

Evaluating The Effectiveness And Awareness Of Fishing Ban Welfare Schemes In Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu

Agash G¹, Saravanakumar P²

¹PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science & Public Administration, Annamalai University.

²Professor, Department of Political Science & Public Administration, Annamalai University.

Abstract

The annual fishing ban enforced by the Government of Tamil Nadu serves as a critical conservation measure aimed at preserving marine biodiversity and allowing for the regeneration of fish stocks. However, while ecologically significant, this ban has substantial economic repercussions for coastal fishing communities, particularly in districts like Nagapattinam, where livelihoods are almost entirely dependent on daily fishing income. To offset this seasonal income disruption, the government has instituted a financial relief scheme, most recently offering ₹8,000 during the 2025–2026 ban period. Despite this intervention, significant gaps persist in the scheme's implementation, notably in areas of awareness, accessibility, and adequacy of support. This study examines the effectiveness and outreach of these welfare schemes, with a specific focus on the socio-economic experiences of marine fishermen in Nagapattinam district during the fishing ban period. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with 90 fishermen drawn using systematic sampling from three key fishing villages—Nambiyar Nagar, Velankanni, and Kodyakarai. The findings reveal a heterogeneous pattern of awareness and benefit uptake: while awareness is high in some areas (e.g., 98% in Nambiyar Nagar), other communities, such as Kodyakarai, continue to struggle due to limited outreach and procedural inefficiencies. The study highlights that delays in disbursement and the inadequacy of relief amount often compel fishermen to seek low-paying alternative employment during the ban, exacerbating their economic vulnerability. In response, the paper proposes policy recommendations including improved dissemination strategies through cooperative societies, timely fund delivery mechanisms, and the promotion of alternative livelihoods such as skill training and aquaculture. Strengthening institutional mechanisms is essential to enhance the inclusiveness and impact of such welfare interventions.

Key words: Fishing ban, Welfare schemes, Social Policy, Livelihood security, Nagapattinam district, Fishermen's cooperatives, Policy implementation,

INTRODUCTION

Marine fisheries form a vital component of coastal livelihoods in India, supporting millions of families through fishing, fish processing, and associated industries. Tamil Nadu, with a 1,076 km long coastline and 14 coastal districts, is one of the leading states in marine fish production and is home to a large population of artisanal and small-scale fishers. Among these coastal districts, Nagapattinam stands out as a region heavily dependent on fishing activities for both income generation and food security. However, the sustainability of marine resources has come under increasing pressure due to overfishing, environmental degradation, and climate variability. In response to these challenges, the Government of Tamil Nadu enforces an annual fishing ban—typically from April 15 to June 14—to allow for fish spawning and replenishment of marine biodiversity. While ecologically justified, the fishing ban poses severe livelihood challenges for fishing communities, especially those without alternative income sources or savings.

To mitigate the adverse economic impact of the ban, the Tamil Nadu government, in collaboration with the central government, has introduced a targeted welfare scheme that provides financial relief to registered fishermen. Initially introduced in 2001 and subsequently revised, the relief amount has recently been raised to ₹8,000, comprising ₹6,500 from the state and ₹1,500 from the central government. The policy intends to sustain fishing families during the lean period by offsetting income losses. However, despite this support, concerns remain regarding the adequacy, timely disbursement, and accessibility of these benefits, particularly among marginalized and less-aware segments of the fishing community.

The present study focuses on assessing the impact of this welfare scheme in Nagapattinam district. Specifically, it examines the level of awareness among fishermen regarding the scheme, the effectiveness of its implementation, and the challenges encountered in accessing the benefits. It also explores the role of intermediaries such as Fishermen's Cooperative Societies and the Department of Fisheries in facilitating outreach and delivery. Previous studies have highlighted that the success of social welfare

schemes in India often hinges not only on policy design but also on grassroots-level execution, administrative responsiveness, and community awareness (Kurien & Paul, 2000; Ramesh, 2019). This study builds on that understanding by investigating how these dynamics operate in the specific context of Nagapattinam, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on inclusive and sustainable welfare governance in coastal regions.

