



Legal Practitioners



# Changing Your Name in Nigeria:

## Legal Process and Implications

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## Introduction

A name is an integral part of a person's identity. It is the distinctive description by which an individual is known and distinguished from others. However, circumstances may arise that necessitate a change of name. Since an individual cannot be permitted to bear multiple names interchangeably, the law prescribes a formal process with legal consequences for effecting a valid change. This article provides a summary of that process and its implications.





## The Procedure for a Valid Change of Name under Nigerian Law

There are various reasons why an individual may seek a change of name, including marriage, a change of religion, or personal preference. Whatever the reason, the applicant must present an official document bearing their existing name for verification. The recognised procedure involves the following steps:

### 1. **Swearing to a Statutory Declaration (Affidavit):**

The applicant must attend the High Court Registry of any State in Nigeria to depose to an affidavit stating the intention to change their name. This document, sworn before a Commissioner for Oaths or a Notary Public upon payment of prescribed fees, should include the applicant's former name, the proposed new name, and the reason for the change. Where applicable, it should also include the date and year of marriage.

### 2. **Execution of a Deed Poll:**

In *PDP & 2 Ors v Biobarakuma Degi-Eremienyo & 3 Ors*, the Supreme Court held that: "Affidavit of change, correction and confirmation of name has to be by a Deed Poll and not by mere deposition... it is only by a Deed Poll, and not by mere deposition, that a change in a name on an official certificate can be effected..."

Accordingly, the extant procedure requires execution of a Deed Poll to give legal effect to a change of name on official certificates. A solicitor typically prepares this document, which must include the applicant's old name, new name, a declaration of exclusive use of the new name, the applicant's signature, date, and witness details. Once executed, the Deed Poll must be lodged with the Nigerian Civil Registry (a department of the National Population Commission) for publication in the official gazette.'



### **3. Publication of Notice in a National Newspaper:**

It is also necessary to notify the public of the change by publishing a notice in a widely circulated national newspaper. For this purpose, the applicant provides the original document bearing their existing name, together with the affidavit and supporting documentation, to the newspaper agency. A copy of the published notice should be retained for future reference.

### **4. Publication in the Official Gazette:**

This is conclusive proof of the change of name. The applicant must apply to the Federal Civil Registry (National Population Commission) to have the executed Deed Poll published in Nigeria's official gazette. A copy of the gazette page should also be retained as official evidence.

## **The Implications of a Change of Name on Existing Documents and Records**

Once the Deed Poll has been executed and published in the official gazette, the applicant is legally recognised by the new name. The change does not invalidate previously issued documents; however, the following implications arise:

1. **Existing Records:** Previously issued certificates and documents remain valid but will ordinarily continue to bear the old name. Relevant institutions may update their records to link the old and new names upon the applicant's request.
2. **International Passport:** A passport issued in the old name remains valid until expiry, but it cannot be renewed unless the change is reflected.
3. **Banks, Employers, and Statutory Bodies:** Most institutions will update records upon sight of the affidavit and gazette publication.

### **Procedure to Effect the Change with NIMC, Nigerian Immigration Service and Other Official Records**

It should be noted that corrections can only be effected by the authority that issued the relevant document. Accordingly, recourse must be had to each issuing body to reflect the change:

- A. **National Identity Management Commission (NIMC):**  
The NIN must be updated following a change of name, given its linkage to essential services. Required documents include:
  - Birth or Marriage Certificate





- Deed Poll and sworn affidavit
- Newspaper publication
- Gazette publication

The update is completed through submission to the Commission, and notification is given once the process is finalised.

**B. Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS):**

Where an international passport has been issued in the old name, the following documents are typically required to process the change:

- Application letter stating reasons for the change
- Old passport
- New National Identity Card reflecting the change
- Biodata of applicant and spouse (where change is due to marriage)

Upon approval, a new passport reflecting the new name will be issued. It is advisable to apply for re-issuance promptly to ensure consistency across documents.

**C. Title Documents:**

Property documents issued before a change of name remain valid and do not affect ownership rights. However, updating title documents at the relevant Land Registry is recommended to avoid discrepancies during future transactions. Supporting documents, and in some cases, consent of other parties with interests in the property, may be required.

**D. Timeline:**

The process of updating records with NIMC, the NIS, and other institutions typically takes several weeks, depending on processing speed.

**Conclusion**

This article has outlined the legally recognised procedure for changing a name in Nigeria and its implications for official records. Applicants should commence the process promptly and notify all relevant institutions upon completion. It is also prudent to retain copies of the Deed Poll and affidavit for ease of reference and proof of change.





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