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Norwegian development cooperation in fisheries — from traditional fisheries aid to sustainable management

The very first Norwegian development project was a fisheries cooperation project with the Indian state of Kerala, initiated in 1952. During the 60 years that has passed, Norwegian fisheries development cooperation has contributed to development within the sector in a number of countries, including Namibia, Vietnam and Thailand.

BY ÅSMUND BJORDAL

Considering Norway's long traditions in fishing and shipping, it was natural that the first development aid project was indeed related to fisheries.

THE CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN FISHERIES – THE HUB REPRESENTING THE NORWEGIAN FISHERIES EXPERTISE

Since the Kerala – project (running from 1952 until 1972), the Institute of Marine Research (IMR) has been engaged in fisheries cooperation with countries in the developing world, with the Nansen Program and the Research Vessel Dr. Fridtjof Nansen being the core elements. The involvement has from the beginning revolved around traditional fisheries, but in recent years, the development cooperation also comprises aquaculture and oil-fish-environment relations.

The cooperation has changed over time as the Norwegian fisheries management has shifted focus, from innovations and investments to increase capacity in the fishing fleet, leading to over-utilization of marine resources, towards management for sustainable and environmentally friendly harvesting.

The Centre for Development Cooperation in Fisheries (CDCF) is located at the IMR and acts as a hub for the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the cooperating countries and the Norwegian management regime within the seafood sector (IMR, The Directorate of Fisheries, The National Institute of Nutrition and Seafood Research, The Norwegian Food Safety Authority and The Veterinary Institute). CDCF currently coordinates and runs 15 bilateral projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America, in addition to operating the "R/V Dr. Fritdjof Nansen".

CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

The Nansen program has been running continuously from 1975, with the environmental- and resource surveys carried out with the research vessels "Dr. Fridtjof Nansen" I and II as central activities. Surveys have been conducted in the waters of more than 60 countries, mainly off the coast of Africa, but also in Asia and Latin-America. The main task is collection of marine data, in particular for fish stock assessments as basis for sustainable fisheries management. Another crucial component of the program is training of local researchers, both on board the vessel and through competence building in research institutions.

The Nansen program is financed by Norad /MFA and the program is carried out in close collaboration with FAO, the United Nations (UN) Food and Agricultural Organization. FAO has the responsibility for the implementation of the program and agreements with cooperating countries, while IMR carries the responsibility for the scientific results as well as operating the vessel. "Dr. Fritdjof Nansen" is staffed with Norwegian seamen and instrument personnel, and usually one technician and a cruise leader from IMR, while the rest of the research staff is recruited from the cooperating countries. Since 2007, the Nansen program has been more oriented towards Ecosystem management, and is now titled "The Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries / Nansen Project". The Norwegian government decided in 2012 to build a new state-of-the-art research vessel, to replace the current vessel. It is expected to be in operation from 2016.

RESULTS FROM THE NANSEN PROGRAM

In 2011, the Nansen program was labeled an "FAO success story", underlining the importance of the project through almost 30 consecutive years. It's safe to say that the program has been successful and have created sustainable results:

- Vast amounts of data has been collected in areas that otherwise are lacking this kind of data; and many cooperating countries have no other marine data than the ones collected by "Dr. Fritdjof Nansen". These data are not only valuable for each country, but also regionally and globally.
- While some of the countries have had sporadic or single cruises, countries like Angola, Namibia and South Africa

Dr. Fridtjof Nansen.

have received continuous cruises and follow-ups that have made available data time series. The ongoing NansClim project, studying climate changes in the marine ecosystem off the south-west African coast (Benguela region), has benefited largely from these time-series.

- The program has contributed to competence building and the strengthening of institutions within marine surveys, analyses and assessments, including more than 100 Master's and PhD-degrees.
- The cruise activity is to a large degree regional, making the vessel a meeting point for scientists from different countries within the same region. This in turn contributes to cooperation, understanding and trust across borders, factors that are fundamental for joint management of common stocks and ecosystems.
- The Nansen program and its services have always been carried out completely without any exchange of fish quotas or other benefits to Norway from the cooperating countries.

NAMIBIA – A SUCCESS STORY

Sustainable fisheries management cannot rest on data and knowledge alone. Laws and regulations, sufficient control of the fisheries activities and sanctions when violations occur all needs to be in place. The fisheries management cooperation between Norway and Namibia, initiated shortly after Namibia gained independence in 1990, serves as a good example that focusing on the whole management chain can yield results. In addition to research (including cruises with "Dr. Fridtjof Nansen"), the program comprised education, development of fishery laws and regulations, fishery control and the support to establish and operate coast guard services. When the program ended after 15 years, the Namibian government was fully capable of handling all necessary tasks within marine research and management.

