

NIGER

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Niger has approximatively 9.8 million inhabitants and covers an area of 1.3 million km². President Mamadou Tandja was elected in 1999, and his government is credited with an economic upturn and civil servant salaries being paid on schedule.

Niger's economy is centred on subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry and uranium deposits. Uranium exports financed 70% of the national budget during the 1970s but falling prices have seen the contribution from uranium shrink drastically.

Several companies hold exploration licences in the Liptako region, namely AGMDC, Carlin, Geoservice, Managem, Onarem and Sati. The Samira Hill and Libiri gold project is being developed by AGMDC, owned by Etruscan and Semafo; Managem, the mining arm of Morocco's ONA Group, and a major shareholder of Semafo, is acting as project operator.

The Koma Bangou goldfield is mined by artisans who produced a reported 920 oz of gold in 2001. Onarem has taken over Etruscan's licence and is seeking partners to develop a project based on the recovery of

gold from artisan tailings and surficial oxydised ore.

Elsewhere in Niger, Gem Vest holds several exploration licences for precious stones; Geoafrika for gold; and Secomi for tin in the north of the country, where 9 t of cassiterite were produced by artisans in 2001. Two projects are being developed by the government: Zangon Kalgo base metals occurrence and Maggia Valley limestone and gypsum.

There are two main uranium mines, Akouta and Arlit, in the north of Niger, operated by the French company Cogema. Uranium production amounted to 2,919 t in 2001. Uranium exploration licences are held by Cominak, Irsa-Onarem and Onarem. In the same region, Sonichar operates an open cast coal mine at Anou-Anarem, on the western edge of the Air Massif, which produced 163,275 t of coal in 2001.

Three petroleum exploration licences are held by foreign companies. Exxon concluded an agreement with Petronas to explore the Agadem licence. The Algerian Sonatrach and Niger are also going to evaluate the potential of the Kafra and Bilma areas.