



Genotype x Environment Interactions and Stability of Grain Yield of Maize Hybrids across Sudanian and Sudano-Sahelian Agro-ecological Zones in Burkina Faso

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author NO wrote the protocol, performed the statistical analysis and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors NS and AB managed the analyses of the study. Authors IK, BO and APS managed the literature searches. Author BT and VG designed the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/IJPSS/2023/v35i183508

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/103595>

Original Research Article

Received: 25/05/2023

Accepted: 03/08/2023

Published: 12/08/2023

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ABSTRACT

Maize is an important staple crop for millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa and, particularly in Burkina Faso, where it ranks first among cereals since 2020. Available maize varieties are low yielding. To enhance maize production SEMAFORT, a seed company founded recently in Burkina Faso, introduced three-way hybrids. The present investigation was performed to assess 128 hybrids in 2018 and the best performing hybrids for genotype-by-environment (G×E) interactions in 2019. The study was conducted at one location (Farako-Ba) during the first year of evaluation using an alpha lattice design and in five locations during the second year using a randomized block design. The second year of the study was conducted in two different agro-ecological zones of Burkina Faso. The data were subjected to genotype and genotype by environment interaction (GGE) biplot analysis using GenStat statistical package. The analysis revealed four mega-environments which discriminated the hybrids according to yield potential. In each mega-environment, the best yielding hybrids were identified and will be further tested and possibly released for production in specific areas. The most stable genotype in the highest yielding and most stable environment was SX8-121. It could be grown across Sudan and Sudano-Sahelian zones of Burkina Faso.

Keywords: *Biplot, genotype by environment interaction; grain yield; maize hybrids; stability; Burkina Faso.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Maize (*Zea mays* L.) is the third most important crop in the world in growing area, after wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) and rice (*Oryza sativa* L.). It ranks first in Burkina Faso in terms of production [1]. Maize originated in the southern region of Mexico and spread throughout America, Europe, Africa and Asia. This cereal is a cross-pollinated crop of the Poaceae family. It is broadly grown all over the world due to its adaptability to a wide range of environmental conditions [2]. Maize can be cultivated at 50° N-40° S, from sea level (0) to 3,300 m above sea level. In Burkina Faso, maize is grown in all the three agro ecological zones of the country, Sudanian, Sudano-Sahelian and sahelian Zone with a rainfall ranging from 600 mm to 1200 mm.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, maize is a major staple crop for millions of people [3] and plays an important role in enhancing food security in the sub-region due to its high yield potential, broad adaptability and relative ease of cultivation [4]. According to Edmeades [5], more than 160 million hectares of maize is produced on nearly 13 million hectares of land in West and Central Africa (WCA) under rain-fed conditions [6]. The success of maize cultivation is linked to the application of inputs that maintain the environment and agricultural production. Among those inputs, are good soil cultivation, suitable maize varieties, adequate fertilization, and insect and disease control. Productive maize varieties are important for breeders and seed producers

and distributors on the one hand, and farmers on the other hand [7]. All of these participants in the maize value chain desire varieties that are adapted and high yielding in a given location. The genotype by environment interaction (GEI) helps to identify stable genotypes that are well adapted to specific target areas [8] which corresponds to the need of farmers. Babic *et al.* [7] reported that farmers look for varieties with small genotype x year interactions while breeders, seed producers and distributors look for more broadly adapted genotypes that are successful across wide areas. GEI through GGE plot analysis has the ability to show the which-won-where pattern for varieties and identify different mega-environments which are a group of sites that share the same, best genotypes.

A maize seed production and distribution company, SEMAFORT, establish in Burkina Faso recently plans to register new hybrids adapted to the three different agro-ecological zones of the country. The registration of new varieties in the national catalog requires evaluation of candidate hybrids' value for cultivation and use (VCU). VCU trials are required by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal and Halieutic Resources (MAARH) to identify useful genotypes under different cropping environments. These trials provide information about hybrid adaptation and performance across different environments in order to obtain their registration and commercialization. The objectives of this study were to (i) evaluate grain yield performance across sites in Burkina Faso,

(ii) assess the presence of GEI using GGE biplot analysis and (iii) identify high yielding and stable hybrids with potential success for commercialization.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Sites

The field studies were conducted in one location (Farako-Bâ) in 2018 and in five locations (Farako-Bâ, Kamboinse, Saria, Fada and Kouare) during 2018 and 2019 rainy seasons. The study sites are all located in different research stations of INERA. These sites are located in the Sudanian and Sudano-sahelian agro ecological zones and were chosen based on an increasing rainfall gradient from North to South. Farako-Bâ is located in the Sudanian climatic zone. Saria and Kamboinse are located in the central part of the transition zone (Sudano-sahelian), Kouare is located in Eastern part of the transition zone and Di is located in north-western part of the transitional zone. Geographical coordinates about study sites are provided in Table 1.

