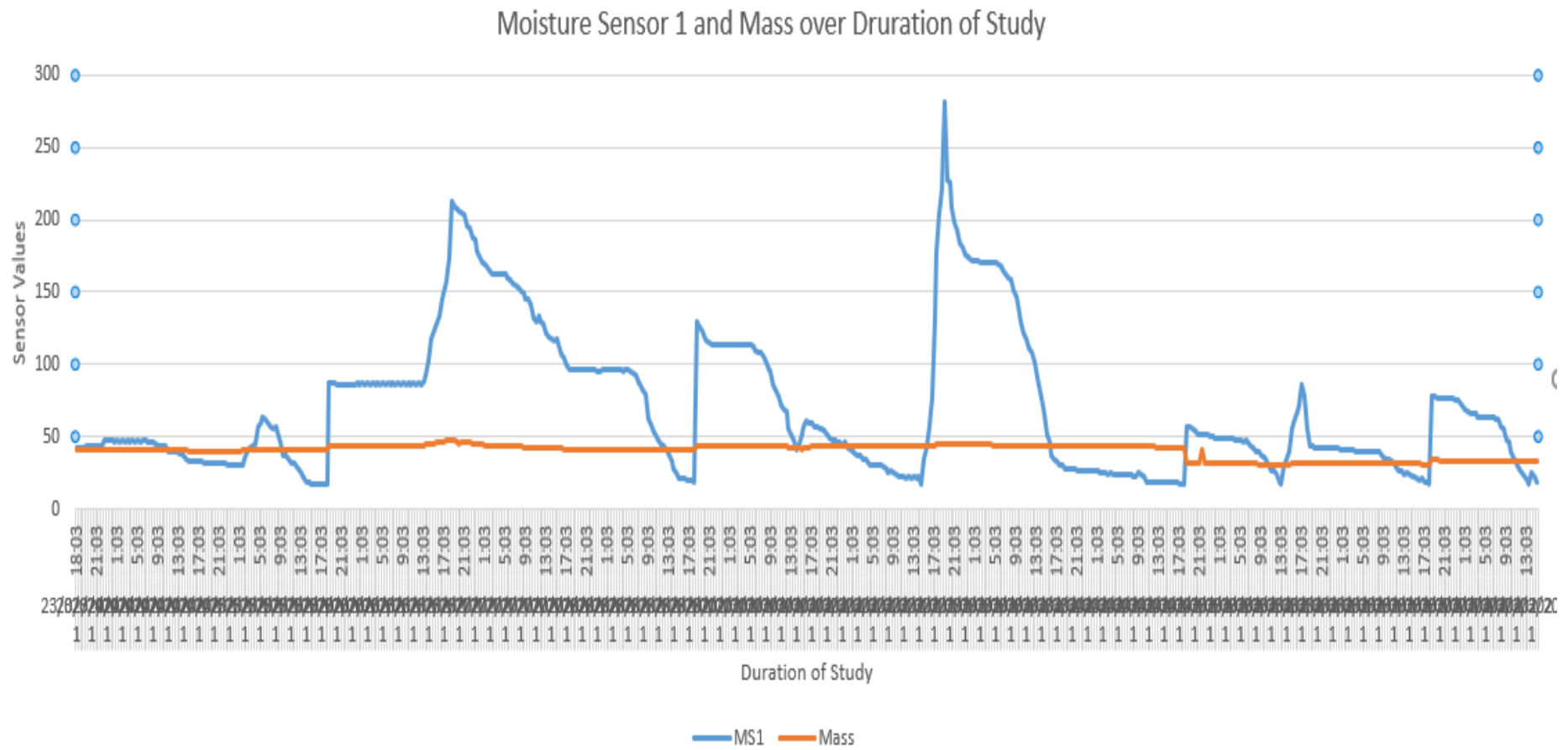


Fig. 4. Moisture sensor 1 Values after 1 week of Study





**Fig. 5. Moisture Sensor 1 Values and Combined Mass of Lysimeter with Soil after 2 Weeks of Study**



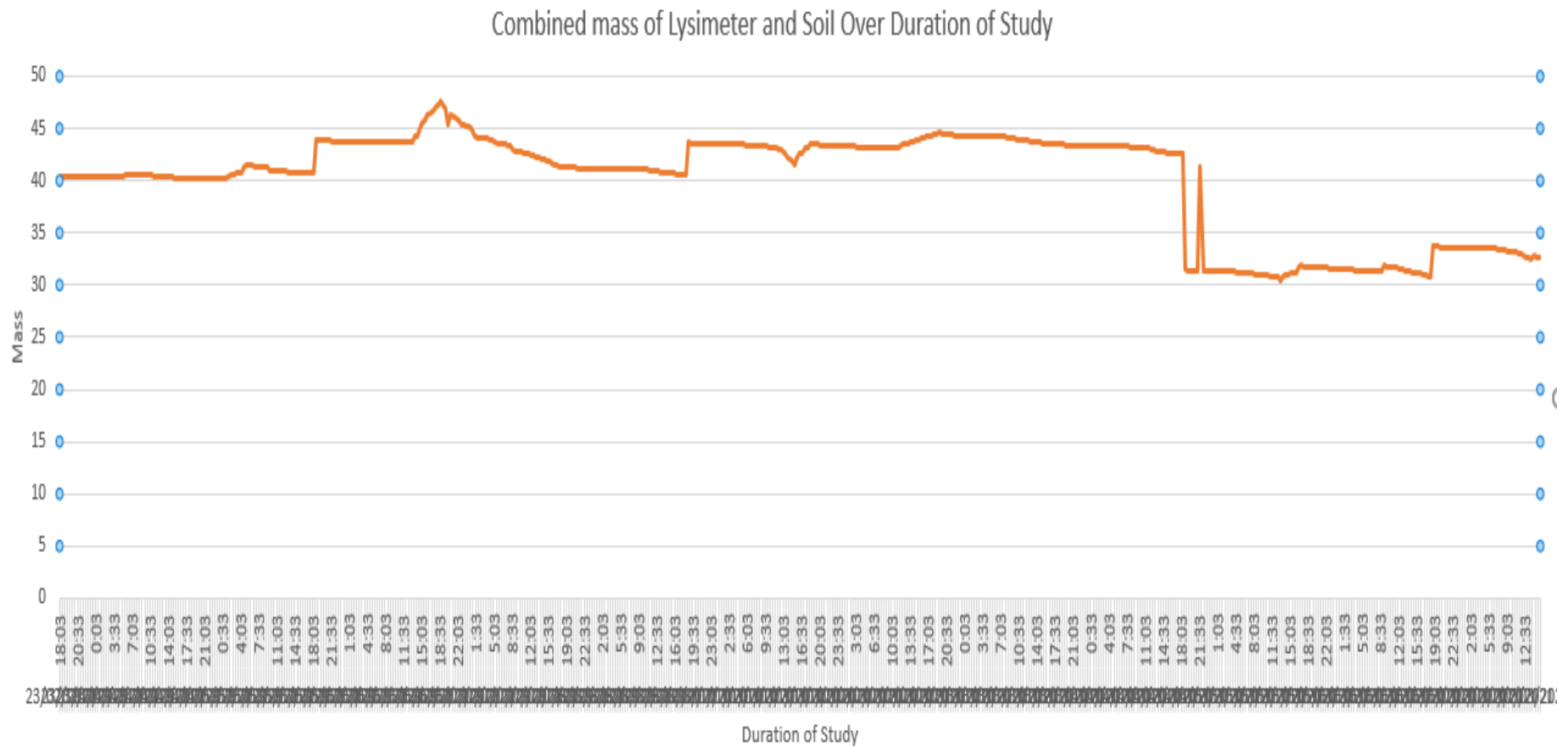


Fig. 6. Combined Mass of Lysimter with Soil after 2 Weeks of Study

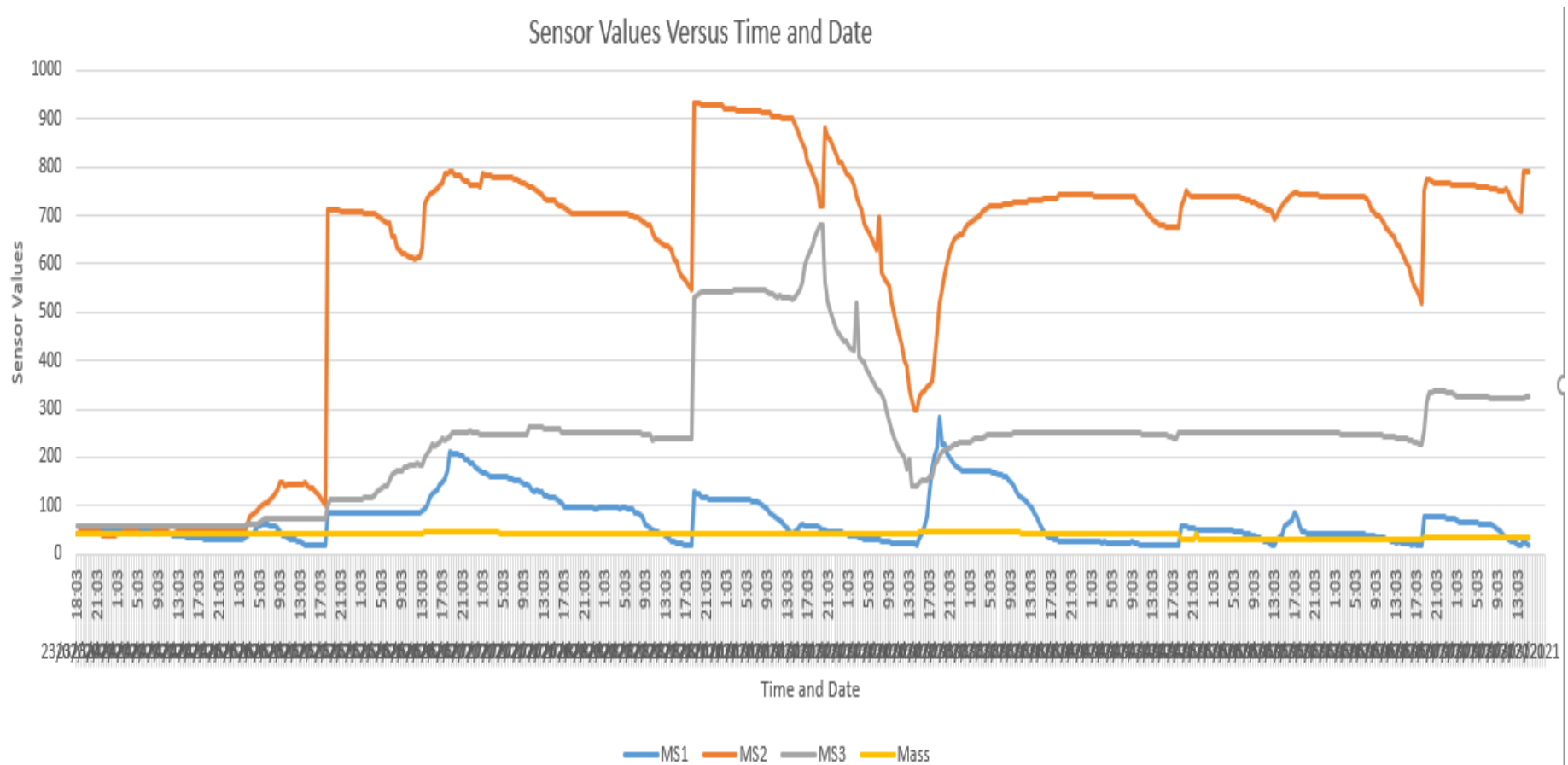


Fig. 4 shows the results obtained at depth 1 during the study with three levels of soil moisture sensors found to experience various levels of water retention, evaporation, and transpiration. The graph shows an increase in soil moisture at depth 1 over time with irrigation and rainfall that affected the root region (0 – 100mm) of water leaf may easily be affected. Despite the rainfall, there was a drop in soil moisture content due to quick evaporation as a result of immediate heavy sunshine in the study area.

**Table 1. Input parameters**

Parameter	Specification
Mass of Empty Lysimeter	12kg
Mass of Soil at Initial Filling	28.42kg
Moisture sensor 1 depth	100mm
Moisture sensor 2 depth	200mm
Moisture sensor 3 depth	300mm
Height of Lysimeter	355.6mm
Volume of Lysimeter	0.02768m <sup>3</sup>
Diameter of inner cylinder	304.80mm
Volume of Irrigation	2000ml

