



The flower lady of Lagos: Part 2

What happens when an expat entrepreneur, who has set up a successful business in their host country, has to return home? HEINEKEN repat partner Ida Rutten faced a dilemma.

No assignment lasts forever

The last time Global Connection spoke to Ida, her business, Dutch Flowers in Lagos had blossomed into a profitable venture. Of course, no assignment lasts forever, so she knew, one day, she would face a difficult decision. "To run a business in Nigeria you really need to be living there, so my options were to find a buyer for the company or just pull the plug. I really wanted it survive. But I also wanted to make sure the new owner would take special care of 'my baby'!"

Out of the blue

After she spread the word, a number of customers (both wholesale and fellow expat partners) expressed interest in buying the business. Some time passed as she shared information with these prospective buyers but nothing stuck. Then out of the blue, she received a message from a customer called Dassy, a Nigerian, who had repatriated from the UK: "I presumed she just wanted to order flowers. Then I realised she was interested in buying the business! A week later we'd signed a preliminary contract."

An emotional connection

"Although Dassy was new to the business and had no experience in flowers, that didn't matter to me. I knew she loved the flowers and had an emotional connection with Dutch Flowers in Lagos," says Ida, who has retained a share in the business. "We had plenty of time for me to show her the ropes. Now that I've repatriated, she oversees all operations and I am just chipping in when and where needed."

Planting a seed

"It means so much to me to know that by setting up a business from scratch in Nigeria, I 'planted a seed', which continues to blossom with a local owner tending to it on a daily basis," says Ida who is now working as a coach after returning to Holland, where the scent of Dutch flowers reminds her boys of life in Lagos. "My experience in Nigeria helped me to realise how fulfilling it is to do something you are really passionate about. As a former expat, and now a coach, I'd always advise expat partners to find their passion and plant a seed of their own."

Photo: Ida Rutten (left) with Dassy