

Nigeria - An African Country

Nigeria is a country on the western side of Africa. Nigeria, like India was a colony of Britain and became independent after a long period of struggle. Thus both Nigeria and India share much in common. Locate Nigeria on the map and see if we also have similar climate.

- ◆ Locate Nigeria on a map of Africa. Find out the name of the ocean which is to the South.
- ◆ Find out the names of the countries that are situated on the other three sides of Nigeria.
- ◆ Also find out which part of Nigeria is nearest to the Equator. What kind of climate do you think those regions will have?

Seasons

The Southern region of Nigeria which is near the Equator has equatorial climate, that is, it has only one season throughout the year – it is fairly warm and rainy all through the year. The capital city of Nigeria, Lagos, is situated in this region. This gives rise to dense forests along the sea coast. However, only Southern Nigeria has equatorial climate. Northern parts of Nigeria have a mild winter season also. And it rains only from May to October. It does not rain all the year round like it does in Lagos.

- ◆ Look at the rainfall map of Nigeria. Locate the cities of Lagos and Kano.

- ◆ Which city is near the equator and which one is farther away?
- ◆ Which part of Nigeria gets maximum rainfall?
- ◆ Which part gets less rainfall?

Natural Vegetation of Nigeria

The trees found in Southern Nigeria are not found in Northern Nigeria. In fact in the extreme north east no trees could be seen at all.

Map 1: Rainfall in Nigeria

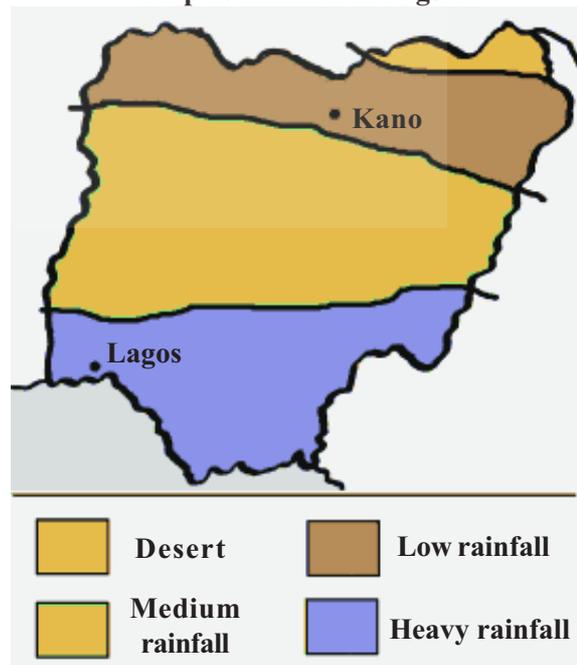




Fig 8.1 Flat roofs of Kano

The northern region of Nigeria is almost a desert. It is a part of the Sahara desert, which is the largest desert in the world.

- ◆ The natural vegetation of Nigeria is shown in Map 2. Compare this with the rainfall map and answer:
 - i. Regions with heavy rainfall have vegetation.
 - ii. Regions with medium rainfall have vegetation.
 - iii. Regions with low rainfall have vegetation.
 - iv. Desert regions have vegetation.

purposes. They help the tree to remain above water during high tides. These roots are submerged under water when the tide comes in. They also help the roots to breathe, as the marshy soil does not contain much oxygen. They also help to anchor the tree to the loose soil. Mangroves are the only kind of trees that grow in salty soils and are very important for preventing the spread of saline marshes along the coasts. The wood of the mangrove tree is very strong and heavy. Its fruit is sweet. Mangrove forests form a 16-96 km wide belt in the coastal region of Nigeria.