2.2 Plant Material

During the first-year trial, 128 maize varieties including 120 hybrids from SEMAFORT seed company were evaluated. The hybrids from SEMAFORT were coded as SX8-121 to SX8-240. Four 4 hybrids from Syngenta were coded as MAZ-20, MAZ-21, MAZ-23, MAZ-24. The remaining three (3) entries were local varieties (SR21, Bondofa and Komsaya) used as checks. During the second-year trial, materials were composed of the twenty (20) best performing hybrids from the first-year trail. SR21 is a composite variety resistant to maize streak viruses that was developed from pop 21 of CIMMYT. Bondofa is a white top-cross hybrid obtained from cross between EV8444 SR and SR22. Its yield ranges from 6,5 to 7 t/ha.

Komsaya is a yellow top-cross hybrid obtained from cross between EV8444 SR and SR22 with yield ranging from 8 to 9 t/ha.

2.3 Experimental Design

During rainy season 2018, an alpha lattice experimental design (4x32) with three (3) replications was used to evaluate 128 genotypes. Each replication was composed of four (4) blocks and each block contained 32 entries. In the second year (2019), the experimental design was a randomized complete bloc design with four (4) replications. Each replication contained 20 hybrids and each hybrid was planted on four (4) rows of five (5) m. Distance between rows was 0, 8 m and 0, 4 m between hills on each row with a total of 13 hills per row. Between three (3) and four (4) seeds were sown by hand in each hill in 3-cm deep holes in all four locations. Seeds were sown only after receiving at least 20 mm rainfall.

2.4 Trial Monitoring

Two weeks after sowing, plants were thinned to two plants per hill after hand weeding and then NPK (14- 23-14) fertilizer was applied at a rate of 300 kg/ha. Fifteen days later, the trial was hand weeded again and urea (46%) fertilizer was applied at a rate of 100 kg/ha. Finally, urea was applied forty-five dap at a rate of 50 kg/ha and trial was hilled to avoid lodging.

2.5 Data Collection

Data collected included germination rate (Ger), days to 50% tasseling (DT), days to 50% silking (DS), plant height (PH), ear height (EH), lodging (Lg), lodging at maturity (LgM), maturity time (Mat) and grain yield (GY). Grain yield was measured in tons per hectare adjusted to grain moisture content at 12%. Days to 50% tasseling and silking was recorded by counting the number of days from planting to when 50% of the plants in a plot emitted tassels or silks.

Table 1. Sites geographical coordinates, rainfall and planting data

Sites	Rainfall (mm)		Planting date		Longitude	Latitude	Altitude	
	Year	2018	2019	2018				2019
Farako-Ba		1382,6	1308,5	05/07	18/07	04°20' E	11°06' N	405 m
Di			825,5		30/07	03°25' E	13°10' N	258 m
Saria			800		14/07	2°09' E	12°16' N	300 m
Kamboinse			782,5		09/07	1°32' E	12° 28' N	296 m
Fada			681,5		13/07	0°17' E	11°56' N	400 m

2.6 Data Analysis

Descriptive and multivariate (principal component (PC) and Hierarchical Ascendant Classification (HAC) analysis were conducted using XLSTAT for data collected during the first-year evaluation.

Descriptive statistics help to describe and understand the features of a specific data set and are focused on the measures of central tendency on one hand and the measures of variability on the other hand. Therefore, we conduct a principal component analysis to evaluate variables that would help to discriminate between hybrids. From the principal component analysis, plant height and grain yield, the variables associated with PC1, and days to silking, associated with PC2, were strongly correlated to days to tasseling and plant maturity and were used for hierarchical cluster analysis.

SAS 9.1 software was used for analysis of the effect of location, genotypes, and their interactions on response variables. Means were calculated from collected data and GGE biplot analyses in GenStat version 12 were performed to identify high yielding and suitable hybrids for grain yield across five different environments during the second-year evaluation.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Measures of variability showed a wide dispersion of data around the mean for plant lodging at early stage (lg=6) and lodging at maturity (LgM=2) as shown by their large coefficients of variation (Lg=181.72 and LgM=203.51). These parameters varied from 0 % to 80% for plant lodging at early growth stage and 0% to 31% for lodging at maturity. Compared to lodging variables, the germination rate was higher (90%), but it varied among hybrids from 33% to 100%. It showed a weak coefficient of variation (11.13) and displayed strong significant differences between hybrids. For plant height, variation was great among hybrids for both ear height and plant height. The plant height ranged from 0.8 m to 3 m with a mean of 1.5 m while the ear height ranged from 0.3 m to 1.9 m with a mean of 0.8 m. Low variation was observed for plant cycle traits (days to tasseling, days to silking and maturity time) but variation was significant allowing for distinction of hybrids. The Grain yield varied from 0.5 t/ha to 10.4 t/ha with a mean of 5.8t/ha.

3.2 Principal Component Analysis (PCA) of Studied Variables

The PCA demonstrated the relationship between variables and revealed that three (3) axes (PC1, PC2 and PC3) explained 61.45% of the variability observed among hybrids. The first axis contributed to 31.15% of the variability among hybrids, the second axis explains 17.56% of variability while the third explains 12.73% of the variability. The plant height and grain yield explained, respectively, 0.669 and 0.8 of axis 1 contribution while, the plant cycle parameters (days to tasseling (-0.743), days to silking (-0.8) and maturity time (- 0.438) contributed negatively to the explanation of the axis. In the axis 2, only two parameters (ear height and days to tasseling) contributed to the explanation of variability among hybrids. In the third axis, two parameters (lodging at early stage and lodging at maturity) contributed highly but negatively to the explanation of the axis (Table 3). Fig. 1 illustrates the contribution of different variables to the discrimination of hybrids. This figure, combined with data in Table 3, indicate that plant height (PH) and grain yield (GY) in axis 1 with days to tasseling and days to silking are the mains components that significantly discriminate hybrids.

