

New research vessel explores oceans for the sake of better marine resources management

FAO and Norway have announced the launch of the new *Dr. Fridtjof Nansen*, a state-of-the-art marine studies vessel with the mission to investigate the planet's least explored oceans, using cutting-edge technology and sophisticated equipment to help developing countries assemble scientific data critical to sustainable fisheries management and study how a changing climate is affecting the world's oceans.



[Image Source: Norad](#)

The new vessel is the third ship to bear the name *Dr. Fridtjof Nansen* during an ongoing 40-year partnership between FAO and Norway. It houses seven different laboratories packed with high-tech gadgetry including new-generation acoustic gear for biomass assessments and ocean floor mapping, a ROV (remote underwater vehicle) control centre, "manta trawls" that collect plankton and microscopic plastic particles, and a laboratory specifically designed for climate studies - making the vessel one of the world's most advanced marine research facilities.

As the only research ship on the planet flying the UN flag, the *Dr. Fridtjof Nansen* is able to sail freely across different jurisdictional boundaries, unfettered in its pursuit of natural resource challenges that transcend borders.

Collaborating on collecting data essential for better management of marine resources

Since the 1970s, scientists working under the Norwegian-FAO effort aboard Nansen research vessels have collaborated with almost all African coastal countries to help them assess fish populations, survey ocean properties such as temperature, salinity, and oxygen content, and sample the seafloor to understand better its nature. Such data - expanded on over time through ongoing research - is essential for the development of fisheries policies that promote better, more sustainable use of marine resources, which are a major source of food and income for millions of the world's poorest people.

Along the way, hundreds of scientists from survey countries, primarily in Africa but also in Asia and South America, have worked and trained aboard Nansen ships, acquiring new skills and knowledge that might have otherwise been out of reach.

Speaking at the ship's naming ceremony in Oslo, Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg stressed that both science and international collaboration will be key to implementing the 2030 Development Agenda. "Norway, with our long coastline and ocean culture, understands the importance of SDG14, with its goal of protecting our oceans. We know this can not be done by any one country on its own. It requires us all to do our part, and Norwegian-FAO cooperation on the Nansen is an example of collaborating with developing countries to achieve this," she said.

"This new vessel allows us to improve research and activities where marine observations are extremely limited, and better understand the impacts of climate change on aquatic ecosystems and our oceans," said FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva. "This is crucial to enable developing countries to increase the resilience of ecosystems and coastal communities, especially regarding small-scale fisheries," he added.

Expanded mission includes climate research

To date, Nansen research vessels operated by [Norway's Institute of Marine Research](#) (IMR) have sailed the equivalent of over 60 global circumnavigations, assembling a wealth of information and giving participating nations data and information for improved fisheries management.

FAO has had the overall responsibility of the research programme since 2006, providing strategic advice on mission planning and technical support, designing studies and deploying experts aboard Nansen vessels, leading capacity development and training efforts, and liaising with national authorities to help coordinate surveys. Additionally, the long trail of ocean data collected over the 40-year Nansen effort today provides researchers with a valuable baseline for studying current ocean patterns and devising models to understand better the effects of climate change.

The new facilities onboard this latest FAO-Norway research vessel will permit an enhanced focus on studying the impacts of climate change and pollution on the oceans — last year the previous *Dr. Fridtjof Nansen* conducted a [demonstration survey](#) across the southern Indian Ocean, collecting information on trash and plastic microparticles, among other activities.

A unique vessel

Designed by the Norwegian firm [Skipsteknisk](#) and built at the Astilleros Gondan shipyard in Spain at a cost of about \$80m, the *Dr. Fridtjof Nansen* is owned by Norway's [Agency for Development Cooperation](#) (Norad) and operated by IMR. The vessel takes its name from the renowned 19th-century Norwegian zoologist, explorer and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Fridtjof Nansen, whose interests later in his career shifted to oceanography, leading him to help develop some of the first modern scientific equipment for marine studies.