

## GCLME/FAO Fish Trawl 2010

African scientists to survey South Gulf of Guinea waters in science-based effort to ensure sustainable management of Guinea current fisheries. By Olu Sarr PORT-GENTIL, Gabon 18 June - Norwegian survey ship Dr. Fridtjof Nansen has set sail from Port-Gentil, Gabon, with 13 African scientists who will learn to use acoustic sounding methods in tracking fish shoals in the West African seaboard of the Atlantic Ocean. "I have to teach the scientists how to interpret acoustic data and use acoustic methods," Sigbjorn Mehl, the scientists' cruise leader, said Friday just before the launch ceremony of the training expedition. Norwegian survey ship Dr. Fridtjof Nansen

Echo sounding is a technique already used by fishermen in Norway, Japan, United States and South Africa to locate fish and maximize catches. However, he said, on this training cruise the scientist on the Nansen would be using their newly-acquired skills to gather hydrographical data with its environmental parameters; as well as collect and evaluate information on pelagic fish stocks and their movement in waters off the Congo Republic and Gabonese coast. They will also collect data such as fish length frequencies, sex ratio and weight in 10 nautical miles offshore in waters 20 to 500 metres deep. When shoals of fish are detected – such as horse mackerel, sardinella - the Nansen will catch the fish using the surface gill net, after which the scientists will collect their data. (L-R) Ship's Captain Cruiser Leader Sigbjorn Mehl, Oumarou Njifonjou, Regional manager Central Africa ACP Fish II

Such essential data would enable the governments of the 16-nation Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem project (GCLME), to make informed decisions to ensure sustainable management of their fish stocks. The Guinea Current region is among the most productive coastal and offshore waters in the world, and is host to a vast array of fishery resources, precious minerals, as well as oil and gas reserves. The potential of the Guinea Coasts for eco-tourism is huge, and it is an important reservoir of globally significant marine biodiversity. However, these areas and their living resources are threatened by human activity and over-exploitation, pollution from land and sea-based sources, and the alterations of ecosystems resulting in degraded coastal habitats because of erosion. The GCLME project, which is being executed by the Interim Guinea Current Commission, is spearheading this 13-day cruise which will last from 18th – 30th June 2010. The Nansen is first due to stop in Malabo, capital of Equatorial Guinea. On Sunday, 19th June it was due to sail to the island nation of Sao Tome and Principe, then to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and finally the neighbouring Republic of Congo. The ship will spend two days at each of these destinations. The African Scientists taking part in the survey come from Angola, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Congo DR, Nigeria, Ghana, and Sao Tome e Principe. After the GCLME Survey, the Nansen will continue to survey the pelagic resources of Angola and Namibia with funding from the Angolan Government. Before leaving the oil city of Port-Gentil, senior officials from the Gabon Ministry of Environment, the Fisheries Department, the Executive Secretary of the regional Fisheries Commission (COREP), the ACP FISH II Coordinator and the Governor of Gabon's Ogooue-Maritime Province, Gaspard Nang Ella, were invited to flag-off the cruise. The simple ceremony on Saturday marked the beginning of the search of some answers to a common regional problem – That of depleted fishery resources of the Guinea Current. Ogooue-Maritime Province Governor Gaspard Nang Ella The Interim Guinea Current Commission (IGCC) is currently led by Dr. Stephen Maxwell Donkor, who has a long history of African Water management, as Regional Coordinator and Executive Secretary. The project is executed by UNIDO with GEF funds with UNEP and UNDP serving as Implementing Agencies. Headquarters of the IGCC is based in Accra, Ghana.