3.3 Hierarchical Cluster Analysis

A dendrogram constructed to group hybrids according to their mean yields revealed three major clusters. The cluster I was composed of short hybrids that emitted tassels and silks around 56 dap and 59 dap, respectively. The hybrids within this cluster had low yield (2.5 t/ha) and were tolerant to lodging at early grow stages and maturity. The cluster II was composed of medium height hybrids that emitted tassels and silks around 55.7 dap and 58.8 dap, respectively. These hybrids had a grain yield of around 6.2 t/ha and were less susceptible to lodging than cluster I hybrids. The last cluster (III) was composed of tall hybrids that emitted tassels and silks around 54.7 dap and 57.8 dap, respectively. Hybrids in this cluster had high yield potential (7.5 t/ha) and were tolerant to lodging (Fig. 3).

3.4 Hybrids Performance within Cluster

Hybrid performance within clusters were obtained by comparison with checks (SR21, Bondofa and Komsaya). The best hybrids were yielded 25% more than checks. Within the cluster I, four hybrids [SX8-186=5.9 t/ha, SX8-213=5.5

t/ha, SX8-149=5.5 t/ha and SX8-143=5.3 t/ha) yielded 43%, 33%, 32% and 29% more than SR21 and 40%, 31%, 30% and 26% more than Bondofa (Fig. 3). In cluster II, most hybrids (SX8-198, SX8-233, SX8-128, SX8-195, SX8-210, SX8-238, SX8-171, SX8-163, SX8-131, SX8-172, SX8-174, SD1, SX8-194, SX8-123, SX8-126, SX8-138, SX8-211, SX8-209, SX8-146, SX8-200, SX8-122, SX8-187 and SX8-197) yielded better than tested checks (SR1 21, Bondofa and Komsaya) except SX8-151 (6.4

t/ha) and MAZ-21 (6.4 t/ha) whose yields were lower (Fig. 3). In cluster III, yield ranged from 6.4 to 8.7 t/ha and all hybrids performed better than the three checks in the trial. Overall, experimental hybrids yield ranged from 4 to 8.7 t/ha which brackets the yield of SR21 (5.10 t/ha) and Bondofa (6.5 t/ha), but are still below the yield of Komsaya (8-9 t/ha). For multi-location results, the best hybrids were in cluster II and cluster III and their yield ranged from 7.3 to 8.7 t/ha (Table 4).

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of studied variables

Variables	Min	Max	Me	CV	F
Ger (%)	33	100	90	11.13	1.7***
PH	0.8	3.0	1,5	16.14	3***
EH	03	1,9	0 ;8	26.05	2.6***
Lg	0	80	6	181.72	1.3ns
LgM	0	31	2	203.51	1.5**
DT	50	66	56	5.47	1.7***
DS	51	69	59	5.45	1,3*
Mat	101	110	105	2.22	2***
GY	0.5	10.4	5.8	32.02	2.7***

Ger: germination rate; DT: days to tasseling; DS: days to silking; PH: Plant height; EH: Ear height; Lg: lodging;

LgM: Lodging at maturity; Mat: Maturity time;

GY: Grain yield; ns: non significant at 5 %; *: significant difference at 5 %;

** : highly significant difference at 5 %; ***: very highly significant at 5 %; F: Fisher probability at 5%; Max: maximum; Min: minimum; Me: mean; CV: coefficient of variation

Table 3. Eigen vectors of three principal components used to determine principal variables discriminating hybrids

Variables	PC1	PC2	PC3
Ger	0.276	0.045	0.231
PH	0.669	0.409	0.301
EH	0.436	0.695	0.188
Lg	0.238	0.486	-0.500
LgM	0.099	0.409	-0.706
GY	0.800	0.102	0.307
DT	-0.743	0.519	0.239
DS	-0.800	0.471	0.181
Mat	-0.438	0.147	0.187
Eigen value	2.804	1.581	1.146
Variance (%)	31.154	17.564	12.732
Cumulative	31.154	48.718	61.450

Table 4. Characteristic of cluster obtained from hierarchical analysis

Variables	Cluster I	Cluster II	Cluster III	Pr > F	Signifiant
Ger	87.3% a	90.2% b	92.1% b	0.023	Yes
PH	1.3 a	1.5 b	1.8 c	0.000	Yes
EH	0.7 a	0.8 b	0.9 c	0.000	Yes
Lg	4.7% a	6.2% a	6.3% a	0.498	No
LgM	2.2% a	2% a	2.2% a	0.915	No
GY	4.2 a	6.2 b	7.5 c	0.000	Yes
DT	56.3b	55.7 ab	54.7 a	0.028	Yes
DS	59.9 b	58.8 a	57.8 a	0.001	Yes
Mat	105.7 b	105.2 ab	104.7 a	0.078	No