In doing so, the study also addresses the need for a multidimensional support system that goes beyond monetary relief. Given the structural vulnerability of fishing households during ban periods, there is a growing recognition of the importance of introducing skill development initiatives, promoting sustainable aquaculture, and integrating fishermen into other economic activities such as eco-tourism. By critically examining both the strengths and limitations of the existing welfare scheme, the study aims to generate evidence-based policy insights that can enhance the resilience and well-being of coastal fishing communities in Tamil Nadu.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The implementation of fishing bans and associated welfare schemes has become an essential policy instrument in both conservation and livelihood protection in coastal regions. Numerous studies at national and international levels have analyzed the ecological benefits and socioeconomic impacts of such bans, particularly in regions like Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu, where fisheries are a dominant source of livelihood. At the national level, the seasonal fishing ban introduced in Tamil Nadu since 2001 was primarily intended for marine resource regeneration. However, studies have pointed out the dual impact of the ban. While it has successfully aided in the recovery of fish stocks, it also led to significant livelihood disruptions. The extension of the ban from 45 to 60 days in 2017 heightened the socioeconomic challenges, with losses in labor income rising from ₹1,638.2 to ₹2,100.2 million. Moreover, the state incurred additional transaction costs of ₹496.5 million for its implementation. The study emphasized the need for alternative livelihood training and stronger compensation mechanisms to ensure the welfare of fishers during the ban period (Infantina et al., 2020)

Further, a focused study on the Palk Bay area reiterated that while fish stock conservation was evident, issues of employment loss, poverty, and sectoral tensions between mechanized and traditional fishers persisted. This highlighted the inadequacy of existing welfare schemes during the ban and called for improved livelihood support measures. From an ecological standpoint, studies have evaluated the biological timing of the ban. Research showed that nearly half of the fish species along the Tamil Nadu coast breed during the northeast monsoon, suggesting a need to realign the ban period for greater ecological effectiveness (Khan et al., 2017). In the context of Nagapattinam, research on post-tsunami livelihood reconstruction revealed that the fishing community, despite setbacks, gradually rebuilt its socioeconomic status through resilience and localized fish marketing strategies. However, the study did not specifically evaluate the impact of fishing ban welfare schemes, indicating a potential gap in localized welfare assessments (Praba & Navinkumar, 2024)

The role of cooperatives and informal institutions also plays a critical part in supporting fisher welfare. The "ur panchayats" or local fishers' councils in Nagapattinam and surrounding districts have been shown to act as self-governance bodies, resolving disputes, managing marine resources, and facilitating social security. Their informal yet structured governance highlights the importance of community-led welfare initiatives, which can complement or substitute state welfare schemes in areas where formal reach is limited (Bavinck & Vivekanandan, 2017). On the aspect of awareness and utilization of welfare schemes, studies have generally shown a lack of comprehensive understanding among beneficiaries. Although this aspect has been explored in sectors like banking and agriculture in Nagapattinam (Ananth & Arulraj, 2011) there is limited empirical research on the awareness levels of fishing ban welfare schemes specifically.

Objectives

The present study seeks to critically examine the welfare measures implemented by the Government of Tamil Nadu during the annual marine fishing ban, with a particular focus on their efficacy and reach among coastal communities in Nagapattinam district. First, the study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the fishing ban welfare scheme in providing financial assistance to marine fishermen during the ban period, a time when their primary source of income is temporarily suspended. Second, it seeks to assess the level of awareness among fishermen regarding the scheme's provisions, eligibility criteria, and overall benefits, thereby identifying potential information gaps that may hinder equitable access. Third, the

research aims to identify the key challenges faced by fishermen in accessing the scheme, whether procedural, institutional, or informational and to propose appropriate measures to address these barriers. These objectives are intended to generate actionable insights that can inform policy improvements and enhance the delivery of welfare schemes for vulnerable fishing communities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent are marine fishermen in Nagapattinam district aware of the welfare schemes introduced by the Tamil Nadu government during the fishing ban period?
2. Which specific welfare schemes are known to the fishermen, and how is this information typically disseminated within fishing communities?
3. What are the perceived benefits and limitations of the financial assistance provided under the fishing ban relief scheme?
4. What challenges do fishermen encounter in accessing the welfare scheme, including issues related to eligibility, registration, and disbursement delays?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the effectiveness, and awareness, of welfare schemes implemented during the annual fishing ban period in Nagapattinam district, Tamil Nadu. The primary objective is to explore the lived experiences of marine fishermen during the ban, assess their level of awareness about government support mechanisms, and identify the operational challenges in availing these benefits. The research is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with 90 fishermen, drawn from three major coastal fishing villages—Nambiyar Nagar, Velankanni, and Kodiyakarai. A systematic sampling method was employed to ensure representative coverage, with 30 respondents selected from each village. The interviews were conducted using a pre-tested interview schedule designed to capture quantitative and qualitative responses concerning awareness levels, experiences with the welfare scheme, financial relief adequacy, disbursement timelines, and alternate coping strategies during the ban period.

