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# Maize/peanut intercropping increases land productivity: A meta-analysis

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#### ABSTRACT

Intercropping cereals and legumes can increase agricultural productivity and reduce inputs of nitrogen fertilizer but there is a need for further literature synthesis on the size of intercropping advantages and the factors affecting these advantages. Here we present a global meta-analysis of 36 studies, 66 experiments and 260 treatments addressing the land productivity of maize (Zea mays L.) and peanut (Arachis hypogaea L.) intercropping. Data were extracted from the literature and analyzed with mixed effects models to assess the land equivalent ratio (LER) and the factors affecting LER. The worldwide average LER of maize/peanut intercropping was  $1.31 \pm 0.03$ . The LER did not vary with continent, intercrop planting pattern and temporal niche differentiation, but sowing maize earlier than peanut (relative sowing time: RSTm<0) increased the partial LER of maize without significantly decreasing the partial LER of peanut. Increased N rate increased the partial LER of maize and decreased the partial LER of peanut but did not affect the total LER. This meta-analysis shows that maize/peanut intercropping is more land use efficient than the sole crops, it attains on average a "win-no win" yield advantage and mainly due to the maize.

#### 1. Introduction

Intercropping is the cultivation of two or more crop species simultaneously in the same field for the whole or a part of their growing period (Willey, 1990; Hauggaard-Nielsen et al., 2008). The advantages of intercropping comprise yield increase (Ofori and Stern, 1987), higher resource use efficiency (Yu et al., 2015; Mao et al., 2012; Zhu et al., 2015), building of soil organic matter, improved N cycling (Cong et al., 2015), and suppression of insect pests (Letourneau et al., 2011), weeds (Liebman and Dyck, 1993), and diseases (Trenbath, 1993; Boudreau, 2013; Zhang et al., 2019). The need for chemical inputs (e.g. N fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides) is often lower in intercrops than in sole crops (Martin-Guay et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2020). Thus, intercropping provides an opportunity to intensify agriculture in a sustainable way (Li et al., 2020a; Tilman, 2020).

Cereal/legume intercropping is practiced worldwide (Rao et al., 1987; Gaba et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2015; Martin-Guay et al., 2018). The key reasons for mixing cereals and legumes in an intercrop are to increase

long-term land productivity by biological fixation of atmospheric N by the legumes and to enhance diversity of product and reduce climate risk (Kermah et al., 2017). Cereals may perform better when intercropped with legumes than as a sole crop, especially at low N supply, due to reduced competition for soil N as legumes can obtain their nitrogen from the atmosphere and are not strong competitors for soil N (Cowell et al., 1989; Hauggaard-Nielsen et al., 2001). Furthermore, a high uptake of inorganic N by cereals may enhance the biological N fixation of legumes (Hauggaard-Nielsen et al., 2003), thus enhancing soil fertility by incorporating legumes in cropping systems in the long term (Giller, 2001).

Maize (*Zea mays* L.) is a major cereal grain crop used for food, fuel, starch, and biofuel (Gore et al., 2009) but it requires high water and N inputs due to high productivity (Ju et al., 2009). Continuous maize cropping often leads to a poor and declining soil fertility (Dakora et al., 1987; Sanginga, 2003), which increases the risk of crop failure (Kermah et al., 2017). In China, farmers often apply excessive amounts of N fertilizer to maize, with serious environmental impacts (Tan et al., 2017; Xiao et al., 2019).

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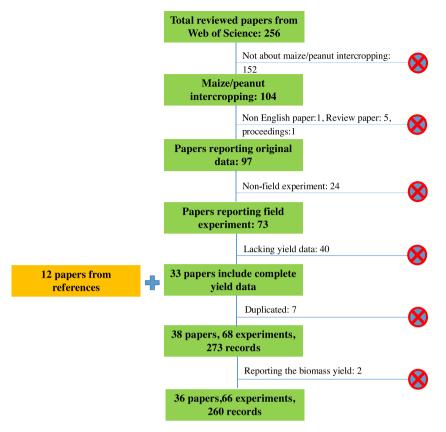


Fig. 1. Paper selection procedure.