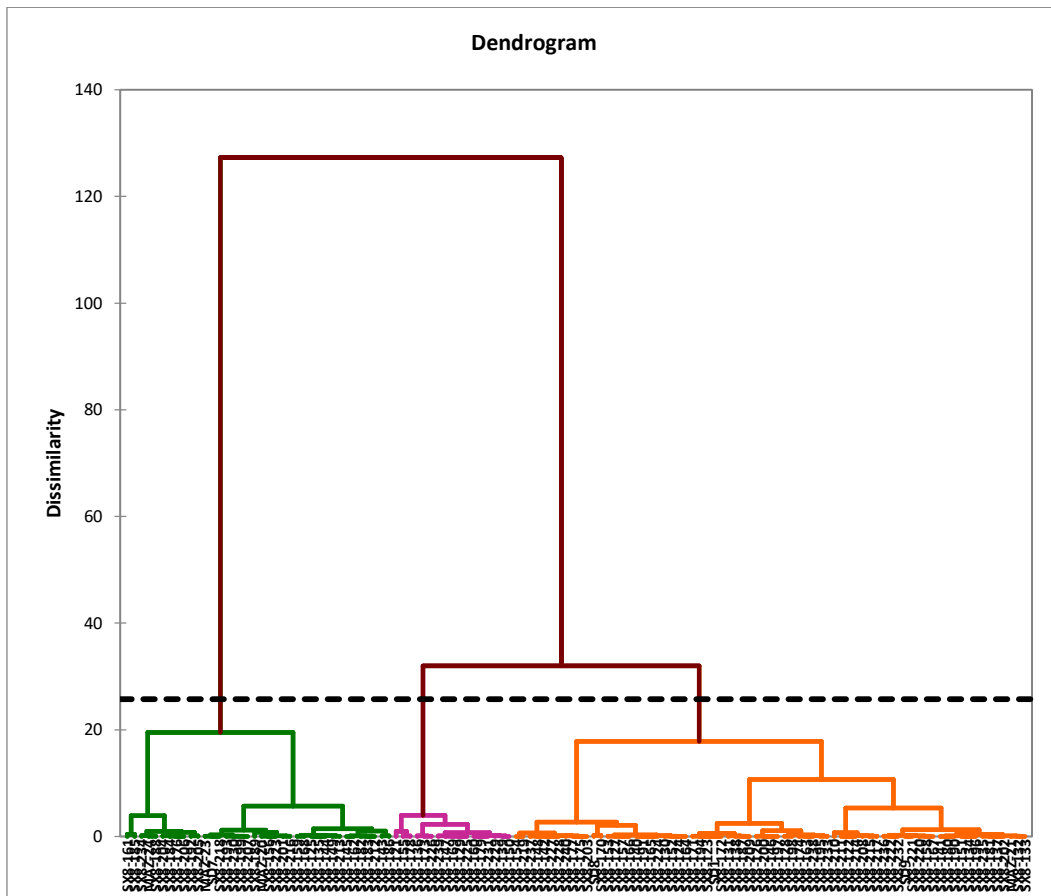


Fig. 1. Dendrogram of the 128 maize hybrids revealed by cluster analysis based on plant height, days to tasseling and grain yield

Table 5. Combined analysis of variance for grain yield of 20 hybrids across five environments

Source of Variables	DF	SS	MS	F value	Pr > F
Env	4	276.336158	276.336158	140.25	<.0001
Rep	3	5.864633	5.864633	2.98	0.0319
Genotype	19	9.606059	9.606059	4.88	<.0001
Env*Genotype	76	9.390329	9.390329	4.77	<.0001
Error	297	585.168949	1.970266		
Mean	6.732381				
CV	20.84941				
R ²	0.775306				

Env = Environment; Rep= Replication; CV = Coefficient of variation; SS=Sum of Squares; MS= Mean Square; Pr = probability

3.5 Analysis of Variance Across Environments

The results of the combined ANOVA across environments for the 20 hybrids showed that genotype main effect (G), environment main effect (E) and G × E were all highly significant ($p < 0.0001$) for grain yield (Table 5). Only replication effect was not significant at 1%.

3.6 Twenty Best Hybrids across Five Environments

Yield performance of these 20 hybrids across five environments is presented in Table 6. The overall mean across the five (5) environments for the 20 selected hybrids ranged from 5.774 t ha⁻¹ to 8.692 t ha⁻¹. The highest yield was obtained at Kamboinsé by SX8-121 with a yield of 12.975 t ha⁻¹ and the lowest yield was obtained at Saria

by SX8-233 with a yield of 2.203 t ha⁻¹. Overall, the hybrids yielded better at Kamboinsé than remaining sites. The bold and underlined mean yields are for those hybrids pointed out for higher or lower yield in the comments.

