

The RV Dr Fridtjof Nansen in the Western Indian Ocean: Voyages of marine research and capacity development

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Over the past four decades, the RV Dr Fridtjof Nansen has become a familiar visitor to the coastal waters of the Western Indian Ocean. In this 'least known' of the world's oceans, it is a flagship for a multitude of fisheries research, management support and capacity development initiatives. Along with surveys at sea, these initiatives form part of the broader Nansen Programme (after 2006 the EAF-Nansen Project), a cooperative development programme shared by Norway, the FAO and beneficiary countries. The EAF-Nansen Project is now in a transition phase, and a brand-new RV Dr Fridtjof Nansen, the third of its name, better-equipped and technologically more advanced than its predecessors, was launched in March 2017. For the occasion, a book on the role of the Nansen in the Western Indian Ocean was commissioned. The authors of individual chapters were selected to provide a balance between Norwegian scientists with long experience of Nansen surveys, and regional scientists with experience of national or local fisheries and environmental issues. In this way, different perspectives of surveys, the use of data, and capacity development could be captured. Individual chapters highlight research into oceanographic processes that maintain ecosystems, ocean productivity and the abundance and distribution of fisheries resources in the waters of Mozambique, the United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles. Chapters in the book show the enduring impacts of the Nansen Programme on fisheries and marine sciences, identify crucial gaps in information, and make recommendations for future work. We provide a rare glimpse of the practical realities of doing research on the Nansen, and show what the outcomes have been used for.