

# **N I G E R I A**

## **SECTION A**

### **Capital**

Abuja 339,100 (1995 est.)

Note: On December 12, 1991 the Capital was officially moved from Lagos to Abuja, though many government offices remain in Lagos pending completion of facilities in Abuja.

### **Area**

923,768 sq km (356,669 sq mi)

### **Form of government**

Republic in transition from military to civilian rule

### **GDP—per capita**

Purchasing power parity - \$970 (1999 est.)

### **Population**

123,337,822

Note: Estimates for this country explicitly take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, as well as changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected.

### **Ethnic composition**

Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo, Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, many others

### **Official language**

English

## **Other languages**

Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Fulani (four main languages spoken by 2/3 of the population), others - Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, Edo, Efik, igbirra, Itsekiri etc.

According to the Ethnologue (Summer Institute of Linguistic, 1996) the number of living languages listed for Nigeria is 470.

## **Legislation dealing with the use of languages**

*Constitution* as adopted on October 1, 1979, amended 1999

## **Background notes**

Independence was achieved from the U.K. on October 1, 1960.

Constitution: The 1979 Constitution is still partially in force.

Nigeria is by far the most populated African country. Its many ethnic groups give the country a rich culture but also pose major challenges to nation building. The economy is dominated by the production of petroleum, which lies in large reserves below the Niger Delta. While oil wealth has financed major investments in the country's infrastructure, Nigeria remains among the world's twenty poorest countries in terms of per capita income.

In pre-colonial times, the area was home to several kingdoms and tribal communities; in spite of European contact that began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they managed to maintain their autonomy until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The colonial era began in earnest in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Britain consolidated its rule over Nigeria. In 1914 the British merged their northern and southern protectorates into a single state called the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Nigeria became independent of British rule in 1960. Since then, the country has endured decades of on-and-off military rule.

The count of approximately three hundred ethnic groups (a group of people having a common language and cultural values) living in the country overwhelmingly enumerates ethnic minority groups, those which do not comprise a majority in the region in which they live. These groups do not have a political voice, nor do they have access to resources or the technology needed to develop and modernize economically. They therefore often consider themselves discriminated against, neglected, or oppressed. There are only three ethnic groups who have attained "ethnic majority" status in their respective regions: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Ibo in the southeast, and the Yoruba in the southwest.

The HAUSA-FULANI are an example of a fused ethnic group, as they are actually made up of two groups, not surprisingly called the Hausa and the Fulani respectively. The Hausa are a fusion of Sudanese people who inhabit what is now considered Hausaland. They believe in the religion of Islam.

The Fulani are also Muslims and are known to have arrived in the Hausa states in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Since then they have intermarried with the Hausa, and have mostly adopted the latter's customs and language, although some Fulani decided to stay "pure" by retaining a nomadic lifestyle and animist beliefs.

IBO (IGBO), the second majority group, is also a synthesis of smaller ethnic groups (Onitsha Ibo, the Western Ibo, the Cross River Ibo, and the North-eastern Ibo). Their origins are completely unknown, as they claim to be from about nineteen different places. They are mainly Christian.

The third ethnic majority group, the YORUBA, is also made up of numerous smaller collections of people (the Oyo, Egba, Ijebu, Ife, Ilesha and Ekiti or Owu peoples). The Yoruba are united, however, by their common belief that the town of Ife is their place of origin, and the Oni of Ife is their spiritual leader. Their mythology holds that "Oduduwa" created the earth. Present-day royal houses of the Yoruba kingdoms trace their ancestry back to "Oduduwa", while members of the Yoruba people maintain that they are descended from his sons.

The remaining members of the population are part of ethnic minority groups, which include such peoples as the Kanuri, the Nupe, and the Tiv in the north, the Efik/Ibibio, the Ejaw, and the Ekoi in the east, and the Edo and Urhobo/Isoko to the west. These are just a few along with hundreds of other groups that differ widely in language, culture and even physique.

## **SECTION B**

### **Where does one observe language to be a problem in the country?**

The diverse ethnic backgrounds of the Nigerian people is the source of much confusion.

Nigeria is an area with the size of Texas in which over three hundred different languages are spoken, and in which the same number of separate cultures desperately try to retain their identity. One can only imagine the ensuing chaos.

In Nigeria, one of the most widely used markers for distinguishing ethnicity is that of language (religion being another). Nevertheless,

language groups sometimes shift their distinctiveness rather than display clear boundaries. For example; Manga and Kanuri speakers in northeastern Nigeria communicate easily with one another. But in the major Kanuri city of Maiduguri, 160 kilometers south of Manga-speaking areas, Manga is considered a separate language from Kanuri. The Kanuri and Manga who live near each other see themselves as members of the same ethnic group; while others farther away do not.

In 1990, relations between ethnic groups remained a major problem in such a large and pluralistic society. The combined factors of location, language, religion, and common and differentiating customs created a strong sense of shared fate among ethnically related groups and formed a constant basis for organizing these groups into political constituencies. Thus, when political parties emerged, they represented the northern Muslim peoples, the Yoruba, and the Igbo; middle belt and others in between were often courted from several different directions.

The situation in Nigeria for all ethnic groups seems to be improving, but whether the government can act quickly enough and fairly enough to balance the many communal groups remains to be seen. If the Ibo and others continue to perceive themselves to be marginalized, they will continue to fight the State and one another for greater political power.

### **The use of language in everyday life e.g. education, broadcasting and other**

The official language of the country is English, which is taught in primary schools and used for instruction in secondary schools and universities. All officials with education to secondary school level or beyond speak English and use it to cross the language barriers formed by Nigeria's ethnic diversity. Many in the university-trained elite use English as one of the languages in their home and/or send their children to preschools that provide a head start in English-language instruction.

In addition to English, "pidgin" has been used as a lingua franca in the south (and in adjoining Cameroon) for more than a century among the uneducated population. By 1990 it was being used in popular songs, radio and television dramas, novels, and even newspaper cartoons. While in the north, Southerners spoke pidgin to one another, but Hausa was the lingua franca of the region and was spreading rapidly as communications and travel provided a need for increased understanding. Counting English, the use of which was expanding as rapidly as Hausa, many Nigerians were at least trilingual. This language capability usually included a local vernacular, a wider African lingua franca, and English. Given the long history of trade and markets that stimulated contacts across local ethnic units, multilingualism was a very old and an established adaptation. Such multilingualism has enabled communication among different ethnic groups historically.

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF NIGERIA



## **APPENDIX B**

### **NIGERIA - CONSTITUTION**

(Adopted on October 1, 1979)

(Document Status in July 1999)

#### **CHAPTER II**

##### **FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES AND DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY**

##### **15**

(1) The motto of the Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress.

(2) Accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.

(3) For the purpose of promoting national integration, it shall be the duty of the State to:

(a) provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods and services throughout the Federation.

(b) secure full residence rights for every citizen in all parts of the Federation.

(c) encourage inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties; and

(d) promote or encourage the formation of associations that cut across ethnic, linguistic, religious and or other sectional barriers.

#### **CHAPTER IV**

##### **FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS**

##### **35**

(3) Any person who is arrested or detained shall be informed in writing within twenty-four hours (and in a language that he understands) of the facts and grounds for his arrest or detention.

## **36**

6) Every person who is charged with a criminal offence shall be entitled to -

(a) be informed promptly in the language that he understands and in detail of the nature of the offence;

(e) have, without payment, the assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand the language used at the trial of the offence.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LEGISLATURE

#### Part I

#### NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

## **55**

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore.

#### Part II

#### HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY OF A STATE

## **97**

The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the State as the House may by resolution approve.

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