



# COWRY RESEARCH ANALYSTS' FLASHNOTE: NIGERIA'S FOREIGN TRADE REPORT- Q1 2026



Cowry Research

## Nigeria's External Trade Strengthens in Q1 2026 as Export Earnings Drive ₦7.55tn Trade Surplus....

According to the latest report released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Nigeria's external trade sector demonstrated remarkable resilience in the first quarter of 2026, supported by stronger export earnings and a moderation in import demand. Total merchandise trade stood at ₦34.79 trillion during the quarter, with exports significantly outpacing imports and resulting in a substantial improvement in the country's trade balance.

Total exports amounted to ₦21.17 trillion, while imports stood at ₦13.62 trillion, generating a trade surplus of ₦7.55 trillion. This represents a significant 340.88% increase compared to the preceding quarter. The improvement was largely driven by higher crude oil export earnings and a decline in petroleum product imports, reflecting the combined impact of improved domestic refining capacity, foreign exchange pressures, and ongoing government policies aimed at reducing import dependence.

Export performance remained robust across both oil and non-oil segments. Crude oil retained its position as Nigeria's dominant export commodity, accounting for ₦11.20 trillion, or 52.92% of total exports. Non-crude oil exports contributed ₦9.97 trillion, representing 47.08% of total exports, while non-oil products accounted for ₦3.19 trillion, equivalent to 15.05% of export earnings. The strong export performance highlights growing diversification efforts, although the country's external sector remains largely dependent on hydrocarbon exports.

On the import side, trade activity moderated considerably during the quarter. Total imports declined by 18.17% year-on-year and 21.05% quarter-on-quarter to ₦13.62 trillion,

largely due to reduced non-oil imports and lower demand for petroleum products. Elevated foreign exchange costs, tighter liquidity conditions, and government initiatives encouraging local production continued to suppress import demand.

From a regional perspective, Europe remained Nigeria's largest export destination, receiving goods worth ₦7.93 trillion, representing 37.44% of total exports. Asia followed closely with imports valued at ₦6.42 trillion, accounting for 30.31% of exports. Exports to Africa amounted to ₦4.06 trillion, representing 19.19% of total exports, while exports to the Americas and Oceania stood at ₦2.61 trillion and ₦148.93 billion, respectively.

Trade relations within Africa remained particularly strong. Nigeria exported goods worth ₦4.06 trillion to African countries while importing only ₦654.94 billion, resulting in a sizeable regional trade surplus. Major African export destinations included Togo, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Egypt, and Senegal, which collectively accounted for over 78% of Nigeria's exports to the continent. Crude petroleum products, gas oil, aviation fuel, and urea remained the primary commodities exported to African markets.

Within the ECOWAS region, Nigeria's exports totaled ₦2.20 trillion, compared with imports of only ₦65.91 billion, reinforcing the country's position as a key regional trade hub. Petroleum oils, gas oil, and aviation fuel collectively accounted for over three-quarters of exports to ECOWAS member states during the quarter.

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Meanwhile, imports from the region were dominated by crude palm oil, cocoa powder, and animal hides and skins.

Sectoral analysis highlights both strengths and vulnerabilities within Nigeria's trade structure. The total value of agricultural trade stood at ₦2.00 trillion, with exports contributing ₦1.17 trillion. However, agricultural exports declined by 31.20% year-on-year, suggesting ongoing challenges relating to productivity, infrastructure, and competitiveness in international markets.

The solid minerals sector recorded encouraging growth, with exports rising by 74.63% year-on-year to ₦102.81 billion, reflecting increased global demand and growing investor interest in Nigeria's mining industry. Nonetheless, exports declined by 12.02% compared to the previous quarter, indicating some moderation in momentum.

