



Business Intelligence and Commercial Awareness (BICA) Report

January - March, 2026

Introduction

The first quarter of 2026 featured major developments across Nigeria's financial, commercial, and regulatory sectors. Key actions such as the SEC's increase in capital requirements and MTN's proposed acquisition of IHS Towers signal stronger regulation and major strategic investments.

New initiatives like the SEC Regulatory Hub, the National Intellectual Property Policy and Strategy (NIPPS), and NDPC enforcement efforts reflect a push for better oversight and transparency. Nigeria's global standing is also improving, with its removal from the EU high-risk AML/CFT list.

This edition of Business Intelligence and Commercial Awareness Report highlights key developments to help stakeholders understand the changing business environment and emerging opportunities.



SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION (SEC) RELEASES A CIRCULAR INCREASING THE MINIMUM CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CAPITAL MARKET OPERATORS

On 16th January, 2026, the Nigerian Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued a circular significantly raising minimum capital requirements for Capital Market Operators (CMOs). This move aims to strengthen market resilience, protect investors, and ensure operators have sufficient financial capacity to meet obligations.¹

This increase affects most capital market operators. Under the new framework, several categories of operators are now required to meet substantially higher capital thresholds, while entirely new categories have been introduced to accommodate emerging digital asset activities.

Regulated Entities	MC (₦)	Revised MC (₦)
Broker (Client Execution)	200 million	600 Million
Dealers (Proprietary Trading)	--	1 Billion
Broker-Dealers	300 million	2 billion
Full-scope portfolio managers	150 million	5 billion
Limited-Scope Portfolio Managers	--	2 billion
Robo-Advisers	10 million	100 million

*MC: Minimum Capital

In addition to these revisions, the Securities and Exchange Commission introduced new Virtual Asset Service Provider (VASP) license categories to reflect the growth of the fintech sector, including:

¹[Securities Exchange Commission “Revised Minimum Capital for Regulated Capital Market Entities”](#)

New Virtual Asset Service Provider (VASP)	MC (₦)
Ancillary Virtual Asset Service Providers (AVASPs)	300 million
Digital Assets Intermediaries (DAIs)	500 million
Digital Assets Platform Operators (DAPOs)	500 million
Real World Assets Tokenization and Offering Platforms (RATOPs)	1 billion

*MC: Minimum Capital

While these new categories have been formally introduced, further guidance is expected to clarify the permissible activities and compliance obligations. The revisions mean operators must review capital structures, raise funds, or restructure to meet thresholds, as failure to comply could lead to suspension or revocation of registration. The Commission has given operators till June 30, 2027 to comply with the new minimum capital requirements. Overall, the SEC's 2026 capital requirement changes mark a major shift in Nigeria's capital markets, emphasizing stronger capital adequacy, regulatory compliance, and preparation for emerging digital finance activities.²

² ibid

MTN SEEKS FULL ACQUISITION OF IHS TOWERS, TRIGGERING COMPETITION AND CONSUMER CONCERNS IN NIGERIA

On 17th February, MTN Group and IHS Holding announced a proposed \$6.2 billion all-cash acquisition in which MTN would purchase the remaining shares of IHS it does not already own, increasing its stake from about 24.7% to 100%. The deal would result in IHS being delisted from the New York Stock Exchange and becoming a wholly owned private subsidiary of MTN.³

The transaction represents a major consolidation in Nigeria's telecommunications sector and remains subject to shareholder and regulatory approvals from the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Nigerian Communications Commission, which oversee mergers and changes of control in the communications industry.

Strategically, MTN views the acquisition as a way to reintegrate critical infrastructure, improve cost predictability, and capture tower lease margins previously paid to IHS while benefiting from third-party tower revenues. Before completion, IHS will divest its Latin American operations in Brazil and Colombia. The proposed acquisition of a 75% stake in IHS Holdings by MTN Group will significantly reshape Nigeria's telecommunications sector. Nigeria accounts for nearly 60% of IHS's global revenue, and if the deal proceeds, MTN would gain control of a large share of the country's telecom tower infrastructure.