The study period focuses on the fishing ban cycles between 2020 and 2025, covering the evolution of the relief scheme and fishermen's perceptions over multiple years. In addition to field interviews, secondary data were collected from government policy notes, administrative reports, previous research articles, and publications from the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department, TAFCOFED, and the Ministry of Fisheries, Government of India. These sources provided contextual understanding of the policy framework and institutional mechanisms governing the welfare scheme.

Ethical considerations were upheld during the data collection process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and anonymity was maintained. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative narrative analysis to triangulate findings from multiple sources and draw robust conclusions regarding the scheme's performance in the selected region.

Findings and Discussion

The findings highlight the key empirical findings from the field investigation conducted among marine fishermen in Nagapattinam district. Drawing from interviews with 90 respondents across three villages—Nambiyar Nagar, Velankanni, and Kodiyakarai—the discussion highlights awareness levels, the effectiveness of the welfare scheme, the challenges in accessing benefits, and the role of cooperatives and institutions in implementation.

Awareness of the Welfare Scheme

The study finds that awareness of the welfare scheme is relatively high across the surveyed villages, particularly in Nambiyar Nagar, where 98% of respondents reported being familiar with the fishing ban relief scheme. This high awareness can be attributed to active engagement by local cooperative societies and better dissemination of information. In Velankanni, awareness was slightly lower at 80%, while Kodiyakarai recorded the lowest level of awareness at 75%. The lower figures in Kodiyakarai suggest gaps in outreach and communication efforts by implementing agencies.

Respondents indicated that their awareness was largely based on information shared by fellow fishermen, cooperative society members, and occasional announcements by the Department of Fisheries. However, there remains a lack of clarity among some beneficiaries regarding the eligibility criteria, the amount of relief, and the disbursement timeline.

Economic Impact of the Fishing Ban

The fishing ban, though ecologically necessary, imposes significant economic strain on daily wage fishermen, particularly those in Kodyakarai and Nambiyar Nagar, who lack alternative income sources. During the ban, respondents reported resorting to low-paying, physically demanding jobs such as manual labor, salt pan work, and summer shop employment. In Kodyakarai, the shift to salt processing was especially common, although it yielded lower and irregular income compared to fishing.

The relief amount, which is ₹8,000 (comprising ₹6,500 from the state and ₹1,500 from the central government)—was uniformly considered insufficient to meet household needs over the 61-day ban period. Respondents emphasized that rising living costs have outpaced the relief support provided, especially with the extended ban duration in recent years. Women involved in allied sectors of fishing, such as drying and selling fish, were excluded from scheme coverage, further exacerbating household-level distress.

Effectiveness of the Relief Scheme

While the majority of eligible respondents acknowledged receiving the financial assistance, they identified several limitations that weakened the scheme's impact. The most critical issue was the delay in disbursement, which often forced families to seek loans or temporary labor during the ban period. Respondents in Velankanni and Kodyakarai reported that relief funds often arrived weeks after the ban started, thereby failing to address their most immediate financial needs.

Furthermore, respondents noted that only fishermen with valid membership in the Fishermen's Cooperative Society were eligible for the scheme, excluding unregistered or informal workers from the relief. This restricted approach left out a considerable number of vulnerable individuals within the community.

Table 1: Total Number of Beneficiaries in Nagapattinam District Under the Tamil Nadu Government's Relief Scheme During the Marine Fishing Ban Period (2020–2025)

Year	2020 -2021	2021- 2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024 -2025
Total Beneficiaries	10496	11342	11698	10410	10967

Table 1 indicates that the total number of beneficiaries in Nagapattinam district under the scheme increased marginally from 10,496 in 2020–21 to 10,967 in 2024–25, suggesting stable but limited coverage. Gender-wise breakdowns (Table 1.1) also show variation in male and female beneficiaries, though the scheme remains male-dominated due to its focus on registered fishermen.

Table 1.1: Number of Fishermen Beneficiaries in the Fishing Villages of Nambiyar Nagar, Velankanni, and Kodyakarai in Nagapattinam District (2020–2025)

Year	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024		2024-2025		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Nambiar Nagar	15	10	15	13	15	15	20	10	15	15	143
Velankanni	20	10	12	18	10	20	21	09	20	10	150
Kodyakarai	10	8	16	14	10	18	21	10	10	20	137
Total	73		88		88		91		90		430

Challenges in Accessing the Scheme

Respondents highlighted multiple administrative and procedural barriers that hindered effective access to the welfare scheme:

- Inadequate awareness campaigns, particularly in Kodyakarai, led to misconceptions about eligibility and disbursement timelines.
- Strict documentation requirements, including family ration cards and cooperative society membership, excluded informal or part-time fishers.
- Lack of grievance redressal mechanisms further frustrated those who were denied benefits or experienced delays.

