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An Overview of World Natural Rubber Production and Consumption: An Implication for Economic Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

H.Y. Umar, D.Y. Giroh, N.B Agbonkpolor and C.S. Mesike

Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria, P.M.B. 1049, Benin City, Nigeria
E-mail: nosabetty@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT The study examined natural rubber (NR) production and consumption worldwide with emphasis on Nigeria. Data were collected from local and international journals on rubber production and consumption, which were analysed using descriptive statistics to evaluate the performance of the sector globally (1951 – 2005). Natural Rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis* Muell. Arg.) was first discovered by Christopher Columbus during his visit to South America in about 1493. It is an environmental friendly cash crop grown in Africa and Asian Continents. The product is mostly consumed by Europe and America and was believed to have been domesticated in about 1876, gained global awareness in 1913. Currently, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia are the leading producers of natural rubber in the world. The global demand growth rate is about 3.4% annually. Africa produces about 408,000 tonnes annually, out of which Nigeria accounted for over 90,000 tonnes in the 1990s, but now only about 66,500 tonnes annually. This shows about 26.1% decrease in NR production from Nigeria during the period under review. Recently however ,research on NR production showed some achievements on high yielding rubber clones and the introduction of intercropping with arable crops has encouraged (NR) production in Nigeria. Inconsistence in Federal Government policies on agriculture, synthetic rubber (SR) production, ecological factors and socio-economic problems were found to be the major factors affecting rubber production and consumption in Nigeria.