This would create a vertically integrated structure in which MTN controls both telecom services and the physical towers used by multiple operators, potentially giving it influence over more than 60% of Nigeria's collocated towers. Such control raises concerns about fair competition. Rival telecom operators would likely need to lease tower space from an MTN-controlled provider, which could expose their expansion and upgrade plans. These concerns relate to the provisions of Sections 1, 17, 18 & 59 of the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission Act, 2018, which empowers the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission to prevent practices that restrict competition or abuse market power. As a result, the transaction is currently undergoing review by the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Nigerian Communications Commission, with particular emphasis on consumer protection considerations and the long-term sustainability of the telecommunications sector.⁴

³[Chukwuyere Ebere Izuogu "MTN's \\$6.2 Billion Acquisition of IHS: What Nigeria's Competition Authorities Will Look For"](#)

⁴[Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy "Statement on the Acquisition of HIS Towers by MTN Group"](#)

For consumers, the deal presents both potential benefits and risks. On the positive side, MTN's direct control of tower infrastructure could accelerate network upgrades, including the rollout of 5G services, and improve network reliability. However, the transaction could also reduce competition if rival operators face difficulties leasing tower space. Additionally, given the huge cost of the acquisition, there is a possibility that MTN may increase service prices in the future to recover its investment.



NIGERIA LAUNCHES NATIONAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY POLICY TO STRENGTHEN INNOVATION AND TRADE

In November 2025, National Intellectual Property Policy and Strategy (NIPPS) was launched marking the country's first unified framework for Intellectual Property protection, commercialization, and governance. Developed by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment with support from the World Intellectual Property Organization, NIPPS aims to modernize legal and institutional frameworks, strengthen enforcement, promote technology transfer, and build human capacity.⁵

To drive implementation, the Federal Government inaugurated specialized committees in January 2026, including an Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee and an Inter-Agency Coordination Group, ensuring coordinated action across agencies and alignment with national priorities and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) IP obligations. The policy emphasizes international standards compliance, supporting regional market access and cross-border recognition of IP assets.

Overall, NIPPS is expected to transform Intellectual Property from a regulatory tool into a strategic economic asset, unlocking opportunities for innovation, trade, and sustainable development across Nigeria and the African continent.

⁵[Temitope Akayi "FG Unveils National Intellectual Property Policy to boost Innovation, Economic Growth"](#)

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PROPOSES FINTECH REGULATORY COMMISSION AMID RAPID INDUSTRY GROWTH

The Nigerian House of Representatives proposes a bill to establish a Nigerian Fintech Regulatory Commission, reflecting the country's rapidly growing fintech sector, currently valued at around \$230 billion. Sponsored by Mr. Kayode Laguda, the bill seeks to unify oversight, enhance investor confidence, and protect users of digital financial services. Currently, Fintech in Nigeria is regulated by multiple agencies, including the Central Bank of Nigeria, Securities and Exchange Commission, Federal Inland Revenue Service, and National Information Technology and Development Agency, creating fragmented oversight. The proposed Commission aims to enforce standards, safeguard consumers from fraud, and provide a stable, coordinated regulatory environment.⁶

NDPC ISSUES COMPLIANCE NOTICE TO 649 HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OVER DATA PROTECTION REQUIREMENTS

The Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC) on 19th February, issued a Compliance Notice to 649 higher institutions across Nigeria including universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and technical colleges as part of its ongoing sector-wide investigation into data protection compliance.

The institutions were given a 21-day timeline to submit evidence of their 2024 data protection compliance audit filings, the appointment of a Data Protection Officer, details of their technical and organisational data protection measures, and registration as a Data Controller or Data Processor of Major Importance under the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023. The NDPC warned that failure to comply may result in enforcement orders, administrative penalties, or criminal prosecution, requiring the affected institutions to submit the requested documentation or address any compliance gaps within the deadline.⁷

⁶ Maimuna Katuka, "House of Representatives moves to Establish Fintech Regulatory Commission to Boost Digital Economy" [ITEDGENEWS](#) "NDPC Issues Compliance Notices to 649 Nigerian Tertiary Institutions, urges stronger protection"



NRS CLARIFIES IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLIANCE TIMELINE FOR NIGERIA'S NEW TAX REGIME

On 3rd February 2026, the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS) issued a notice to clarify the implementation and effective dates of the 2025 tax reform laws following public concerns about when the new rules would take effect. The notice confirmed the official commencement dates and explained how the reforms should be applied in practice. It also signaled the end of the transition period, meaning businesses and individuals are now expected to fully comply with the new tax regime⁸.