Peanut (*Arachis hypogaea* L.) is a high value crop which is a source of protein and cooking oil (Settaluri et al., 2012; Davis and Dean, 2016). Peanut requires less water and fertilizer than maize, it can fix N from the atmosphere and its residues provide N to the following crops (Dakora et al., 1987).

Given interspecific complementary, maize/peanut intercropping has a potential to increase crop yields, reduce risk and improve soil fertility. Cereal/legume intercropping is a good way to improve system productivity as well as resource use efficiency (Searle et al., 1981; Li et al., 2001; Ghosh, 2004; Li et al., 2009), but trade-offs exist. In the maize/peanut intercropping system, maize is often a dominant crop species, achieving a better growth and higher yield per plant in the intercrop than in the pure stand (Mandimba et al., 1993). Peanut is shaded and dominated by maize with often reduced yield per plant in intercrops (Jana and Saren, 1998; Ghosh, 2004), which may reduce or even nullify the benefit of maize yield increase in intercropping. A synthesis of existing data across the world is required to obtain an overall assessment of the importance of advantages and disadvantages of intercropping maize and peanut.

Only few meta-analyses of intercropping have been done so far, and these showed an average land equivalent ratio (LER) of around 1.22  $\pm$  0.02 (Yu et al., 2015), 1.30  $\pm$  0.01 (Martin-Guay et al., 2018) or 1.29  $\pm$  0.02 in intercrops with maize and 1.16  $\pm$  0.02 in intercrops without maize (Li et al., 2020a). These previous studies were global meta-analyses that consider a wide range of species combinations, while they contained only a small sample of studies on maize/peanut intercropping, e.g. four out of 100 publications in the study of Yu et al. (2015) and 35 out of 939 data records (126 publications) in Martin-Guay et al. (2018). No meta-analysis has been made of the potential yield advantages that might be achieved by intercropping maize and peanut.

Because of the global importance of maize and peanut as food crops and the recognized potential for complementarity between these species, we conducted a specific meta-analysis on the land use efficiency in maize/

peanut intercropping. The land equivalent ratio (LER) is used in this analysis to represents the potential land sparing of intercropping as compared to monocrops. Design and management characteristics of an intercrop such as the intercropping pattern (strip, row, mixed), co-growth period of two species, sowing order of maize and peanut and nitrogen fertilizer input are likely to influence intra- and interspecific interactions by changing the plant growth condition in intercrops, such as light interception, water and nutrient distribution and uptake. Consequently, those agronomic practices are likely to affect the LER. These influences have not before been synthesized in an overarching analysis.

Therefore, in this study, we address two main questions: (1) What is globally the land equivalent ratio of maize/peanut intercropping? (2) How is LER affected by intercrop management, particularly, the intercropping pattern, co-growth period, relative sowing time of two species and fertilizer-N input?

#### 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Data collection and synthesis

A literature search was conducted on the Web of Science on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019. We used the search terms (*intercrop* OR (*mix\** AND *crop\**) OR *polycult\* not* (*fish\* or shrimp\**)) AND (*maize* OR *corn* OR *zea*) AND (*peanut* OR *groundnut* OR *arachis*) in the topic field. We concentrated on studies performed between 1945 and 2019. The search yielded 256 publications. We selected only those studies that met four inclusion criteria: (1) data were from field experiments (excluding pot experiments); (2) papers reported original data (no reviews); (3) papers were written in English; (4) papers included both the grain yield of intercrops and sole crops, or reported the LER directly. A total of 36 publications were retained (Fig. 1, Appendix: S1, S2).

Multiple data records were extracted from each publication. Different data records from the same publication represent separate experiments