A good indicator of the difference made by the program is that Namibia now ranks amongst the top ten countries worldwide when it comes to sustainable fisheries management.

THAILAND – DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE

A complete marine cage culture pilot system for cobia and sea bass, from the production of brood fish and fingerlings, through processing and sale of grown fish, is set up in Thailand. This approach aims to transfer theoretical knowledge about sustainable aquaculture to practical know-how. Good understanding of management principles in a number of areas has been created, hereunder location of farms, breeding systems, feeding, fish health, hygiene etc. This practical / theoretical model has proven successful and is being used in similar projects in other countries, for example Cuba.

VIETNAM – FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE LAWS

Norway has a long history of fisheries cooperation with Vietnam, including donation of the research vessel "Bien Dong". In the most recent project, we assisted Vietnam in developing modern laws and regulations in fisheries and aquaculture. The project was recently finished and the reviews and evaluations show that the project has been highly successful. After the law was approved after the first phase of the project, the second phase "Bringing the law to life" tested different aspects of the laws and regulations to make the necessary adaptations to the local context.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The Nansen program has been a success, where Norway has contributed to substantial competence and knowledge to a number of developing countries. However, the knowledge needs to be combined with management and control to secure sustainable fisheries. A broad fisheries management program, preferably in an area with large marine resources (e.g. Northwestern Africa), should be initiated. In such an area, the difference between good and poor management can have significant implications for the countries in the region. Estimations indicates that illegal fishing leads to a real loss of around 1 billion US$ for the countries in the Sub-Saharan African region alone, underlining the difference proper fisheries management can make for countries with access to marine resources.

Within aquaculture, emphasis should be put on projects proven to be successful, as the one in Thailand. Rather than having relatively small projects in many countries, one should also here focus regionally, for example in Asia, with base in Thailand, the Caribbean, with base in Cuba, or in a region in Southern Africa.

Key criteria for sustainable development projects:

Sector wide approach
It's important to develop the full width of the fisheries management sector; from research to management and control. Research and knowledge do have value in itself, but its importance is limited if it is not transferred to practical management – as it has been in Namibia. The same goes within aquaculture, where we, as in Thailand, are involved in the whole chain of production.

Duration
The projects need a time-frame that ensures the knowledge to be rooted and enables local colleagues to implement good practice concerning research and management after the projects are finalized. The time-frame needed may vary from country to country. In Namibia, where we started from scratch, it took 15 years. In Thailand, we are in the second half of a six-year long project, which might well be sufficient.

Practical know-how
Theoretical knowledge must always be the foundation, but our experience shows that combining theory with practical education yields results that are both more sustainable and that are also reached in a faster pace. "Learning by doing" thus serves as a good principle for achieving results.

Local ownership
Development projects can only succeed if they are in line with the receiving countries' own plans and priorities.

INSTITUTE OF MARINE RESEARCH
HAVFORSKNINGSINSTITUTTET

INSTITUTE OF MARINE RESEARCH
Nordnesgaten 50
P.O. Box 1870 Nordnes
NO-5817 Bergen – Norway
Tel.: +47 55 23 85 00
Fax: +47 55 23 85 31

www.imr.no

TROMSØ DEPARTMENT
Sykehusveien 23
P.O. Box 6404
NO-9294 Tromsø – Norway
Tel.: +47 55 23 85 00
Fax: +47 77 60 97 01

FLØDEVIGEN RESEARCH STATION
NO-4817 His – Norway
Tel.: +47 55 23 85 00
Fax: +47 37 05 90 01

AUSTEVOLL RESEARCH STATION
NO-5392 Storebø – Norway
Tel.: +47 55 23 85 00
Fax: +47 56 18 22 22

MATRE RESEARCH STATION
NO-5984 Matredal – Norway
Tel.: +47 55 23 85 00
Fax: +47 56 36 75 85

RESEARCH VESSELS DEPARTMENT
Tel.: +47 55 23 68 49
Fax: +47 55 23 85 32

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION
Tel.: +47 55 23 85 38
Fax: +47 55 23 85 55
E-mail: informasjonen@imr.no

Contact:
Bjordal Åsmund
Tel.: +47 55 23 86 90
E-mail: asmund.bjordal@imr.no