Mangrove Forests

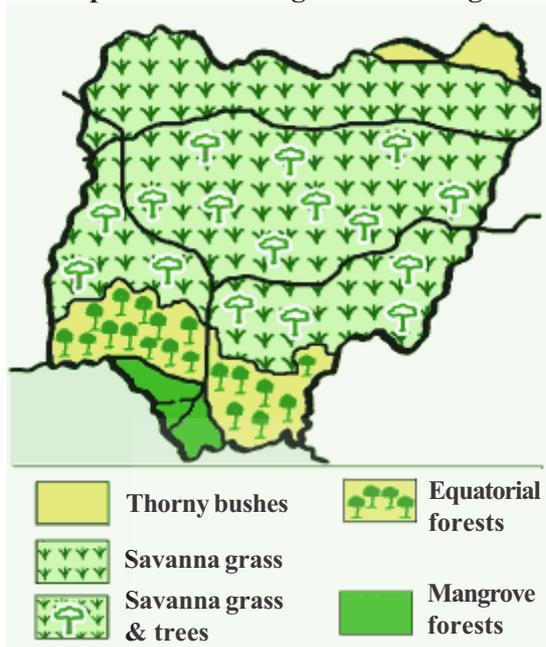
Nigeria's coast is not much above sea level. During high tide, salty seawater floods these coastal areas, small gulfs and deltas of rivers. When the tide subsides, the water recedes.

There are saltwater marshes in these coastal areas. Mangrove trees are found in large numbers in these marshy areas. In figure 8.2, look how the roots of the mangrove trees are sticking out of a marsh. They serve a number of



Fig 8.2 Mangrove forest in India.

Map 2: Natural Vegetation of Nigeria



The coastal areas of India too have mangrove forests. The Sunderban forests of the Gangetic delta (in West Bengal) are the most important mangrove forests in the country. Sunderi is the typical tree of this forest in India.

Equatorial Forests

Dense Equatorial forests begin where the salt water marshes end. These forests contain tall trees, creepers, etc. like mahogany, ebony, rubber, sapele, obeche, African walnut and oil palms. Since there is no dry season the trees here are evergreen and never leafless. Raffia palm is also a very important tree of this belt. Its fruit yields cooking oil. Coconut trees can also be found in the entire belt. Equatorial forests are found in 80-160 km belt after the mangrove forests.

- ◆ Which of these trees grow in your state?

Some of the trees in equatorial forest (as in Map 2) grow 60 meters high. An

interesting thing about these trees is that they give wood of different colours. Ebony has black wood, mahogany is reddish brown and obeche tree has white wood. In contrast, most of the trees in our country yield brown wood.

The Equatorial forests merge with monsoon forests towards the north. In these parts there is a dry season and the trees shed their leaves to conserve water. Leaves sprout again in these forests when it begins to rain in May or June.

There is a great demand for Nigerian wood in many countries, especially in Europe, because it is heavy and strong. Earlier, ships and boats were made out of such wood. This wood was also used as sleepers under railway lines. Nigeria earns much foreign exchange by exporting wood. However, this has also led to rapid depletion of forest resources.

The Savanna

So far we have been talking about Southern Nigeria near the coast. As we move inland, the rainfall declines. The trees are few and far between. Tall grass grows between the trees. The typical trees of this region are acacia and baobabs (Map 2), do not grow very tall. This is the Savanna region.

Trees grow closer together along the two major rivers, Niger and Benue, as more moisture is available there.

Have you wondered why there is more grass and fewer trees in the Savanna region? Trees need lot of water. Grass grows in regions with low rainfall. You must have noticed that grass grows rapidly during the rains, after which it dries up very fast. In the next season, new grass comes up.

In the hot Savanna region, the grass is stiff and dry. It is not soft and juicy like in the cold regions of Iran, Poland or France. That is why animal husbandry is not very common in the Savanna region, except among a few tribes.

Rainfall declines as we move north and with it, the vegetation also changes. Both the trees and grass get shorter and shorter. Trees, typically, spread out just like umbrellas.

If you had visited Gwalior or Rajasthan, you would have noticed small thorny trees (*babul*) and shrubs with grass growing in between. That is because this region also gets very low rainfall.

Natural Regions of Nigeria

There are no large mountains in Nigeria. There are only small hills.

Look at Map 3 and locate the different parts of Nigeria as you read along.

1. Niger Delta: This is the region where the river Niger divides into a number of small streams and empties into the sea. The Europeans built a number of ports along this area where their ships could halt. It was from here that slaves were sent to America. Later on, it was from these ports, that wood and other products were sent out of the country.