**Table 1**Variables extracted from publications.

	1	
Variable	Definition	Data type/ Unit
Title	Title of publication	Text
Authors	Authors of Publication	Text
Continent	Continent where experiments were carried out	Text
Latitude and longitude	Latitude and longitude of the experimental site	Text
Intercropping	In which way the two species were	
pattern	intercropped:	
	- Strip intercropping two species planted in	
	alternative strips and at least one strip	
	includes more than one row;	
	<ul> <li>Row intercropping two species planted in alternate rows;</li> </ul>	
	- Mixed intercropping two species planted in	
	the same field without any distinct row or strip pattern.	
Sowing and	Sowing and harvesting date of intercropped	Date
harvesting date	species or information on total period and	
	overlap period of intercrops to calculate relative	
	sowing time (RST) or temporal niche	
	differentiation (TND)	
Fertilizer-N rate	Amount of N applied as fertilizer to intercrops and sole crops per unit area of the whole field	kg/ha
Yield (or LER)	Grain yield of sole crops and intercrops, or LER of intercropping	ton/ha

and different treatments within an experiment. An experiment was defined as a unique combination of site and year. Treatments were defined by differences in crop variety, crop density, crop configuration, intercropping pattern, sowing dates and fertilizer amount within an experiment. We individually coded each publication and each experiment in order to use publication and experiment as random factors in the analysis to account for factors affecting the response variables that were either not reported or not included in our statistical models. Data were extracted from tables or from figures using the GetData Graph Digitizer version 2.26 (Table 1). The final data set included data from 36 publications, 66 experiments and 260 records (treatments within experiments).

#### 2.2. Response variables

The response variables were the LER (Mead and Willey, 1980) and partial land equivalent ratios (PLER) for maize (PLERm) and peanut (PLERp), calculated according to the Eqs. (1) and (2).

$$LER = \frac{Y_m}{M_m} + \frac{Y_p}{M_p} \tag{1}$$

$$PLERm = \frac{Y_{m}}{M_{m}} & PLERp = \frac{Y_{p}}{M_{p}}$$
 (2)

Where  $Y_{\rm m}$  and  $Y_{\rm p}$  are the yields of maize and peanut in intercropping, while  $M_{\rm m}$  and  $M_{\rm p}$  are the corresponding sole crop yields.

We also calculated the relative yield advantage of maize ( $\Delta$ RYm) and peanut ( $\Delta$ RYp) to further quantify the contribution of the component crops to the intercropping system (Loreau and Hector, 2001):

$$\Delta RYm = \frac{Y_{m}}{M_{m}} - \frac{EY_{m}}{M_{m}} = PLERm - LSm$$

$$\Delta RYp = \frac{Y_{p}}{M_{p}} - \frac{EY_{p}}{M_{p}} = PLERp - LSp$$
(3)

Where  $\mathrm{EY}_m$  and  $\mathrm{EY}_p$  are the expected yields of maize and peanut, which were calculated as the product of the monoculture yield and the land shares, LSm and LSp. The land share was calculated on the basis of the densities of a species in the intercrop and in the sole crop or on the basis of the row or plant arrangement (Li et al., 2020b). There is a relative

yield advantage for a species if the relative yield is greater than the land share. Based on the sign of the relative yield advantage of the two component species, a mixture could be classified as win-win (both species have a relative yield advantage), win-lose (maize has a relative yield advantage but peanut has not), lose-win (maize has a relative yield loss but peanut has a relative yield advantage) and lose-lose (both species suffer a yield disadvantage).

#### 2.3. Explanatory variables

In the analyses, we used five explanatory variables, i.e. (1) continent, (2) intercropping pattern (categorical with 3 levels: strip, row, mixed), (3) temporal niche differentiation (TND, Eq. 4), (4) relative sowing time (RST, Eq. 5), (5) amount of fertilizer-N applied to intercrops. The information on continent, intercropping pattern, and amount of N fertilizer was obtained directly from the publications, while the TND and RST were calculated according to Eqs. (4) and (5) (Yu et al., 2015, 2016):

$$TND = \frac{P_{\text{system}} - P_{\text{overlap}}}{P_{\text{system}}} = 1 - \frac{P_{\text{overlap}}}{P_{\text{system}}}$$
(4)

Where  $P_{
m overlap}$  refers to the length of the period of overlap in the growing periods of maize and peanut in the maize/peanut intercropping, while  $P_{
m system}$  refers to the duration from sowing of the first crop species to harvest of the second crop species. This index quantifies the proportion of time that the two species in the intercrop are growing separately, resulting in competitive relaxation due to the empty space left by the not yet sown or already harvested companion species. When TND is zero, the growing periods of maize and peanut are identical, i.e. simultaneous intercropping. When TND is greater than 0, there is temporal differentiation in growing periods, i.e. relay intercropping. TND would be one in the case of no overlap (co-growth), i.e. double cropping. Double cropping was not addressed in this analysis.

