

## Nigeria

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Nigeria is located on the coast of West Africa. It is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world. It is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Nigeria has strong historical, language and constitutional ties with the UK and is the UK's 39<sup>th</sup> largest overseas market and second largest African market for goods. The three largest and most influential ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo tribes.

Despite the many positive developments within the Nigerian economy it is still affected by challenges such as high youth unemployment, insecurity, power instability and infrastructure problems. The economy is still very much oil dependent and work is being undertaken to promote growth in non-oil sectors.

Depending on the country of origin of the company you are dealing with, you are likely to experience a variety of different business structures. All native Nigerian companies however will display hierarchical tendencies as befits a country rich in tribal tradition and culture. Thus the boss expects and receives respect from those below them in the structure. As age is highly valued in Nigerian culture, managers are often of the older generation – age brings wisdom. Respect for your elders is important in Nigeria, even if you possess more qualifications than older colleagues (or even if you 'outrank' them, in corporate terms), there is no surer way to cause offence in Nigeria than by disrespecting members of the older generation.

Although middle-managers like to give the impression that they have power, they rarely do. Decisions are invariably made right at the top. This does not mean, however, that junior staff can be ignored as they may well influence the eventual decision-maker.

As you would expect in a strictly hierarchical culture, managers are expected to lead quite strongly. The boss is expected to make decisions (with or without wider consultation) and the decisions of the boss are expected to be carried out to the letter. Directions should be given in a polite and friendly but definitive fashion. Spell out in detail what needs to be done – anything which is not explicitly requested is likely to remain undone. This does not mean that subordinates are inefficient or lazy, merely that they expect the boss to know exactly what he wants to happen and to explain things to them fully.

Teamwork and the ability to work together toward clearly defined goals are considered more valuable assets in the Nigerian workplace than independent thinking, or individualistic efforts.

More than 500 languages exist in Nigeria. While the official language is English, less than half of the population speaks it. Other languages that are spoken widely are Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Fulfulde. When communicating in English, speak in short, simple sentences and avoid using jargon and slang. Polite and cheerful greetings are highly valued in Nigeria and can be extensive. Conversations may get loud and passionate. However, interrupting others may be considered rude. Communication in Nigeria can be direct and straightforward, especially among friends and close business partners. They may not find it difficult to say 'no'.

Nigeria is a country in which relationships are all-important and so meetings will often start and finish with a great deal of social interaction. Do not try to rush these conversations as they are vital parts of the getting-to-know-you process. Greetings are very important in Nigeria. They are not perfunctory, such as in some Western societies, but are rather more ritualistic. Make sure you are on your feet, and take your time when greeting someone. Be sure to enquire about their health, as well as the health of their immediate family. Be candid and warm, and remember, people will be more interested in you than your business strategies at this stage.

Names are usually given in the order of first name, family name. Always use the title of Chief if it applies to the person. Before calling Nigerians by their first name, it is best to wait until they offer it. The exchange of business cards is an essential step when meeting someone for the first time, so bring more than you need.

Extended, warm handshakes are the traditional greeting amongst men. However, for women, since Nigeria has a large Muslim population, and observant men are forbidden from shaking hands with women; a safe, traditional greeting would be to bow your head slightly when introduced. Try to avoid using your left hand when greeting people, handing them things or eating, as it is considered haram ('unclean') in Muslim culture.

Expect negotiations to be slow and protracted. Relationship building, information gathering, bargaining, and decision making all take time. Throughout the negotiation, be patient, control your emotions, and accept that delays and changes occur. Most Nigerians prefer a strongly polychronic work style. They are used to pursuing multiple actions and goals in parallel. When negotiating, they often take a holistic approach and may jump back and forth between topics rather than addressing them in sequential order.

In Nigeria, especially for men, it is important that your business dress reflects your status; wear dark, stylish suits and a tie, and don't hold back on the accessories. For female visitors, remember that Nigeria is a traditional country, and therefore skirts above the knee and cleavage-revealing tops are unacceptable in the office environment, as is the exposure of too much skin around the collarbone and shoulder area. As the weather gets hot, make sure that garments are made of natural fabrics, such as silk, cotton or linen, which will allow the skin to breathe and for you to stay reasonably cool.

Finally, foreign visitors may be invited to special events. Elaborate preparations may be made so make sure to go to great lengths to acknowledge such efforts. Social events do not require strict punctuality. While it is best to arrive at dinners close to the agreed time, being late to a party by 15 to 30 minutes is acceptable.