



Nigerian businesses expand opportunities in China through CIIE

Every year, the China International Import Expo (CIIE) serves as a gateway for Nigerian agricultural products to enter the Chinese market, with Nigerian cashews in particular gaining significant recognition through the expo.

Previously unfamiliar to many Chinese consumers, the cashews quickly attracted strong interest after being showcased at the expo, leading to a surge in orders. Hassan Mohammed, trade commissioner of the trade office of the Consulate General of Nigeria in Shanghai, has witnessed this transformation firsthand. He attended the first CIIE as an official representative from Nigeria, where he was impressed by the vast range of new technologies and products on display, as well as the face-to-face networking opportunities for global businesses. The following year, he was assigned to work in China and has since participated in the CIIE annually. Reflecting on his seven-year journey with the expo, Mohammed said, "A lot of changes are happening, and Nigerian businesses have grown because of the CIIE."

One of his most memorable experiences was at the 7th CIIE, where 16 Nigerian companies participated, and 13 secured business agreements. Among them, Nigeria's Vintage Group signed a contract worth over \$1.2 million with one of China's largest cocoa bean processing companies. Mohammed sees the CIIE as a key platform for Nigerian entrepreneurs. "Nigerian companies have formed joint ventures with Chinese businesses, which has helped them expand production and create more jobs back home, increasing incomes for the Nigerian people," he said. At the 2024 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, Nigeria and China signed an agreement to facilitate the export of Nigerian peanuts to China, opening new doors for Nigerian agricultural businesses. Temitope Akintunde, director for international and public sector relations at the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), noted that while peanut exports at past CIIEs were limited, there is now strong potential for expansion.

As the world's fourth-largest peanut producer, Nigeria has already received inquiries from Chinese companies eager to purchase its peanuts. Given China's high demand for the crop, Nigeria sees the expo as an opportunity to accelerate its entry into the market. Mohammed emphasized, "Nigeria is fortunate to be one of the few African countries able to bring peanuts to China. We hope to use the CIIE to further promote Nigerian agricultural products." Nigeria's participation in the CIIE extends beyond agriculture. At the first CIIE, traditional Adire fabric from Abeokuta, a southwestern Nigerian city, gained popularity among Chinese visitors. A Nigerian exhibitor who showcased the indigo-dyed cloth noted that, unlike Nigeria's major export products such as oil, cocoa, and sesame, Adire fabric represents Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and allows the world to learn more about the country. "I didn't expect to secure many orders or make any big deals at my first CIIE," he said. "My goal was to establish connections and seek collaboration opportunities with Chinese businesses."

Nigeria's participation in the expo has also led to global business opportunities. At one CIIE, a Georgian trader secured a sesame trade deal with a Nigerian exhibitor. "Without the CIIE, this kind of long-distance collaboration would be extremely difficult," Mohammed said. LCCI's Akintunde also highlighted the expo's broader impact, stating that the CIIE plays a crucial role in strengthening global trade ties and uniting businesses from around the world. As Nigeria-China relations have been elevated to a comprehensive strategic partnership, Akintunde hopes that Nigeria can transition from being an exhibitor at the CIIE to becoming an official partner country at the expo. "We can explore avenues for co-hosting bilateral forums during the expo and deepencooperation across more industries," he said. For Mohammed, the CIIE is more than just a trade fair—it's a global marketplace where opportunities abound. "The CIIE is like a global village. Every country has its own culture and ways of doing business. By engaging with others, we can learn from them, promote Nigeria, and find new opportunities," he said.