Relative sowing time (RST) of a species was calculated as the difference in sowing time between a focal species and its companion, expressed as a proportion of the growing period of the focal species (Yu et al., 2016):

$$RSTm = \frac{S_m - S_p}{H_m - S_m} \tag{5}$$

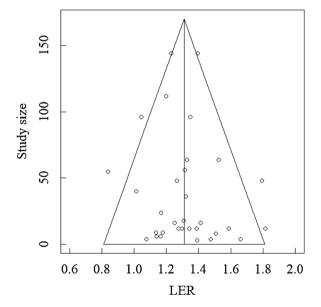
where RSTm represents relative sowing time of maize with respect to peanut.  $S_{\rm m}$  is the sowing date of maize,  $S_{\rm p}$  is the sowing date of peanut, and  $H_{\rm m}$  is the harvest date of maize with all dates based on the Julian calendar. Negative values of RSTm characterize the time, relative to the total growing period of maize, that maize is growing before, and therefore without competition from peanut. If maize was sown later than peanut or if, maize and peanut were sown simultaneously, then RSTm > 0. We expect that a species can escape from strong competition from the companion species if it is sown before the other species, i.e. if its RST < 0.

#### 2.4. Statistical analysis

All analyses were conducted in R Core Team (2021). Linear regression with mixed effects models (R package nlme; Pinheiro et al., 2021) was used to quantify the relationships of LER and PLER with the explanatory variables (continents, intercropping pattern, TND, RST, N input). We assumed normal error structure and homoscedasticity and validated the model assumptions by checking residuals (Zuur et al., 2009). We used publication and experiment within publication as random effects to account for differences between the studies (publications) and between experiments (sites\*years) within studies. The best random effects structure was identified by fitting different structures and comparing them using Akaike's information criterion using the R functions anova and AIC. Fourteen mixed-effects models were fitted to the data (Table 2). Data records with missing values of a variable were

Table 2
List of final best models fitted to the data.

Model	Equations
1	$LER_{ijk} = \beta_0 + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
2	PLER $m_{ijk} = \beta_0 + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
3	$PLERp_{ijk} = \beta_0 + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
4	$LER_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * continent_i^2 + \beta_2 * continent_i^3 + \beta_3 * continent_i^4 + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
5	$\text{LER}_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Pattern}_{ijk}^2 + \beta_2 * \text{Pattern}_{ijk}^3 + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
6	$LER_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * TND_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
7	$PLERm_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * TND_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
8	PLERp <sub>ijk</sub> = $\beta_0+\beta_1*TND_{ijk}+a_i+b_{ij}+\varepsilon_{ijk}$
9	$LER_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * RSTm_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
10	$PLERm_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * RSTm_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
11	$PLERp_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * RSTm_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
12	$LER_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * N_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
13	PLER $m_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * N_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$
14	$PLERp_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * N_{ijk} + a_i + b_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ijk}$



**Fig. 2.** Funnel plot of study size against land equivalent ratio. The vertical line represents the estimated mean LER via the mixed effects model. Study size is defined as the total number of plots across all replications, treatments and experiments in a study.

excluded from analyses which required that variable.

The indices, i,j and k represent publication, experiment and treatment, respectively. In all mixed models, the regression coefficients are denoted by  $\beta$  whereby  $\beta_0$  denotes the intercept while other coefficients  $\beta$  denotes the effects either of a covariable (in which case  $\beta$  represents a

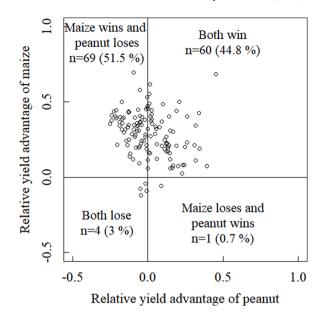


Fig. 4. Scatter plot of the relative yield advantage of maize ( $\Delta$ RYm) versus the relative yield advantage of peanut ( $\Delta$ RYp).