- ◆ Hang a wall-map of Africa in the classroom and identify the country from where the Niger originates. Into which ocean does it empty itself?
- ◆ Which river in India has a very large delta?
- ◆ What could be the problems in carrying out agriculture on deltas?

Free Distribution by Govt. of A.P.

2. Coastal Plains: The coastal plains of Nigeria stretch beyond the delta. These plains are about 120 meters high.

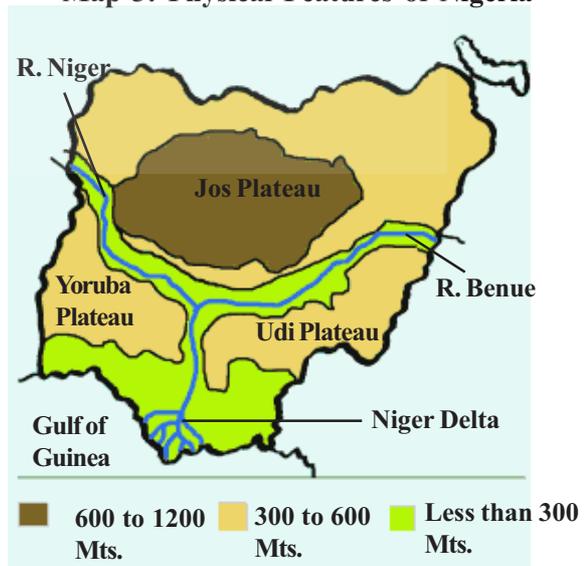
- ◆ Where has this height been measured from?

3 and 4. River Valleys and Plateaus: As you move northwards of the coastal plains you would have to climb gentle slope to reach the Yoruba and Udi Plateaus whose height is around 300 meters. Then you have to descend a sharp slope to reach the two river valleys of the Niger and the Benue. After crossing the narrow valleys you will have to climb a steep escarpment to reach Jos Plateau. This is the highest part of Nigeria. It is 1200 meters high.

If you descend a series of stepped scarps to the north-east you will reach Lake Chad. This is a vast lake and only a part of it is in Nigeria. The remaining part of the lake is in Chad, a country which has been named after the lake.

- ◆ Can you name the four major natural regions of Nigeria?

Map 3: Physical Features of Nigeria



People

Nigerian people belong to a number of different tribes – some of them are Ibo, Fulani, the Yoruba, the Hausa and so on.

Most of the tribes practice agriculture and live in small villages in which most of the villagers are related to each other. Of course, recently a large number of young people are migrating to towns to take up new jobs in factories and offices.

Agriculture

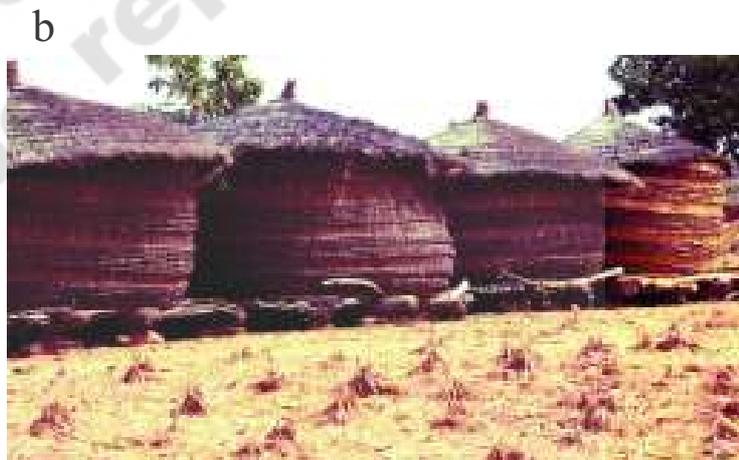
The food of the people consists of yam, cassava, guinea-corn, rice and beans. Cassava is a kind of tuber like the sweet potato. It features largely in the diet of the people.

Every year the groups of tribesmen clear a small piece of forest land of its trees and burn the wood. Then all the families distribute that piece of land among themselves. Often they share the work and help each other at harvest and other times.