The Nigerian Tax Act and the Nigeria Tax Administration Act came into force on 1st January 2026, requiring all payroll, VAT, and corporate tax filings from that date to follow the new regulations. Meanwhile, the NRS (Establishment) Act and the Joint Revenue Board Act took effect earlier, on 26th June 2025, to legally authorize the transition from the FIRS to the NRS, support digital upgrades, and restructure enforcement operations. As a result, administrative actions taken by the NRS between June 2025 and January 2026 remain legally valid.

The Nigeria Revenue Service also clarified how the new rules apply across different taxes. VAT, Withholding Tax (WHT), and Stamp Duty apply only to transactions from 1st January 2026 onward, while transactions completed in 2025 remain subject to the old laws. For Company Income Tax (CIT), the new framework applies to the 2026 Year of Assessment, while the 2025 assessment year will still follow the previous system. Capital Gains Tax (CGT) depends on the date of asset disposal, sales made in 2025 follow the old rates, while those from 1st January 2026 fall under the new rules.

Businesses are therefore advised to update their accounting systems, internal controls, and compliance procedures to align with the new regulations. Given the penalty provisions under the Nigeria Tax Administration Act 2025, taxpayers are encouraged to seek professional guidance where necessary to ensure compliance and avoid sanctions.

⁸[Goldsmith Solicitors "A Review of the NRS February 2026 Notice"](#)



SEC INTRODUCES REGULATORY HUB TO BOOST COLLABORATION, TRANSPARENCY, AND MARKET OVERSIGHT

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Nigeria has introduced the Regulatory Hub, a centralized digital platform aimed at enhancing collaboration, strengthening oversight, and promoting transparency across Nigeria's financial and capital markets. The Hub facilitates secure, real-time exchange of regulatory information among key agencies, including the office of the National Security Adviser (NSA), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), and other participating institutions.

SEC Director General emphasized, "The Regulatory Hub marks a significant step in our commitment to harness technology for greater regulatory synergy. By linking regulators on a single platform, we are enhancing market resilience, integrity, and investor confidence." Adding to this, the Executive Commissioner, Operations, stated, "This platform will greatly improve the speed and quality of regulatory decision-making. It serves as a single access point for regulators to share data, respond to requests, and collaborate seamlessly in safeguarding our financial and capital markets."⁹



NDPC JOINS GLOBAL EFFORT TO PROTECT PRIVACY IN AI-GENERATED IMAGERY

In the first quarter of 2026, the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC) joined 60 global Data Protection Authorities in endorsing a Joint Statement on AI-Generated Imagery and Privacy, coordinated by the Global Privacy Assembly. The statement highlights the risks of AI tools creating non-consensual or harmful imagery, especially for children and vulnerable groups, and calls on

⁹[Securities and Exchange Commission "Regulatory Hub, A SEC Nigeria Initiative"](#)

organisations to implement safeguards, ensure transparency, provide content removal mechanisms, and comply with data protection laws.

This aligns with Nigeria's broader AI governance efforts, including the National AI Strategy led by Bosun Tijani, the Federal Minister of Communications and Digital Economy of Nigeria and NDPC's privacy-by-design requirements under the Nigeria Data Protection Act. The NDPC will also use Compliance Audit Returns from major data controllers to monitor responsible AI use, ensuring privacy rights are protected while supporting Nigeria's digital development.¹⁰

NIGERIA REMOVED FROM EU LIST OF HIGH-RISK THIRD COUNTRIES FOR MONEY LAUNDERING AND TERRORISM FINANCING

The Federal Government of Nigeria has welcomed the decision of the European Commission to remove Nigeria from the EU's list of high-risk third countries for Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT). The move follows Nigeria's earlier removal in October 2025 from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring after completing its reform action plan.

According to Wale Edun, Nigeria's Minister of Finance, the decision reflects reforms implemented under the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, including stronger inter-agency coordination, legal reforms, and closer engagement with international partners. The European Commission noted that Nigeria had addressed key technical and strategic gaps in its AML/CFT framework.¹¹

Nigeria's removal from the list is expected to improve financial credibility, ease cross-border transaction scrutiny, strengthen correspondent banking relationships, and attract greater foreign investment. The government also reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining these reforms in collaboration with global partners to ensure continued alignment with international standards.

