»Best Practices for Intercropping in Coffee and Cocoa«

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Combining perennial crops with other crops or trees is a popular form of agroforestry. Inter cropping perennials like coffee, cocoa or fruit trees enhances ecological and social economic benefits.
Specific combinations of crops and trees can be adopted according to the need of the farmers, environment and market access. Suitable inter cropping models depend on the locations specifics, bio physical contacts and farmer preferences. Inter cropping legumes add nitrogen which can be used by coffee plants. For shades farmers either plant native timber or fruit trees.

Inter cropping

Cocoa is often established together with maize, cassava, papaya and banana. They not only provide food and income but also shade for the young seedlings which reduces mortality. After a few years, shade can be reduced to a few timber and fruit trees as well as leguminous trees.
Mature cocoa can still be inter cropped in lines. The choice of system depends on the preferences and capacities such as equipment, labor and time available to the farmer.

Factors in inter cropping

Select the suitable trees and crops but also consider planting patterns and management practices to reduce the competition in between the components. Fertilizer and pest management requirements need to be adopted. Optimized shade management provides the necessary shade for a healthy main crop while keeping competition for light, water and nutrients at minimum. Inter cropping should consider an optimal labor distribution

over the year and possibly allow for some mechanization.

Existing plantations

You can use inter cropping to rejuvenate your plantation. A map of your plot supports planning. Remove all aging or unproductive trees. With targeted thinning and pruning you can create more space. You can then decide which plants to add based on preferences, local climate and soil.
To optimally use the space and facilitate management and harvest, plant new crops in a structured way and according to recommended planting distances. You may consider adding multi use trees.