In Nigeria, farmers cultivate just enough to meet the requirements of their families. They use the hoe to plough their fields. Even the use of bullock or horse driven plough is very rare. So, production is also limited. However, things are changing fast these days as people have begun to produce on a large scale for market. In the drier interior regions cotton is grown on a large scale for sale to factories.



Fig 8.3 a) Kola Seeds seller b) traditional maize storage c) Cassava seller d) Cocoa tree and its fruit



Crops and Plantations of South Nigeria

You may be fond of eating chocolates. They are made of cocoa which grows in Nigeria. In Southern Nigeria, apart from cocoa, there are also rubber plantations. Oil bearing palm trees are also found there. Oil is extracted from its fruit. People reach these forests after crossing the River Niger by boat and then collect palm fruit. Earlier all these trees were found wild in forests. When the demand for these products increased, patches of forest were cleared and these trees were planted there. Cocoa, rubber, palm and palm oil are being exported and this enables Nigeria to earn foreign exchange.

- ◆ In Map 4, identify the region of Nigeria where these crops are grown.

Plantations were started by the British who were not satisfied with the quantity of wild products collected from the forests. They wanted to produce more and export them.

Plantations made many things easy for them. First of all, it was no longer difficult to go into the forest and locate the trees. It was easy to look after the trees since the trees were all located in one place. Harvesting the produce also became much easier. Production, which was necessary for trade, increased.

Nigerian people started working in these plantations, while the British were their managers.

In this way, commercial agriculture of palm, cocoa and rubber began in Nigeria.

Not only this, a number of processing units were also set up near plantations, such as units to separate seed from the cocoa fruit, to dry it, extract oil from palm fruit, extract milk from rubber plants and so on.

Most of the profit from trade of palm, cocoa and rubber went to the British. The Nigerian people worked there only as agricultural labourers. Even in India during the British times, plantations of tea and coffee were started for trade purposes. Nigeria was under the British rule until 1960, when it won independence. After that the plantations and trade in plantation products have gradually come under the control of the Nigerians and they are able to benefit from these.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in Northern Nigeria

You know that Northern Nigeria is the region of Savanna grass. It rains very little here and only grasses and some thorny trees are to be found. Cattle-rearing is an important occupation of the Fulani tribe which lives in the north. They also rear sheep and goats. Trade in hides and skins is an important commercial activity here.

Only crops that can be grown in low rainfall regions are grown in the north. Most common food crops are coarse grains such as millets, guinea corn and cassava. In some areas, wheat is also grown. Trees here are generally not cut down and can be seen standing in the middle of the fields.

- ◆ Make a list of crops grown in the heavy rainfall region of the south and the low rainfall region of Northern Nigeria.



Fig 8.4 Designs on a traditional cloth called *Kampala*.

Here also, some commercial crops are grown, such as kola nuts, groundnuts, tobacco and cotton. Kola nuts are of great importance in the lives of Nigerians. It is specially served to honour guests. You may have tasted cola soft drinks. Kola nut is used in the production of many of these drinks. That is why the Kola nut is also exported on a large scale.

Northern Nigeria has been cultivating cotton for a long time. People weave cloth on hand-loom and also grow cotton for commercial use. Railways were built near cotton fields to facilitate easier transport so that trade becomes easier. Now cotton mills, too, have been set up in Nigeria.

Groundnuts are also grown in plenty in Northern Nigeria. The British introduced groundnuts in this country, as the soil and climate were suitable for their growth. Factories have been set up in Kano and in Kaduna to extract oil from groundnut.

- ◆ Locate the regions growing cotton and groundnuts in the map.

Mineral Oil

- ◆ Mineral oil is the most important natural resource of Nigeria. In the map, look for the mineral oil regions of Nigeria and name the ports from where this oil would be exported.

Since 1958, mineral oil has been exported from Nigeria. Oil refineries have been set up at Harcourt and Vari port. One such factory has also been set up in Kaduna city in middle Nigeria.