Fig. 5 shows the graphical representation of moisture sensor 1 and the combined mass of the setup. The moisture content of the region experiences a very high decrease due to sunlight, especially between the hours of 11.03am to 14:33pm. This decrease in moisture content was observed in other levels (200mm and 300mm) except in the moisture sensor 1 region with the highest moisture content data of 282. This increase was due to rainfall and not irrigation. The combined mass of the system increased by +3kg whenever irrigation was executed. The increase in mass added by rainfall was determined from the load cell unlike in the work of [15] where a recording of precipitation was done by a tipping bucket type rain gauge thus, providing results in millimetres.

Fig. 6 shows the results obtained from the small scale lysimeter from day 1 to 2weeks with the three moisture sensor values and those of the load cell against the duration of the study. Fig. 7 shows the plot of three moisture sensor values and the load cell against time during the 2 weeks of study. The blue line designated on the legend signifies values and readings obtained for soil moisture 1, the peach line stands for soil moisture 2, and the grey line for soil moisture 3 while the yellow line stands for the combined mass of the lysimeter and soil during the 2 weeks of study. There was an increase in soil moisture with a corresponding increase in the combined

mass of 46.33kg on 5 to 9 day attributed to rainfall. Hence, the combined mass of the system increased by +3kg whenever irrigation was employed as a result of a fixed volume of water (2000ml) in the setup. Draining of the lysimeter was highly effective due to the perforation of 2mm holes at the bottom of the inner cylinder. A related work by [16] states that draining of the lysimeter was retarded due to reduced discharged capacity of the peristaltic pump (14ml/min) used, which was much below the maximum rate of 220 ml/min indicated by the manufacturer.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In this work, a digital lysimeter was developed with the combined attributes of a weighing and non-weighing lysimeter. The constructed device consisted of two cylinders the inner and outer cylinder with three soil moisture sensors placed at intervals of 100mm apart with water leaf grown on clean agricultural soil placed in the lysimeter. Data logging was achieved using an Arduino Nano programmable logic controller, SD-card module, a real time clock (RTC module), and a 4GB SD card with a 16x2 LCD displaying the data. The combined mass of the system increased by +3kg whenever irrigation was employed as a result of a fixed volume of water (2000 ml) in the setup. The four load cells used in the combined mass of the lysimeter were effective for the consumptive use of the crop.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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