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## Alleviating Rural Poverty in Nigeria: A Challenge for the National Agricultural Research System

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### Abstract

Rural poverty is a serious threat to food and nutrition security in sub-Saharan Africa and specifically in Nigeria. Land degradation, caused by human-induced soil erosion, deforestation, over-grazing and other human activities, accounts for much of rural poverty occurring in Nigeria. Apart from low external inputs, land degradation brings about low productivity in subsistence farming, while also fostering land conversion to marginal agricultural lands with fragile soils. Farm households respond to declining land productivity in diverse ways. Prospects for economic growth and future human welfare are also threatened by land degradation, whose environmental damage leads to losses in farmers' income and greater risks for poor households. An urgent reversal of this trend is necessary in order to rescue from the cycle of poverty, the rural populace, whose economic livelihood is directly dependent on land exploitation. Unfortunately, over half of Africa's rural poor are located on “low potential” and “fragile” lands. Other contributors to rural poverty in Nigeria are agricultural and economic policies of previous governments, which negatively affect farming communities. Of the many technology-related constraints of farmers, only a fraction can be addressed effectively through agricultural research. Worse still, most resource-poor farmers are unable to formally articulate their technology needs. Besides, farmers' constraints are not always researchable problems, leading to farmers' despondency, and difficulty in research priority setting. The national agricultural research system (NARS), which is expected to contribute to agricultural development and rural poverty alleviation in Nigeria, is beset by enormous constraints of low funding, poor infrastructure, and instability in staff, policy, governance and institutional arrangements, all of which are not conducive to sustained agricultural growth. The public sector research cannot do the task alone, so private sector research needs to be encouraged. Universities, with their comparative advantage, should also play active role in agricultural research activities and programmes. The various agricultural development and rural poverty alleviation programmes being embarked upon will be discussed.

**Keywords:** Agricultural research, environmental degradation, Nigeria, rural poverty