3.7 Identification of High Yielding and Stable Genotypes across Sites

Fig. 2 displays the average environment coordination (AEC) view of the GGE biplot showing stability and performance ranking of the hybrids across five environments. Stability as well as high performance of the tested hybrids were revealed. This was achieved by drawing an AEC on the genotype-focused biplot. The arrow headed line points to higher performing hybrids across environments while the crossing lines point to greater stability (poor variability) according to the direction. So, the biplot revealed that the highest yielding hybrids were SX8-121, SE-104, SX8-198, SE-105 and SE-103. SX8-233,

SE-101, SX8-131 and SX8-155 exhibited poorest yields. Hybrids SX8-121, SE-102, SX8-131 and SX8-239 showed high stability across environments. Hybrids SX8-233, SE-103, SX8-

198 and SX8-128 were unstable. Hybrid SX8-121 had high yield and high stability. In GGE biplot, the best genotype has large PC1 scores (high mean yield) and near zero PC2 scores (high stability). PC1 and PC2 accounted, respectively, for 44.91% and 21.79% of the total GGE (genotype and genotype by environment interaction) for a total of 66.70%. In Fig. 2, SX8-121 has high PC1 score with PC2 score near zero (indicating stability).

3.8 Identification of Mega Environments

GGE biplot has the ability to show the which-won-where patterns and mega environment differentiation from the genotype by environment interactions and gives a precise summary of the G × E pattern on a multi environment trial. Mega environment is a group of environments sharing almost the same and best performing genotypes. The polygon in Fig. 3 is formed by the connection of hybrids that are far away from the biplot origin such that all the remaining genotypes are contained in the polygon. Five sectors were drawn with the best or poorest hybrids (SX8-128, SX8-198, SX8-121, SE-103 and SX8-233) located on the vertices of the polygon, and environments fell into four sectors representing

Table 6. Mean grain yield (t/ha) of 20 hybrids across five environments in 2019

Geno	Environment					Mean
	Di	Fada	Farako-Ba	Kamboinsé	Saria	
SE-101	11.000	5.725	7.012	4.250	3.103	6.218
SE-102	8.225	5.400	7.309	9.350	3.920	6.841
SE-103	5.350	6.600	8.855	8.675	4.618	6.820
SE-104	8.125	6.800	6.930	10.100	4.198	7.230
SE-105	6.675	6.425	8.566	9.300	4.520	7.097
SX8-121	9.975	6.350	9.395	12.975	4.765	8.692
SX8-128	10.650	5.775	4.734	10.050	2.973	6.836
SX8-129	7.075	6.250	8.059	7.925	4.968	6.855
SX8-131	8.900	4.850	6.488	5.525	3.940	5.941
SX8-136	6.925	5.975	8.266	9.925	4.375	7.093
SX8-155	8.775	5.575	5.813	5.150	3.555	5.774
SX8-173	4.150	5.675	7.145	9.500	4.745	6.243
SX8-178	6.500	6.175	6.516	8.325	4.828	6.469
SX8-195	5.925	6.325	8.426	7.675	3.355	6.341
SX8-198	10.350	6.100	6.746	12.900	3.410	7.901
SX8-225	7.775	7.100	7.855	7.575	4.150	6.891
SX8-226	9.725	6.225	7.168	8.250	2.813	6.836
SX8-231	6.350	5.975	6.230	9.850	3.615	6.404
SX8-233	9.475	4.250	9.188	4.450	2.203	5.913
SX8-239	6.225	5.575	6.574	9.125	3.553	6.210
Mean	7.907	5.956	7.364	8.544	3.880	

Geno= genotypes; Env= environment

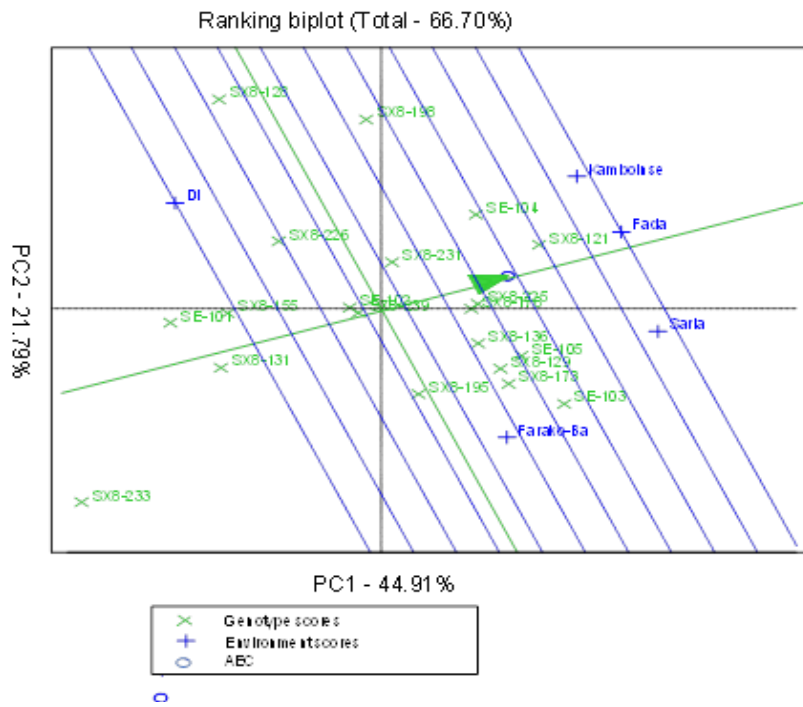


Fig. 2. Biplot of the average environment coordination (AEC) view showing mean performance and stability of 20 hybrids