slope) or a categorical effect (in which case  $\beta$  represents a difference in intercept between categories).  $a_i$  is a random publication effect and  $b_{ij}$  is a random experiment effect.  $a_i$  and  $b_{ij}$  are assumed normally distributed with constant variances.  $\varepsilon_{ijk}$  is a residual random error assumed normally distributed with constant variance. The variance terms  $a_i$ ,  $b_{ij}$  and  $\varepsilon_{ijk}$  were all assumed independent. Superscripts 2, 3, 4 in model 4 (Table 2) indicate different continents while superscripts 2 and 3 in model 5 indicate different intercropping patterns.

We made a funnel plot (Duval and Tweedie, 2000) for LER to assess publication bias. For the funnel plot, we plotted study size against LER of each study as a proxy for study accuracy. The study size was calculated by summing the number of experimental units over all experiments and treatments underlying the mean LER calculated from the publication (Yu et al., 2015). The funnel shape was almost symmetrical (Fig. 2), indicating absence of publication bias (Peters et al., 2008).

Because many publications did not include sufficient information (e. g. standard deviation or standard error) to estimate SEs of the LER per each treatment, we did an unweighted analysis in which all studies had an assumed equal variance, consistent with earlier meta-analyses on intercropping (Yu et al., 2015; Martin-Guay et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020a). The advantage of an unweighted analysis is that a greater number of source papers is suitable for analysis, thus increasing the sample size of studies that is available for this meta-analysis.

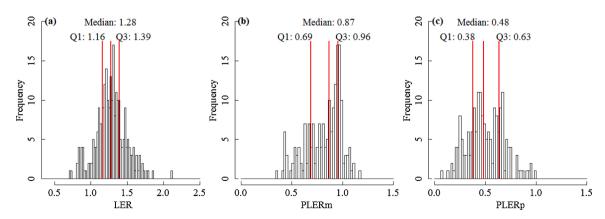


Fig. 3. Frequency distribution of LER (a), PLERm for maize (b) and PLERp for peanut (c). Vertical lines indicate the first (Q1), median and the third (Q3) quartile (transition value) of LER, PLERm and PLERp, respectively (Model 1, 2 and 3, Table 2).

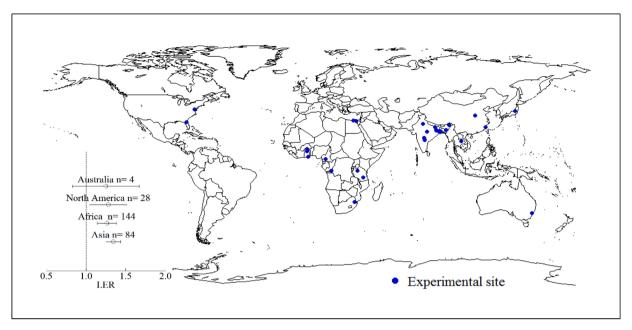


Fig. 5. Estimated means and global distribution of studies on the LER of maize/peanut intercropping. The horizontal bars represent 95 % confidence intervals; the dashed lines indicate LER = 1. Mean LERs for each continents were estimated with model 4 (Table 2).

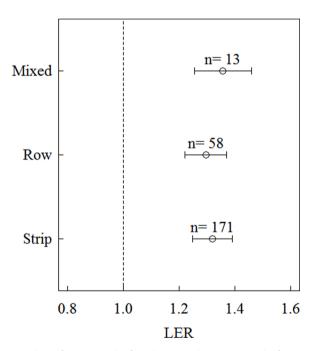


Fig. 6. Estimated mean LER in three intercropping patterns, mixed, row and strip. The horizontal bars represent 95 % confidence intervals; the dashed line indicates LER = 1. Mean LERs in different intercropping patterns were estimated with model 5 (Table 2).

#### 3. Results

## 3.1. Land equivalent ratio

The first quartile of LER was 1.16, the median LER was 1.28, and the third quartile was 1.39 (Fig. 3a). The mean LER was  $1.31\pm0.03$ . There were 238 LER values (92 %) greater than one, indicating that in a large majority of cases, maize/peanut intercropping gave a higher land use efficiency than sole crops. The mean PLER of maize was  $0.85\pm0.03$  and the mean PLER of peanut was  $0.49\pm0.03$ , while the median PLER of maize was 0.87 and the median PLER of peanut was 0.48 (Fig. 3b and c).

