

Kenyan RV Mtafiti, at your service!

Vanhaecke Delphine¹, Nina Wambiji², Enock Wakwabi², Edward Kimani², Charles Magori² and Jan Mees¹

¹ Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), Wandelaarkaai 7, 8400 Oostende, Belgium
E-mail: delphine.vanhaecke@vliz.be

² Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute, Mombasa, Kenya

In 2013, the Government of Flanders donated its oceanographic research vessel (RV) Zeeleeuw (renamed RV Mtafiti, Swahili for 'Researcher'), to the Government of Kenya to advance marine scientific research in the West Indian Ocean (WIO) region. The Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), as a centre of excellence in marine sciences in the WIO region, was mandated to manage and operate RV Mtafiti. Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), within the frame of the VLIZ-KMFRI collaboration, coordinated and facilitated the preparations involved with the translocation of the ship from the harbor of Ostend (Belgium) to Mombasa (Kenya), installed navigation tools and sampling equipment on board and provided training for the navy crew and scientists from KMFRI.

RV Mtafiti is the first permanent maritime research platform available on the East African coast, in the vast area between Somalia and Mozambique. The presence of this research vessel opens a wide range of opportunities for the collection of much needed marine data and information in order to establish scientifically underpinned marine resource management and development plans for the WIO region.

In December 2015, RV Mtafiti conducted her Maiden Voyage, a two-week scientific cruise in the Kenya Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). KMFRI staff collected samples from Shimoni to Kilifi. Further activities planned for RV Mtafiti involve undertaking national as well as regional oceanographic surveys. Annually, RV Mtafiti will run four fisheries and oceanographic surveys in the Kenya EEZ. The State Department of Fisheries is also planning to use the vessel for monitoring, surveillance and control surveys. In addition, the involvement of RV Mtafiti in the Second International Indian Ocean Expedition (IIOE2) running from 2015 - 2020, is being explored. The IIOE2 comes with a science plan addressing major questions about the Indian Ocean and Earth System, such as the impacts of climate change, pollution, and increased fish harvesting on the Indian Ocean as well as the influence of the Indian Ocean on other components of the Earth System (<http://www.scor-int.org/IIOE-2/IIOE2.htm>). RV Mtafiti could contribute by conducting scientific cruises at the East African coast.

In April 2016, VLIZ and KMFRI are organizing an international workshop (sponsored by VLIR-UOS), onboard RV Mtafiti. VLIZ-trainers will make scientific campaign leaders of the participants, transferring their skills and expertise gained over the years in operating and managing a research vessel and undertaking scientific cruises. Participants will come from the WIO-region creating a network of academics that will promote the deployment of RV Mtafiti for collaborative research projects and the involvement in the IIOE2.

Finally, we call out to you and the entire (Flemish) marine scientific community to take part in this venture! RV Mtafiti is operational and at your service! Ship time with RV Mtafiti can be requested to undertake research in the underexplored WIO Region. Help jumpstart the deployment of RV Mtafiti and the advancement of marine sciences in the WIO region! by collecting new marine data needed for the sustainable management of the coastal and marine resources of the West Indian Ocean.

References

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