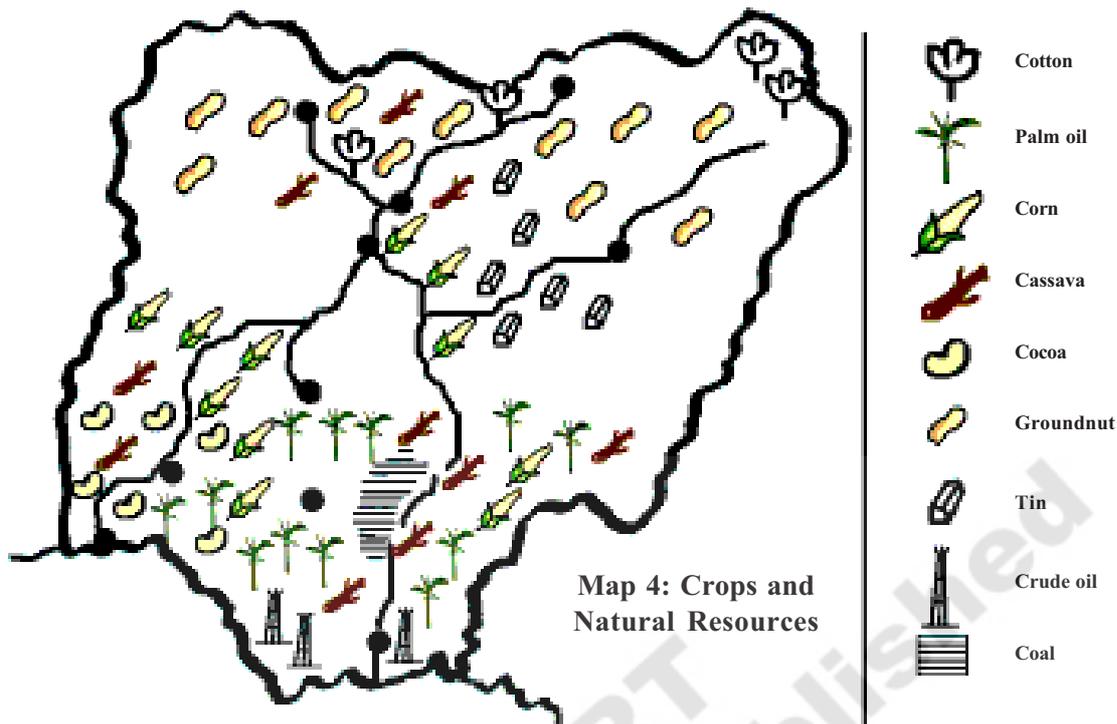
This industry is mostly in the hands of foreign companies. The Nigerian government has only a small share in this industry. This is the same with many other minerals which are mined from Nigeria.

- ◆ Look at the map and list the minerals that are mined in Nigeria.

Nigeria is rich in natural resources and agriculture, but they have not been able to use these resources to their full capacity. Moreover, most of these resources have remained in the hands of foreign companies. Presently, the Nigerian people are slowly establishing industries.



Fig 8.5 A view of the city of Lagos



Improve your learning

1. How are the equatorial forests useful to the people of Nigeria?
2. Name three cash crops of South Nigeria.
3. Name at least four crops, which the farmers of Nigeria cultivate for their food.
4. Why do some tribes in North Nigeria practise animal husbandry? What difficulties do you think they would be facing?
5. When you move from South to North Nigeria, what difference do you notice in :
 - a) terrain
 - b) rainfall
 - c) vegetation
6. Separate the occupations of North and South Nigeria which are given below. Make a table with the following titles (Occupations, North Nigeria, South Nigeria).

1. Coal mining	6. Palm plantation	11. Extracting palm oil
2. Tin mining	7. Groundnut cultivation	12. Cocoa cultivation
3. Mineral oil mining	8. Cotton cultivation	13. Cultivation of yam and cassava
4. Animal husbandry	9. Loading, unloading	14. Cultivation of kola nut
5. Rubber plantation	10. Extracting groundnut oil	
7. What is the height of the Yoruba Plateau and the Jos Plateau?
8. Nigeria, like India, was a colony of the British till recently. Do you think there are any other similarities between India and Nigeria?
9. Do you appreciate the design on the traditional clothes of the Nigerians? Why?
10. Read the paragraphs of “Natural vegetation” and comment on it.