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Nigeria's NUPRC formally opens 2026 licensing round for 40 oil and gas blocks

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Nigeria's upstream regulator, the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), has formally opened its 2026 licensing round offering 40 oil and gas blocks for award. Initially reported across multiple Nigerian outlets including TheFact.ng as an announcement, the process has now moved a step further with TheCable confirming as of October 2026 that the round has been officially opened — a meaningful procedural progression from intention to active bidding process. This represents the most significant batch of acreage made available by Africa's largest oil producer in recent years and a structured entry point for international operators and their supply chains ahead of a potential wave of new development activity.

The shift from announcement to formal opening is significant for market participants. Prospective bidders should now expect formal bid-round documentation, data-room access, and submission deadlines to follow in relatively short order as NUPRC drives the process toward award. The scale of the offering — 40 blocks — suggests the regulator intends a broad campaign covering multiple basin types and likely a range of geological settings, though available source material does not yet specify the breakdown between onshore, shallow-water, and deepwater acreage. No individual block details, award criteria, or financial terms have been disclosed in any of the source material reviewed to date.

Nigeria's upstream sector has seen sustained interest from both international majors and indigenous independents since the Petroleum Industry Act came into force. A

round of this size, now formally open, would represent a meaningful expansion of the country's active acreage portfolio and could trigger corresponding demand for exploration drilling, seismic acquisition, and eventually development services. For service companies, the 2026 round remains a planning horizon: exploration campaigns resulting from block awards typically translate into rig contracts, well-services agreements, and subsea or pipeline scopes two to four years after acreage is secured.

Norwegian service companies should now escalate their monitoring posture. With the round formally open, the window for early operator engagement is narrowing — likely bidders among the majors, independents, and Nigerian national or indigenous companies are now actively evaluating acreage, and procurement relationships are best established before exploration scopes are defined. The right actions at this stage include tracking NUPRC's formal prospectus and data-room releases, mapping which basins and block geometries are included, and intensifying targeted outreach to operators most likely to secure awards.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

The formal opening of the round shifts this from a watch-and-monitor item to an active business development signal — Norwegian service companies should now identify which operators are submitting bids across the 40 blocks and initiate or deepen procurement relationships before exploration scopes are defined post-award. Early positioning with likely awardees, particularly on drilling, seismic, and subsea services, will be critical given the typical two-to-four year lag between acreage award and service contracting.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Seismic acquisition companies:** Newly awarded blocks will require fresh seismic campaigns; early framework agreements with likely bidding operators could secure first-mover advantage.
- **Drilling contractors and well-services firms:** A 40-block round, if fully awarded, represents a multi-year exploration drilling pipeline; relationship-building with indigenous and international operators now will pay off at contracting stage.

- **Nigerian indigenous E&P companies:** Post-PIA, Nigerian independents are active bidders; Norwegian companies with technology and financing ties could position as preferred service partners for this cohort ahead of award.

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