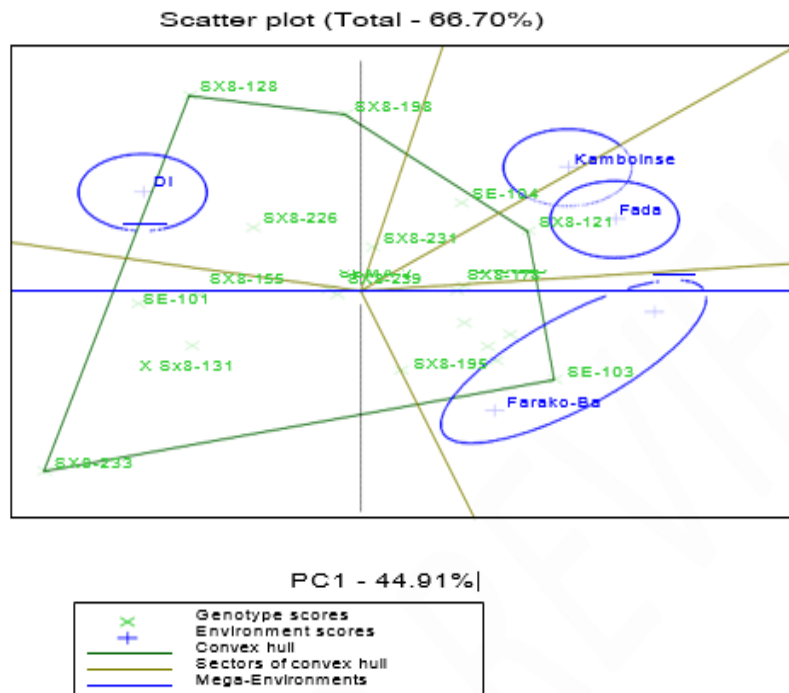


Fig. 3. Polygon view of the GGE-biplot showing the mega-environment based on grain yield of 20 hybrids

mega- environments. The environments were grouped as follows: three environments (Kamboinse, Fada and Di) appeared in their own

sectors individually and two environments (Farako-Ba and Saria) appeared in one sector. The vertex genotype for the mega-environment

composed of two environments (Farako-Ba and Saria) was the genotype SE-103. The remaining vertex genotypes (SX8-128, SX8-198, SX8-121 and SX8-233) were displayed for all the mega-environments and but did not fit into any of them, but genotypes SE-104 and SX8-121 were close to Fada and Kamboinse environments.

3.9 Identification of Ideal Environment and Genotypes

The GGE biplot is useful to identify ideal environments through PC1 and PC2 scores. The ideal testing locations or environments are determined by small (absolute) PC2 score and a large PC1 score. Small PC2 score refers to the representativeness of all environments while large PC1 score indicate power to discriminate genotypes in terms of genotype main effect. In addition to PC score, environments that are located in the center of the concentric circles are the most ideal (stable). Fada was the most ideal environment as identified from GGE biplot (Fig. 4). The AMMI analysis also indicates that Fada had the best IPCA2 value of 0.55 and Fig. 4 clearly shows that environment of Fada is located almost on first concentric circles. Among testing environment,

the nearest environment to Fada are Kamboinse and Saria which are located on the third and the fourth concentric circles.

The study revealed important environmental variation with three environments which had positive IPCA1 scores [Fada (0.009), Saria (0.236) and Kamboinse (2.205)] and the two others with negative IPCA1 score [Farako-Ba (-0.231) and Di (-2.219)]. The AMMI analysis also indicated that a genotype's reaction was different based on environmental variation and the best AMMI model allows for selection of the best hybrids that suit specific environments. The four best hybrids selected by AMMI model for each environment are presented in Table 7. Hybrid SX8-121 performed well in two stable environments (Fada and Saria) and ranked as second and fourth best performing hybrid at Kamboinse and Di. SE-103 was selected as the best performing hybrid at Farako-Ba and ranked as second and third best hybrid at Saria and Fada. SX8-198 performed well at Kamboinse under stable conditions and ranked fourth at Di in an unstable farming condition. Some hybrids such as SE-101, SX8-225, SE-104, SX8-129, SX8-136, SX8-128 performed specifically to a given environment (Table 7).