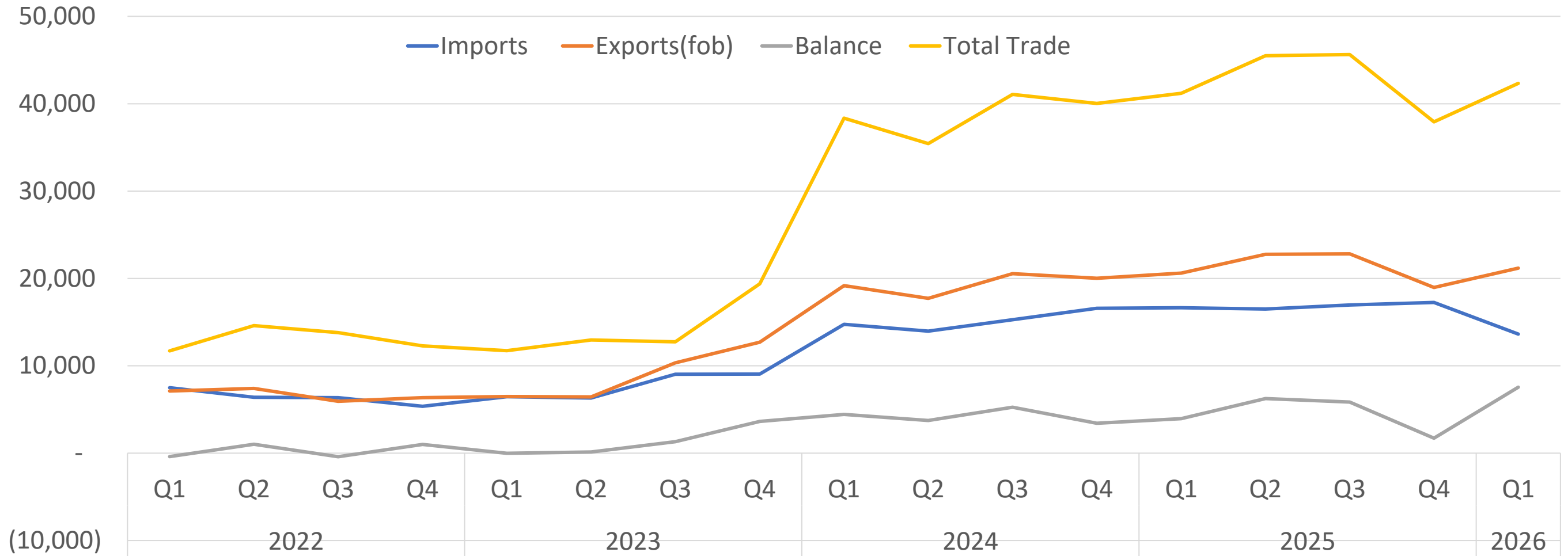
Manufactured goods accounted for ₦8.79 trillion, representing 25.26% of total trade activity. However, manufactured exports remained relatively low at ₦302.64 billion, underscoring persistent structural constraints in Nigeria's industrial sector and the need to improve export competitiveness.

Agricultural imports totaled ₦827.72 billion, representing 6.08% of total imports and reflecting a 20.09% decline compared to the corresponding period in 2025. The raw materials sector recorded total trade of ₦3.12 trillion, comprising ₦1.58 trillion in imports and ₦1.53 trillion in exports, highlighting sustained industrial demand despite broader import moderation.

