

## **WOMEN ONBOARD**

### **CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF THE NANSEN PROGRAMME**

In a popular and packed side-event at the 31<sup>st</sup> session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), project staff, partners and participants from many countries gathered to celebrate one of the longest-running projects that FAO has been involved in.

Opening the session, Coordinator of the EAF-Nansen Project, Mr Kwame Koranteng emphasised that the Nansen Programme's focus has always been to enhance management power and to maximise capacity for fisheries research in developing countries.

Mr Koranteng was proud to introduce the speakers:

- FAO Deputy Director General for Natural Resources, Mrs Maria Helena Semedo, as the chair and to explain FAO's vision;
- Norwegian Research Director, Mr Asmund Bjordal, to give an historical overview of the Nansen Programme;
- The Minister of Fisheries of Angola, Her Excellency Mrs Victoria de Barros Neto, to present Angola as a case study; and
- Mrs Gabriella Bianchi of FAO to outline the future developments of the Programme.



The panellists (L to R), Mr Asmund Bjordal, Mrs Victoria de Barros Neto, Mrs Marina Helena Semedo and Mrs Gabriella Bianchi, being introduced by Mr Kwame Koranteng

#### **From Cabo Verde:**

Opening the session, FAO Deputy Director-General, Mrs Maria Helena Semedo applauded the achievements of the Project. "This 40 year journey of one of the biggest projects I have seen in my life is an excellent example of true collaboration and the major achievements that can be obtained by working together at national, regional and global levels."

Mrs Semedo had first-hand experience of the Programme in Cabo Verde through her various roles including Minister for Fisheries and Minister for

Marine Affairs. She noted the excellent collaboration between FAO, IMR and Norad and emphasised how important the programme had been, particularly in increasing fisheries research and management capacity in many African countries.

Mrs Semedo continued to point out the main achievements of the Programme and particularly how it had both contributed to enhancing regional cooperation in fisheries research and management in various parts of the world such as in Central America and in Africa and improved the capacity of national fisheries research and management institutions together with providing information on distribution and status of world fishery resources. She reminded the participants that the data collected through the surveys with the *Dr Fridtjof Nansen*, are a unique source of information that can be used as a reference to monitor change in marine ecosystems, of key importance particularly in the context of climate change.



Mrs Maria Helena Semedo

#### **From Norway:**

Mr Asmund Bjordal from Norway's Centre for Development Cooperation in Fisheries gave a 20 minute rundown of 4 decades of the Nansen Programme's roots and growth, explaining how the Programme's first research vessel *Dr Fridtjof Nansen* set sail from Norway to the developing world in 1974, operating 24 hours per day, 7 days per week and racking up some 300 survey days per year, and with the second vessel this has never stopped since.

The first largely exploratory phase found new fishery resources, assessed the status of fish stocks on which commercial fisheries were developed and also identified where stocks were depleted. The Programme expanded to focus on resources and environmental monitoring whilst also adding in capacity development in fisheries research and management before fully taking on board promotion of an ecosystem approach to fisheries and becoming the EAF-Nansen Project.

With today's vessel, the 2<sup>nd</sup> R/V *Dr Fridtjof Nansen's* typical activities during a survey include:

- estimating stock biomass of fish species;
- identifying species and assessing biodiversity;
- measuring environmental variables;
- conducting studies in relation to oil and gas development; and
- teaching national scientists and technicians in survey techniques and sampling methods.

Mr Bjordal demonstrated how the research conducted has helped to develop policies and management measures in partner countries. He concluded that the use of data and information from surveys could help reverse trends of over-exploitation of marine resources thereby contributing greatly to the global drive for sustainable fisheries.

### **Gender Shift:**

As in many areas of employment around the world when this Programme started, men were dominant in the fisheries research sector, but the R/V *Dr Fridtjof Nansen* welcomed the first female research technicians, Ms Lizette Sousa (from Mozambique) and Ms Helga Gill from Norway aboard the vessel in 1977 and 1978 respectively and since then there has been a significant change of gender balance in the Programme.

Three extraordinary women who took the lead in the side event confirm the gender shift. From Cabo Verde, Angola and Italy they were all familiar with the research vessels having spent time on board the ships – but all three have moved onwards and upwards.



Mrs Victoria de Barros Neto (left) making her presentation

### **From Angola<sup>1</sup>:**

Minister of Fisheries, Mrs Victoria de Barros Neto participated in R/V *Dr Fridtjof Nansen* surveys in Angolan waters as a young research scientist. She commended the Programme for empowering Angolan scientists to work side-by-side with Namibian and South African scientists. She explained how important it was for many newly independent countries, like Angola, to know what fish stocks they had and to learn how to manage them. After attaining independence all the Portuguese experts left the country leaving a vacuum of knowledge and experience.

Mrs de Barros Neto reminded the session that although few women were involved actually fishing in her country, huge numbers were directly involved in the distribution and processing of fish.

From the first surveys conducted in Angolan waters in 1975, to the present, Angola has worked hand-in-hand with the Nansen Programme to develop national and regional fisheries management plans through provision of data and knowledge and capacity development.

Mrs de Barros Neto was particularly enthusiastic about regional cooperation citing Angola, Namibia and South Africa working together and in partnership

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<sup>1</sup> In the Minister's delegation to COFI were three Directors of her Ministry two of who are women who are also products of the Nansen Programme.

with the Benguela Current Commission to enhance the fisheries of all three countries.

The main objective for Angola is to ensure future generations enjoy at least the same benefits from the sea and its resources as the present generation.



Some of the participants at the side event

**..and from FAO, Italy:**

Fisheries Biologist, Mrs Gabriella Bianchi has worked for several years for the Nansen Programme and on the research vessels. She is now FAO Senior Fishery Resources Officer and leads its work on EAF.

Mrs Bianchi emphasised how the Nansen Programme and the EAF-Nansen Project have continuously developed, adapting to the needs of partners and to new challenges. The underlining principles remain the same – spreading knowledge, sharing ownership and giving empowerment.

For the next phase of the Programme it is envisaged that the following emerging drivers on marine ecosystems will be addressed:

- Overfishing;
- Effects of pollution, particularly from oil and gas exploration and exploitation;
- Climate change and acidification of oceans.

This next phase will seek to provide knowledge on the impacts of these multiple stressors and together with training throughout all levels of those involved in the fisheries sector will support partner countries in strengthening their management, following the principles of an ecosystem approach to fisheries.