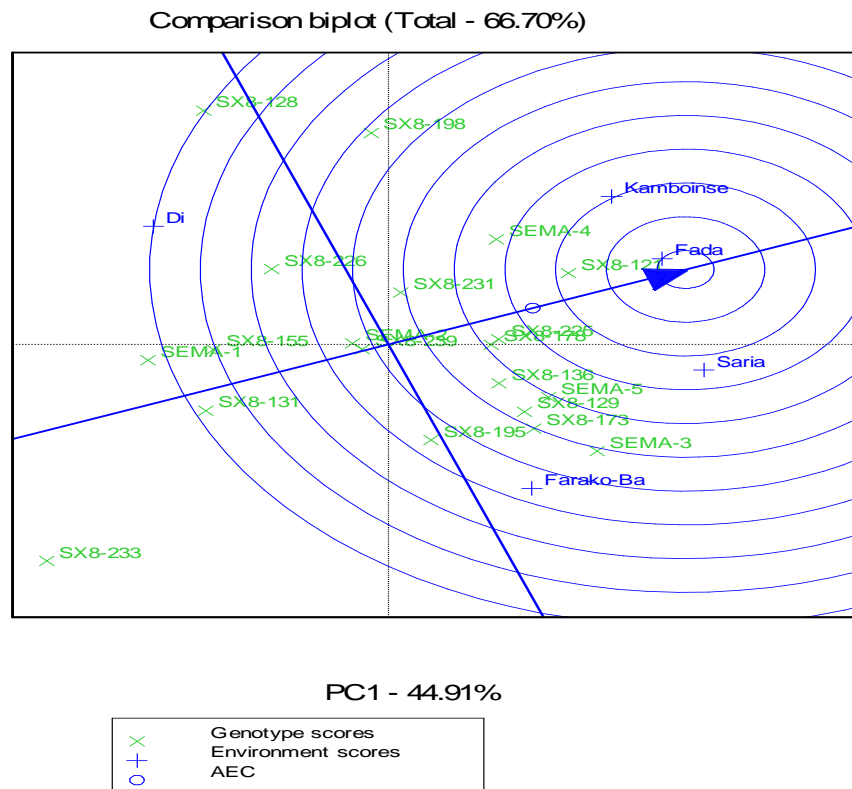


Fig. 4. Comparison view of 20 hybrids with ideal environment

Table 7. Environments ranked on IPCA scores including the first four recommended genotypes for each environment based on AMMI estimates

NE	Environment	Mean	IPCA1 score	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th
1	Di	7.911	-2.2199	SE-101	SX8-128	SX8-198	SX8-121
2	Farako-Ba	7.364	-0.2306	SE-103	SX8-129	SE-105	SX8-225
3	Fada	5.959	0.0090	SX8-121	SE-105	SE-103	SX8-136
4	Saria	3.880	0.2361	SX8-121	SE-103	SE-105	SX8-129
5	Kamboinse	8.548	2.2055	SX8-198	SX8-121	SX8-128	SE-104

4. DISCUSSION

The wide variation of data around the mean with large coefficient of variation for most of studied traits including germination rate, lodging parameters, plant cycle and grain yield indicate that hybrids reacted differently from each other. The results on germination rate in our study were higher than those reported by Nyembo *et al.* [9] who found a germination rate of 22% à 66%. In our case, the rate was higher and was 100% higher for some hybrids. Some hybrids had days to tasseling and silking around 50 days after planting, meaning they could reach physiological maturity at 85 days after planting and could be considered as early maturing varieties. However, some hybrids had days to tasseling and silking around 66 to 69 days after planting, meaning they could reach physiological maturity around 100 days after planting and could be considered as intermediate maturing group. For the remaining parameters which are routinely used to characterize local maize varieties, improved varieties and hybrids, Moussa *et al.* [10] and Zoma [11] revealed important variation.

The principal components identified the main variables responsible for discrimination among hybrids. PC1 explained most of the variation observed in the germination (Ger), plant height (PH), plant cycle parameters such as days to tasseling, silking and maturity (DT, DS & Mat) and the grain yield (GY) whereas PC2 was linked to morphological traits related to ear height (EH) and PC3 was linked to lodging parameters (Lg and LgM). This indicates that major variables controlling differentiation among genotypes were associated with PC1 (31,1%) and within variables associated to PC1. Grain yield (0,8) and plant cycle parameters [DT (-0,74) DS (-0,8)] contributed more to the variation. PC2 and PC3 explained less variation among hybrids and accounted for 17,56 and 12,7 of the observed variation.

The results suggest that focus should be directed toward yield and plant cycle parameters

when selecting directly for performance and adaptability for Sudan and Sudano-Sahelian areas for Burkina Faso. Vaisi and Golparvar [12], in their investigation to improve grain yield and seed weight in oats, found that selection of panicle and grain number per panicle were relevant. Ibrahim *et al.* [13] found that grain yield exhibited strong and positive phenotypic and genotypic correlation with its components.

The result of principal components analysis gave a hierarchical classification by using variables associated with the major component (PC1). The 128 hybrids were grouped into different clusters according to plant height, plant cycle and grain yield. Low yielding, short hybrids with intermediate maturity time characterized the first cluster. The cluster II was composed of medium yield, medium height hybrids with intermediate maturity while the cluster III was composed of tall hybrids, quite early with the highest yield potential. Concerning grain yield comparison with checks within clusters, the majority of hybrids performed better than checks in all clusters. In fact, SR21 is an opened pollinated variety while Bondofa and Komsaya are top crosses hybrids compared to the three-way hybrids tested here. Three-way hybrids are more uniform and more productive than open pollinated varieties [14] and according to Dzido [15] only classic single cross hybrids are the more interesting in terms of yield.

The combined ANOVA analysis showed significant effects for genotypes, environments and genotypes by environment interaction. This indicates that environments were highly variable and revealed also that hybrids react differently according to environment. The highly significant mean squares of environments for grain yield indicate that the environments were diverse, which is in agreement with the previous results reported by Gezahegn *et al.* [16] on Napier grass. According to the cumulative rainfall data, the tested locations were divided into three groups; Farako-Ba representing the wettest location following by Di, Saria and Kamboinse with medium rainfall level and lastly, Fada

representing the less wet site. In fact, Farako-Ba is located in the Sudanian climatic zone with high rainfall level while Di, Saria, Kamboinse and Fada are located in Sudano-sahelian with lower rainfall. Geographical coordinates (longitude, latitude and altitude) also displayed diversity within studied sites. The high significance of genotypes by environment (sites) interactions (< 0.001) for grain yield indicate that genotypes interacted differently across environments.