The high relative yield of maize contributed more to the high LER than the more modest PLER of peanut. The mean relative yield advantage of maize was 0.29, while the mean relative yield advantage of peanut was 0.01 (Fig. 4). Maize had a relative yield advantage in the far majority of cases (96.3 %) while peanut had slightly more often a relative yield disadvantage (54.5 %) than a relative yield advantage (45.5 %).

The maize/peanut intercropping studies analysed here were distributed over Africa (144 records), Asia (84 records), North America (28 records) and Australia (4 records). The mean LER was  $1.26\pm0.06$  in Africa,  $1.35\pm0.05$  in Asia,  $1.28\pm0.11$  in North America, and  $1.25\pm0.21$  in Australia (Fig. 5), with no significant difference among continents (P=0.7112). Generally, maize/peanut intercropping increased land use efficiency across different parts of the world.

## 3.2. Effect of different factors on the LER

There was no significant difference in the LER between the three intercropping patterns (P=0.3236), ranging from  $1.30\pm0.04$  in row intercropping to  $1.36\pm0.05$  in mixed pattern (Fig. 6). The configuration also showed no significant effect on the relative yield advantage of maize (P=0.0609) and peanut (P=0.3721). There was no response of the LER and PLER to TND, but the PLER of peanut tended to increase with TND (Fig. 7c), suggesting that relative yield of peanut was more sensitive to TND than the relative yield of maize.

Sowing maize earlier than peanut increased the PLER for maize by 0.63 units as the RST decreased by one unit (Fig. 7e). There was no effect of RST on the PLER of peanut or the total LER (Fig. 7d, f). Increased fertilizer-N rate increased the PLERm (P=0.0213), decreased the PLERp (P=0.0106) and had no effect on the total LER indicating an N rate benefit to intercropped maize but a negative effect on peanut (Fig. 7g, h, i).

### 4. Discussion

This is the first meta-analysis on the land use efficiency of maize/peanut intercropping. Based on the information of field studies in a global database, we found that maize/peanut intercropping is a means to increase land productivity (LER =  $1.31 \pm 0.03$  with a maize PLER of 0.85 and a peanut PLER of 0.49). Martin-Guay et al. (2018) and Yu et al. (2015) reported worldwide average LERs of  $1.30 \pm 0.01$  and  $1.22 \pm 0.01$ 

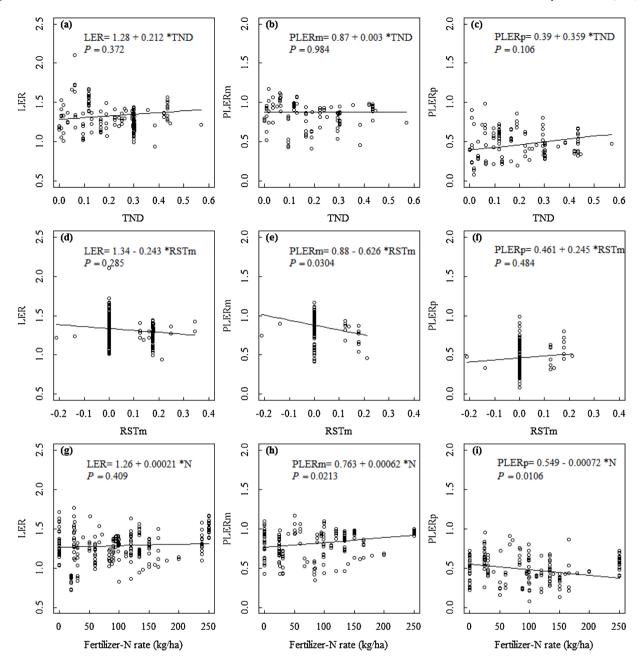


Fig. 7. Relationship between the LER and TND (a), the PLERm and TND (b), the PLERp and TND (c), the LER and RSTm (d), the PLERm and RSTm (e), the PLERp and RSTm (f), the LER and fertilizer-N rate (g), the PLERm and fertilizer-N rate (h), and the PLERp and fertilizer-N rate (i). P-values refer to the slopes of the regressions. The relationships between response variables (LER, PLERm and PLERp) and explanatory variables (TND, RSTm, Fertilizer-N rate) was estimated by mixed effects model 6-8, 9-11, 12-14.

