

NIGER

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Niger has approximately 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 in the country and improvements in government functions (including 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 mineral exploration licences in the Liptako region, namely AGMDC (Tiawa and Saoura permits), Onarem (Liptako) and SATI (Kossa). The Samira Hill and Libiri gold project is being developed by Société des Mines du Liptako (SML), owned by Etruscan and Semafo; a bank loan of US\$12.5 million was granted by the African Development Bank to SML to finance the Samira-Libiri project. The total capital expenditure needed for the project to be completed is US\$26 million. The future mine is expected to produce an average of 100,000 oz/y of gold. The Koma Bangou goldfield is mined by artisans. 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 oxidised ore. Official gold production by artisans in South Niger (Liptako) amounted to 870 oz in 2002.

Elsewhere in Niger, in the north of the country, 11.25 t of cassiterite were produced by artisans in 2002. Various projects are to be developed by the government with foreign assistance: Maggia Valley limestone and gypsum - meanwhile 4,290 t of gypsum were produced by artisans - within the framework of a €35 million EU-funded Sysmin project to be launched at the end of 2003. This will include airborne geophysics, prospecting and mapping, setting up of a computer database, and assistance to artisans. Other assistance projects have been designed in 2002: institutional support to the Ministry of Mines and Energy by France and coal exploration of Salkadama (Tahoua) by China.

There are two main uranium mines, Akouta and Arlit, in the north of Niger, operated by the French company Cogema. Uranium production amounted to 3,076 t in 2002. Uranium exploration licences are held by Cominak, Cogema and Onarem. In the same region, Sonichar operates an open-pit coal mine at Anou-Anarem, on the western edge of the Air Massif, which produced 18,291 t of coal in 2002.

Three petroleum exploration licences are held by foreign companies: Agadem by Petronas-Esso; Tenere by TG World Energy; and Djado by Hunt Oil. No

field work was carried out in 2002, but three holes should be drilled in the Agadem licence in 2003. The Algerian company Sonatrach is also negotiating a deal to evaluate the potential of the Kafra and Bilma areas. The petroleum code revision was initiated with regard to sharing agreements, royalties and pipelines.