



# Newsbrief

## Two large regional projects launched!

All the three regional inter-linked projects financed by Global Environmental Facility (GEF) in the Western Indian Ocean region are now operational. The first is the project "Addressing land-based activities in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-LaB)", which was formally launched in May 2004 and is implemented by UNEP through the Nairobi Convention. WIO-LaB is designed to address some of the main environmental problems and issues related to the degradation of the marine and coastal environment due to land-based activities in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region. The other project is the Agulhas and Somali Currents Large Marine Ecosystems (ASCLME), which was formally launched in November 2007 and addresses productivity, ecosystem processes and offshore and coastal oceanographic processes as well as persistent organic pollutants and near shore fisheries. ASCLME is implemented by UNDP.

The third project is the South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Project (SWIOFP), which is implemented by the World Bank and was formally launched in June 2008. SWIOFP deals mainly with offshore fish and fisheries.

In this issue of *WIOMSA Newsbrief*, two of these projects, SWIOFP and ASCLME are presented.

For more detailed description of the third regional GEF-funded project WIO-LaB and its activities, please visit its website:

<http://www.wiolab.org/www.wiolab.org>

## ASCLME project funds "voyages of discovery"

The longest, and possibly the most ambitious research cruise to take place in the western Indian Ocean, begins on August 15, when the Norwegian research vessel, *Dr Fridtjof Nansen*, steams out of Maputo harbor carrying a full complement of oceanographers, most of them from African countries.

The 118-day cruise is the first of a number of research voyages that will be funded by the Agulhas and Somali Current Large Marine Ecosystems (ASCLME) project and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations over the next five years. It begins in Mozambique and includes a full survey of the marine and coastal environment of Madagascar, Mauritius, the Mozambique Channel and a remote ocean region known as the Mascarene Plateau.

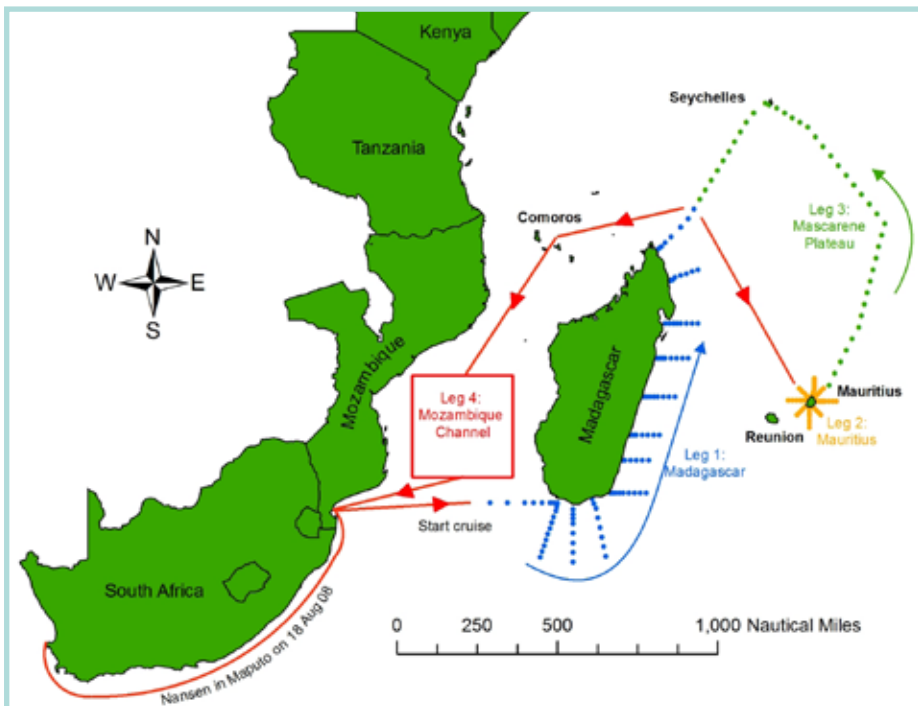
"This is one of the least studied ocean regions in the world," says Professor Johann Lutjeharms, an oceanographer at the University of Cape Town in South Africa who has been involved with planning the research cruise.

Professor Lutjeharms has spent a lifetime studying the oceanography of the Agulhas Current and believes that the forthcoming cruise of the *Dr Fridtjof Nansen* will provide oceanographers with a unique opportunity to gather baseline information about the two large marine ecosystems (LMEs) of the Western Indian Ocean: the Agulhas and Somali Current LMEs.

"This is fundamental, pioneering research that you can't do anywhere else in the world," says Professor Lutjeharms, "it is vital for the countries of the region because you can't manage an ecosystem unless you have a basic idea of what the currents are doing and the effects they have on biota."

Indeed, gathering information about the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the two LMEs, with the long-term goal of better managing their resources, is what the ASCLME project is all about. Over five years, the project will coordinate the efforts of eight countries - Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania - helping them to compile a comprehensive scientific analysis of the transboundary environmental problems that affect the two LMEs. This analysis, termed a "Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA)" will be used as a starting point for the countries to set out a "Strategic Action Programme (SAP)" or a roadmap for tackling these problems

"Scientific findings will lay the groundwork for the eight countries of the region to develop a strategy for collectively managing the resources on which their people and economies depend," explains Dr David Vousden, director of the ASCLME project. "This research cruise and those that will follow in 2009 and 2010, are integral to achieving the aims of the ASCLME project."



A visual representation of the 118 day research cruise that will be undertaken by the Norwegian research ship, *Dr Fridtjof Nansen* between August and December 2008.

The ASCLME project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Project headquarters are in Grahamstown, South Africa, where the project coordination unit is being hosted by the world renowned South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB).

Training and capacity building are an integral part of the ASCLME project and, in preparation for the forthcoming Nansen cruise, 10 trainees from national institutions, universities and ministries in Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa, participated in an intensive 25-day training course between 23 June and 18 July. During the course, the trainees participated in a demanding schedule of lectures and practical activities on board the South African research ship, *Africana*, as well as the smaller, inshore research vessel *SeaLab*, belonging to the Maritime Research Institute. They also attended the four-day Southern African Marine Science Symposium, held at the University of Cape Town where they gained a valuable opportunity to meet 400 other marine scientists from southern Africa and beyond.

The next challenge facing the trainees is to participate in the forthcoming cruise of the *Dr Fridtjof Nansen*, which consists of four discrete legs. Leg one is a pioneering survey of the oceanographic conditions

off the East coast of Madagascar. It will help oceanographers to better understand the physico-chemical structure of water masses and the pattern of current flow in this poorly studied area. The second leg of the expedition is a comprehensive oceanographic survey around Mauritius. Leg three is a survey of the remote Mascarene Plateau, an oceanic ridge that is thought to influence the flow of the South Equatorial Current. In-situ measurements, which will be taken along the 2 000km length of the Mascarene Plateau, will help oceanographers to better interpret remote sensing data and improve computational models of the region. On leg four, scientists aim to comprehensively study the massive eddies that move water through the Mozambique Channel.

The *Dr Fridtjof Nansen* will return to Maputo on 11 December, after which scientists, students and technicians who took part in the various legs of the cruise will analyse data and generate reports which capture knowledge and improve understanding of the oceanography of the region. These reports will ultimately contribute to the ASCLME project's goal of developing a TDA and SAP for both the Agulhas and the Somali Current Large Marine Ecosystems.

For more information on the forthcoming cruise of the *Dr Fridtjof Nansen*, visit [www.asclme.org](http://www.asclme.org)



Young oceanographers from five African countries participated in an intensive training programme in South Africa in June and July.