0.02, respectively, while Li et al. (2020a) found an average LER of 1.29  $\pm$  0.02 in maize based intercrops. The average LER in this study of 1.31  $\pm$  0.03 was in line with the results of these meta-analyses that were based on multiple species combinations. It confirms the general belief that cereal/legume intercropping has a land use advantage.

Maize/peanut intercropping attains on average a "win-no win" yield advantage, with a relative yield advantage for maize of 0.29 and for peanut of a scant 0.01. In about 52 % of the records maize showed a relative yield gain while peanut lost, while 45 % of the records showed a relative yield gain for both maize and peanut (Fig. 4). Overall, a comparatively high maize yield in the intercrop was the main reason for an overall yield advantage in maize/peanut intercropping.

There was no response of the LER to TND, which is not consistent with previous studies. Yu et al. (2015) found that LER increased with

TND. Xu et al. (2020) also found a positive effect of TND on the LER in maize/soybean intercropping. The lack of relationship between the LER and TND in our dataset could be due to the comparatively narrow range of TND in the extracted studies which was from 0 to 0.57 (Appendix: S3) compared to 0 to 0.95 in Yu's dataset (2015), where the wider range of the independent variable increases the chance to find a significant response. Yu et al. (2015) furthermore mentioned that when conditions are favorable for crop growth (high N input), competition for light is strong, and high LER is achieved by allowing TND to mitigate this strong competition. On the other hand, when nutrients are limiting (0 or low N), the effect of temporal niche differentiation on LER was not as strong as under more favorable conditions. In the studies in our database, the N input was relatively low (Appendix: S4), 90.8  $\pm$  12.1 kg/ha in the intercropping system. This moderate input may also be a reason why

temporal niche differentiation did not show a significant positive effect on LER. However, we still found a slight positive trend of PLERp to TND, suggesting that relative yield of peanut was more sensitive to TND than maize by reducing the shaded time.

We found that PLERm increased with larger negative values of RSTm (earlier sowing for maize), while there was no effect of RSTm on PLERp. This means that sowing maize earlier will result in a higher relative yield of maize, but it will not strongly influence the relative yield of peanut. Thus, our analysis indicates that the sowing order of species in maize/peanut intercropping could be a better predictor for intercrop maize performance than the duration of the co-growth period. Sowing maize earlier than peanut can improve the relative yield of maize of this intercropping system.

We found no response of the LER to the fertilizer-N rate. However, the PLER of maize increased and the PLER of peanut decreased with higher N rate. Higher N input leads to a more vigorous growth of maize, which negatively affects peanut by competition for light and water. Peanut is less responsive to N input than maize because it can fix N from atmosphere. Thus, with greater input of N, the competitive balance between the species is tilted towards greater advantage for maize. Possibly in an attempt to attain high maize yield, researchers in most of the experiments in our dataset used a relative high N input for intercropping without considering the shading effect on peanut and the biological N fixation of peanut. New experiments are needed with moderate N input in intercropping to maintain peanut yield and achieve the N saving potential of maize/peanut intercropping.

#### 5. Conclusions

Maize/peanut intercropping is a promising practice to achieve sustainable high crop yield. It is important not only for smallholder agriculture to meet the demands for food and protein, but also for land sparing in developing countries. Maize had substantial relative overyielding, while peanut had not. The dominant crop species, maize, makes the largest contribution to the high LER of maize/peanut intercropping. The intercrop planting patterns and temporal niche differentiation had no effect on land equivalent ratio, while sowing maize earlier than peanut in intercropping increased the relative yield of maize without jeopardizing the yield of peanut. The LER did not respond to fertilizer-N rate, however, PLER of maize increased and of peanut decreased with increased N rate.

# **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

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#### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fcr.2021.108208.

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