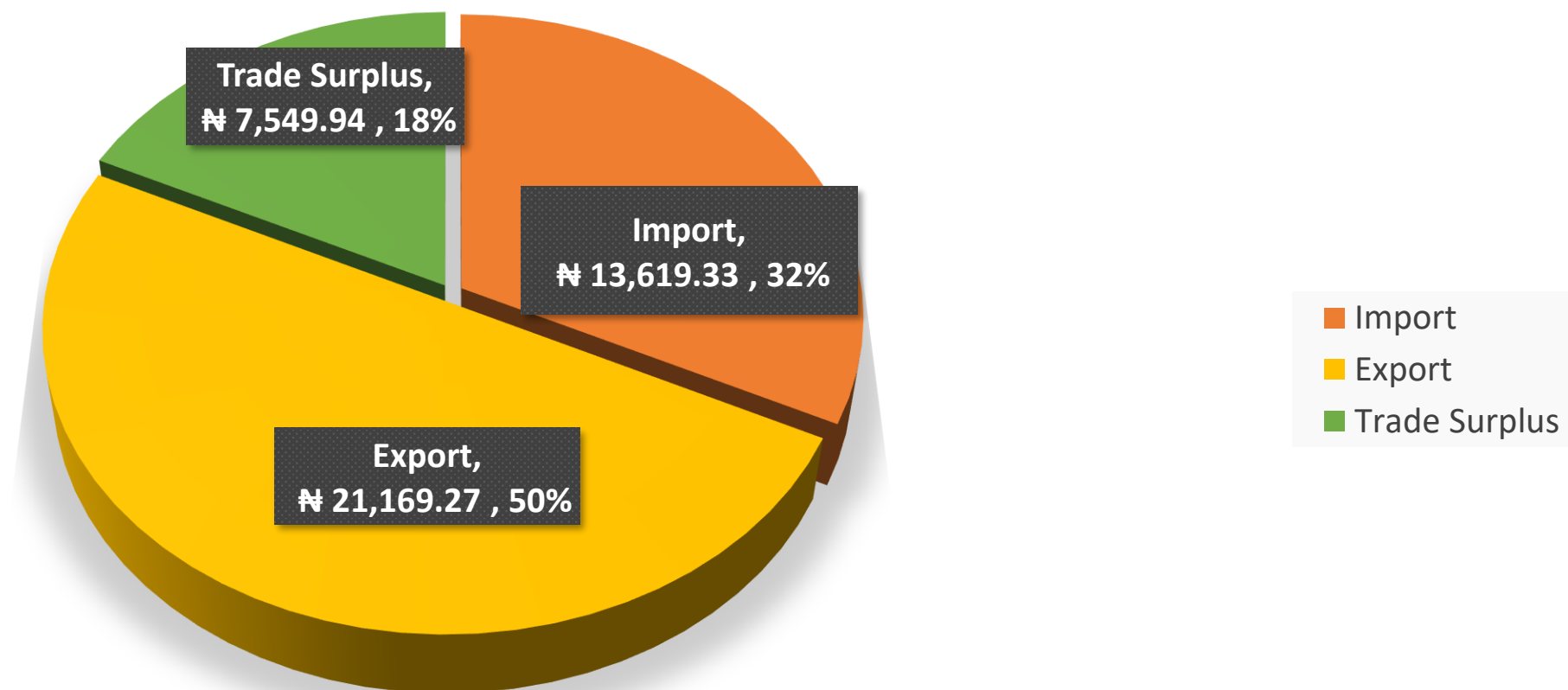
Nigeria's Q1 2026 trade performance reflects improving external sector fundamentals, supported by stronger crude oil exports, reduced import demand, and a widening trade surplus. While the outlook remains favourable in the near term, sustained progress will depend on accelerating non-oil export growth, strengthening domestic manufacturing capacity, and reducing the economy's continued reliance on hydrocarbon revenues.

Cowry Research opines that Nigeria's trade balance is expected to remain positive in the coming quarters, supported by sustained and higher crude oil export revenues, increased oil production, foreign exchange constraints that curb imports, and growing non-oil export activities. However, the country's external sector remains vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices and production levels. While ongoing reforms and improved domestic refining capacity may further reduce petroleum product imports, long-term trade sustainability will depend on expanding non-oil exports, boosting manufacturing competitiveness, and strengthening agricultural productivity to diversify export earnings and reduce exposure to external shocks.

### Quarterly Movement of Nigeria's Trade Merchandise (2022 - 2026)



### Nigeria's Trade Numbers in Q1-26 (N'trn)



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria; Cowry Research



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