¹⁰ [NDPC "Joint Statement on AI-Generated Imagery and the Protection of Privacy"](#)

¹¹ [Federal Ministry of Finance, "Nigeria Welcomes European Commission's removal of the Country from EU AML/CFT high-risk list"](#)



NAICOM ISSUES NEW GUIDELINES ON LICENSING AND RENEWAL OF INSURANCE INSTITUTIONS

The National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) has released revised Guidelines for Licensing and Renewal of Insurance Institutions in Nigeria, effective January 2026. The guidelines apply to insurance and reinsurance companies, brokers, agents, insurtechs, and related operators, setting minimum standards for capital, governance, operations, and consumer protection, along with clear application and renewal procedures. The revisions aim to enhance regulatory certainty, market discipline, and consumer confidence in Nigeria's insurance sector.¹²



NCC AND CBN SET TO IMPLEMENT REFUND FRAMEWORK FOR FAILED AIRTIME AND DATA TRANSACTIONS

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) have developed a joint framework to resolve failed airtime and data transactions, where subscribers are debited without receiving value. Following consultations with telecom operators, banks, and other stakeholders, the framework sets enforceable Service Level Agreements (SLAs), requiring refunds within 30 seconds or up to 24 hours for pending transactions. It also mandates SMS notifications for all transactions and introduces a Central Monitoring Dashboard to track failures, refunds, and SLA compliance. Implementation is expected to begin on 1st March 2026, pending regulatory approvals and technical integration.¹³

¹² [National Insurance Commission "Guidelines on License and Renewal of Insurance Institutions' License in Nigeria"](#)

¹³ [Nairametrics "NCC, CBN mandates 30 second refund for failed airtime, data transactions"](#)



FCCPC COMMENCES ENFORCEMENT OF DIGITAL LENDING REGULATIONS

The Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC) has begun enforcing the 2025 Digital, Electronic, Online, and Non-Traditional (DEON) Consumer Lending Regulations against digital lenders that failed to regularize by 5th January 2026. Enforcement measures include withdrawing conditional approvals, removing non-compliant operators from the FCCPC's approved lender register, and engaging application platforms and payment providers to monitor compliance. Operators under transitional arrangements have until April 2026 to comply. The DEON regulations aim to ensure regulatory certainty, enhance market discipline and transparency, protect consumers from abusive practices, and safeguard compliant operators from unfair competition in Nigeria's digital lending sector.¹⁴



CBN RE-ADMITS BUREAU DE CHANGE TO OFFICIAL FOREIGN EXCHANGE MARKET

On 10th February 2026, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) issued a circular allowing licensed Bureau de Change (BDCs) to participate as intermediaries in the Nigerian Foreign Exchange Market (NFEM). This marks a major policy shift, as BDCs had been excluded from accessing official foreign exchange since July 2021 due to concerns over exchange-rate instability. The decision follows the 2024 regulatory reforms, which strengthened capital requirements, licensing standards, reporting obligations, and compliance rules for BDCs. Under the new framework, each BDC may purchase up to \$150,000 weekly, must sell or utilize the FX within 24 hours to prevent hoarding, and cash settlements are limited to 25% of the transaction value. The policy is intended to improve foreign exchange liquidity and expand access to FX for legitimate end users through the official market.¹⁵

¹⁴ [Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission “Digital Lending Rule: FCCPC Goes After Violators”](#)

¹⁵ [Central Bank of Nigeria “Nigeria Opens up official dollar market to bureau de change”](#)



CONCLUSION

The first quarter of 2026 highlights significant regulatory reforms, strategic corporate developments, and increasing digital transformation within Nigeria's business environment. Key changes across sectors such as capital markets, telecommunications, taxation, data protection, and financial services reflect a policy focus on stronger oversight, improved transparency, and enhanced investor confidence.

As Nigeria continues to strengthen its regulatory frameworks, advance digital innovation, and deepen international collaboration, stakeholders must remain proactive and adaptable to navigate the evolving business climate and take advantage of emerging opportunities.

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