

Eritrea

Total population (July 2000 estimate): 4,136,000

Area: 121,320 km²

Annual population growth rate (2000): 3.86%

Life expectancy at birth (1998): 51.1 years

People not expected to survive to age 40 (1998): 31.4% of the total population

GNP per capita (1998): US \$833



Eritrea is located in the Horn of Africa, between the highlands of Ethiopia and the Red Sea. It has a long coastline with the Red Sea.

In 1999, the agricultural sector accounted for 17% of the GDP and provided a livelihood for around 80% of the population. The major food crops are maize, wheat, sorghum, barley and beans. Eritrea exports livestock, sesame seeds and textiles.

The mineral sector of Eritrea is very small. However, there is some potential to develop the known gold and copper resources. At present, Eritrea exports salt and small amounts of marble.

Geological outline

Geologically, Eritrea is largely made up of Tertiary to Recent volcanics and Neoproterozoic terranes (De Souza Filho and Drury 1998). Marine sediments of Mesozoic to Quaternary age are exposed in the coastal area of Eritrea along the Red Sea.

AGROMINERALS

Phosphates

There are no known phosphate resources in Eritrea. Only small bird guano deposits are known from the Dahlak archipelago and other islands in the Red Sea (Hutchinson 1950).

Potassium-salts and gypsum

Enormous reserves of late Tertiary to Pleistocene evaporites including halites, gypsum and potassium salts exist in the Dallol depression located in the Danakil depression, an area located mainly in Ethiopia with a small portion reaching into Eritrea. Previous exploration work, mainly on the Ethiopian side of the Danakil depression, has been compiled by Holwerda and Hutchinson (1968) and Arkin (1969). The latter author concluded that in the whole depression there are at least 160,456,000 short tons of potash ore with 31-34% KCl. Arkin (1969) states that only a small portion of the Danakil depression has been tested for its potash resources. The well-explored areas are located in the Musley and Crescent area, on the Ethiopian side of the border. On the northern side of the Danakil depression some parts of the evaporite sequence, including K-salts and gypsum/anhydrite beds, may continue across the Eritrea/Ethiopia border into Eritrea.

Gypsum deposits occur along the coastal area of eastern Eritrea (Schlede 1989).

Limestone/dolomite

The limestone resources of Eritrea are large. Limestones occur in Quaternary sediments along the coast, and in Mesozoic sediments east of the Danakil depression, in the Danakil Alps. Marble lenses, some of which are dolomitic, are found in Proterozoic rocks of Eritrea (Schlede 1989). The usefulness of agricultural liming material in Eritrea is limited due to the limited extent of acid soils close to the limestone and dolomite resources (Schlede 1989).

Sulphur

Jelenc (1966) reported small sulphur occurrences in the Zariga area, along the road from Dallol to Mersa Fatma.

Agromineral potential

The potential for small-scale agromineral development in Eritrea is difficult to assess due to a very limited database. Known agrominerals are few and seem to be located far from agricultural land. The extent of potash-bearing beds on the Eritrean side of the border, in the northern portion of the Dallol/Danakil depression, is not known at present.

References:

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