This justifies the need to identify the most stable and productive hybrids across environments and to identify suitable hybrids for specific environments. According to Yan and Tinker [17], genotypes displaying both high yield and stability across environments are considered as ideal genotypes. Consequently, from this investigation, hybrid SX8-121 exhibited high mean yield and high stability. High yield was identified by using the single-arrowed line which is the AEC abscissa pointing to higher mean yield across environments while high stability was defined using the crossing lines in either direction (the shorter the crossing line for a genotype, the higher the stability of that genotype). This indicates that SX8-121 was broadly adapted, had high consistent ranking across environments and may therefore be cultivated across Sudan and Sudano-Sahelian agro-climatic zones of the country. In this particular case, similar studies reported that broad adaptation is more important than narrow [Kayaga, [18]; Gauch and Zobel, [19].

The GGE biplot has the ability to show the which-won-where pattern and mega environment differentiation from the genotype by environment interaction and provide a precise summary of the $G \times E$ pattern on a multi environmental trial. According to Yan and Rajcan [20], mega environment is a group of environments that shares almost the same and best genotypes. In this study, the GGE biplot analysis of grain yield and stability of 20 hybrids showed that PC1 explained 44.91% of total variation while PC2 explained 21.79% and together, the two axes accounted for 66.70%. This implies that the biplot of PC1 and PC2 adequately approximated the environment centered data. The biplot for 20 hybrids was divided into five sectors and four mega-environments within which different genotypes could be selected and deployed similar to environments as reported by Yan and Tinker [21]. The relationship among environments and which won were pattern showed that Saria and Farako-Ba were similar

while Fada, Kamboinse and Di were different from first mega-environments (Saria and Farako-Ba) and also from each other.

Fada was the higher yielding and more stable environment while Kamboinse was the most discriminating environment among tested hybrids (high yielding environment) but less stable than Fada. Di was the low yielding and unstable environment. Saria and Farako-Ba were in the same environment with medium yield hybrids. The results clearly exhibited different mega-environments which were associated with either high, medium or low yielding hybrids. This is in agreement with explanation provided by Badu-Apraku *et al.* [4] about mega-environment. In fact, in 2011, Badu-Apraku *et al.* [4] reported that the ability of a test environment to represent the mega-environment is referred to as the representativeness. It was also reported by Nzuve [22] that a mega-environment indicates a group of fairly homogeneous environments sharing the best and common genotypes.

As mentioned earlier, an ideal test environment is the one representative that is most discriminating for genotypes [23]; Yan and Kang [24]. From the PC scores, the most discriminating test location was Kamboinse because of its large PC1 score but it was less representative because of large angles with the AEC abscissa as compared to Fada that was the most representative location because of its small PC 2 and its position which was almost in the first concentric circles. This result is in agreement with Yan and Rajcan [20] who confirmed that ideal testing locations or environments are determined by small (absolute) PC2 score while large PC1 score indicate power to discriminate genotypes in terms of genotype main effect.

After identifying the best genotype (SX8-121) and the ideal environment (Fada), it was important to identify other superior hybrids suited to specific environments. In fact, according to Derera *et al.* [25], the ranking based on AMMI analysis of estimates could be helpful to select hybrids for the different agro-ecological zones. So, based on this analysis, the four best hybrids selected for each environment were: SE-101, SX8-128, SX8-198 and SX8-121 for the unstable environment of Di; SE-103, SX8-129, SE-105 and SX8-225 at Farako-Ba (medium yield and unstable environment; SX8-121, SE-105, SE-103 and SX8-136 in the ideal environment (Fada); SX8-121, SE-103, SE-105 and SX8-129 in the low yielding and stable environment of Saria;

SX8-198, SX8-121, SX8-128 and SE-104 hybrids in high yielding and stable environment of Kamboinse.

5. CONCLUSION

Genotypes, environments and genotype × environment interaction were significant for grain yield. The hybrids performed differently with respect to yield in each of the five test environments and their relative performance varied from one environment to another. The AMMI biplot showed large variability among the environments and among tested hybrids for yields. The GGE biplot discriminated the study area into four mega-environments which seemed to be linked to the yielding potential. High yielding hybrids were identified for each mega-environment and could be proposed for release for production. These hybrids are SE-101 for mega-environment of Di, which is related to the low yielding environment and SE-103 for the of Farako-Ba (medium yield and unstable environment), SX8-121 for Fada (stable and high yielding environment) and Saria (low yielding and stable environment) and lastly SX8-198 for the high yielding and stable environment of Kamboinse. However, the most outstanding hybrid was SX8-121 which has the potential for production across environments and should be released and commercialized. The highest yielding hybrid per environment could be recommended for the specific environments where they performed well. The results of this study should be confirmed through further evaluation of hybrids at different locations of the Bimodal Humid Forest Zone during both minor and major seasons for several years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors would like to thank SEMAFORT seed company for supporting INERA to complete this activity in order to widen the range of registered maize varieties in Burkina Faso particularly and in west Africa in general.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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