



The Enhanced Integrated Framework tells World Leather how it is working with the government to modernise tanneries, train leather workers and set up more advanced systems for skin collection and exports.



Leather ‘holds so much promise’ for Niger

For women like Zouha Mohammed, learning a new skill offers both a route to financial independence and a means to feed her family. Through a programme of training schemes and support in the landlocked West African country Niger, more women are learning leather craftwork skills that are usually performed by men, and they are flourishing.

The government of Niger and the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) have been laying the foundations for a more formalised trade in hides and leather and are boosting the leathergoods sector following an assessment that revealed vast opportunities for growth. The Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Assistance for the Least Developed Countries is a global development programme that supports countries to better integrate into the global trading system.

“The leather and hides sector plays an essential role in Niger’s economic and social development,” says Abdou Adamou of EIF in Niger. “The country has an important capacity for processing hides in rural areas and a significant production potential for small ruminants such as goats.”

Food for thought

As with the rest of the leather industry globally, the availability of hides and skins is linked to the food industry, to availability and to demand. The country has a network of slaughterhouses but only around one third takes place in these controlled settings, and while many are equipped with dryers, the EIF found the machinery was often obsolete. The remaining two thirds take place in the countryside and in households, with flayed skins dried on the floor or roughly salted. This, combined with poor hygiene levels, branding or marks left by ticks or disease, means the quality of the skins is often poor.

Between the slaughterhouse and tanner come the skins collectors and traders and, while there is a national society for the collection of hides and skins (SNCP), the system can sometimes “open the door to theft or embezzlement. It is not uncommon to see a collector disappear with the money advanced by the merchant,” says an EIF report. “Some traders team up to rent a truck that will transport a cargo of skins to Nigeria, especially at the time of the Tabaski [or Eid al Adha, the Muslim festival when many households sacrifice goats]. Apart from this type of ad hoc association, they remain independent of each other.”

The skins are taken to small, artisan tanneries or to one of five more formal facilities. The country is home to two



Handicrafts, including handmade and artisanal leather items, have their own space for sales in Niamey, Niger.

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“modern” private tanneries (Malam Yaro de Zinder and Sahelian Leather of Maradi) and three semi-modern tanneries (Corniche-Gamkalé, Tamaské, and Magaria Makéra), according to EIF. Malam Yaro exports between 250,000 and 400,000 small skins per year to Italy, and can produce around 2,500 skins per day. Sahelian Leather turns skins into wet blue, again mainly for export. The three smaller tanneries supply the domestic market, to be used in crafts and footwear.

EIF estimates that of the skins that are processed in the larger tanneries, around 80% are exported, mainly to Nigeria, but also to Burkina Faso and Mali, with a small proportion ending up in Europe. Prices are monitored through a Livestock Market Information System and can vary widely.

What’s holding it back?

While the potential is clear, there are several constraints. Alongside poor-quality skins there are organisational hurdles including insufficient training of butchers and tanners and lack of formality in the collection networks. Wider systematic

Zouha Mohammed, 56, has trained in leather quilting. Craftswomen can go on to set up their own workshops.





barriers include financial constraints, difficulties accessing credit and an "institutional framework unfavourable to private investment in the supply chain".

The need for skills development and training is also an issue in Niger, which has high population growth and an economic focus on its uranium reserves, oil and mining opportunities. The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index ranked Niger at 189 out of 189 countries in its 2019 report. With its GDP stagnating over the last 35 years, increasing exports of something Niger already has in abundance makes sense.

Skills boost

Ms Mohammed was one of 125 women who trained in leatherwork as part of the EIF programme and whose bags are now marketed through three main channels: locally, in Niamey, at the Wadata craft village, with goods purchased by tourists and some locals; through a representative of the Third World Shop, based in the Netherlands, which sources bags made by women leather workers from the Wadata craft village; and by taking part in exhibitions at international fairs (such as those in Paris, Marseille, Montpellier, Dakar, Ouagadougou and Bamako). Such is the skill involved, these craftworkers have placed first in several competitions, including the Salon international de l'artisanat de Ouagadougou (Ouagadougou International Arts and Crafts Fair), held in Burkina Faso in 2016, and the International Festival of African Fashion in Niamey in 2017. They have also learned about e-commerce, to offer the chance to sell internationally.

"All training was provided by a team of eight trainers from Niger," EIF coordinator Paulin Zambelongo tells *World Leather*. "These trainers were initially trained at the Centre National du Cuir et de la Chaussure de Tunis (Tunis National Centre for Leather and Footwear) in Tunisia, so that they would be able to deliver training much more effectively. Three study trips were organised as part of the project: one to Morocco (Casablanca and Marrakesh) on tanning processes, one to Tunisia on footwear, and one to India for the hides and skins sector."

Niger is rife with extensive and varied livestock herds, of both cattle, sheep and red Maradi goats that are prized for their skins. The business relationships forged during these trips led to exports to India of Maradi hides tanned in the Sahelian



A tannery in Niamey processes approximately 12,000 goat and sheepskins per month, and 8,000 oxen. The products are then sold to leatherworkers.

region. One Tunisian business also expressed an interest in setting up a shoe factory in Niger as part of a joint venture.

Odour-free tanning

In terms of hides and skins, more than 600 people have accessed training in preserving skins and tanning methods. "The training enabled the production of better-quality hides, including through odour-free tanning processes," explains Mr Zambelongo. Tanneries are also being supported under the European Union's €5 million West Africa Competitiveness Programme.

"The domestic expertise gained by training the eight trainers remains and can be used to provide further training to tanners and traders. The only obstacle is a lack of funding to cover the costs of holding such training workshops," said Mr Zambelongo. "The sector holds so much promise for Niger's people. It has been impressive to see the development in the tanneries and processors, in the skills, in the standards. But there is more to do so that the women and men who work in this area see stable incomes and the government sees exports increase." 🌐



Targeted support in the sector has been essential in strengthening the capacities of producers and exporters, as they play a more active role in the commercialisation of their products.