Additionally, some respondents reported bureaucratic hurdles in renewing membership or updating beneficiary information with cooperative societies, which affected their ability to receive timely assistance.

Role of Fishermen's Cooperative Societies and Institutional Support

The Fishermen's Cooperative Societies emerged as central actors in both the dissemination of scheme-related information and in facilitating access to relief funds. In Nambiyar Nagar and Velankanni, where societies were active and better organized, awareness and benefit uptake were significantly higher. These cooperatives acted as intermediaries between the fishermen and the Department of Fisheries, helping verify eligibility and manage fund transfers.

However, in villages like Kodyakarai, where the societies were either less active or inadequately resourced, implementation challenges were more pronounced. The findings underscore the need for capacity building and greater autonomy for cooperative societies to ensure effective last-mile delivery of welfare programs.

Suggestions and Policy Recommendations

The study reveals that while the welfare scheme introduced by the Tamil Nadu government during the fishing ban period plays an essential role in supporting fishermen's livelihoods, several gaps in implementation limit its overall impact. Based on field-level findings and beneficiary responses, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the reach, effectiveness, and sustainability of the scheme:

- **Enhance Timeliness of Disbursement:** A recurring concern among fishermen was the delay in receiving relief funds, which often arrived weeks after the fishing ban had begun. The state should establish a pre-disbursement timeline, ensuring that financial assistance reaches beneficiaries before or at the start of the ban period, allowing them to better plan household expenditure during the lean season.
- **Increase the Relief Amount to Reflect Economic Realities:** The current relief of ₹8,000, while an improvement over previous years, is insufficient to cover daily expenses during the 61-day ban. Considering inflation and rising cost of living, a needs-based revision of the relief amount should be implemented, possibly including tiered support for larger households or those with no alternative income sources.
- **Inclusive Coverage for Allied Workers and Women:** The current scheme excludes allied workers, particularly women engaged in fish processing, drying, and marketing. The scope of the scheme should be expanded to cover all livelihood participants in the fishing sector through self-help groups (SHGs), fisherwomen cooperatives, and informal worker registrations.
- **Strengthen Role of Fishermen's Cooperative Societies:** Villages with active cooperatives (e.g., Nambiyar Nagar) showed higher awareness and better access to the scheme. The state should provide training, digital tools, and funding support to cooperative societies to enhance their administrative capacity and outreach functions, including grievance redressal and beneficiary tracking.
- **Conduct Awareness Campaigns and Information Drives:** Limited awareness, particularly in areas like Kodyakarai, underscores the need for regular awareness campaigns using culturally relevant communication methods such as street plays, local radio, pamphlets in regional languages, and door-to-door outreach.
- **Introduce Skill Development and Alternative Livelihood Programs:** To reduce total dependence on fishing, the government should invest in alternative livelihood training programs during the ban period. Options include aquaculture, coastal tourism, handicrafts, or marine-based entrepreneurship, facilitated in collaboration with NGOs and local institutions.
- **Digitalization and Transparency in Disbursement:** Integrating the scheme into a digital platform or mobile application can improve transparency and track the status of applications and payments. SMS alerts, grievance portals, and public dashboards could be developed for real-time monitoring.
- **Periodic Evaluation and Beneficiary Feedback Mechanism:** A structured evaluation system should be established to assess the performance of the scheme annually. Feedback from beneficiaries should be collected through structured surveys or cooperative meetings to inform necessary adjustments. By adopting these policy reforms, the Tamil Nadu government can significantly enhance the resilience of fishing communities during ecologically mandated fishing bans and ensure that welfare support is more responsive, inclusive, and impactful.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the impact, and effectiveness of the Tamil Nadu government's welfare scheme introduced during the annual fishing ban period, with a specific focus on marine fishing communities in Nagapattinam district. The fishing ban, implemented from April 15 to June 14 each year, plays a vital role in conserving marine resources and ensuring long-term ecological sustainability. However, for coastal communities whose livelihoods depend almost exclusively on fishing, this ban imposes considerable economic hardship.

Through structured interviews conducted with 90 fishermen across three fishing villages—Nambiyar Nagar, Velankanni, and Kodiyakarai—the study identified substantial variation in the level of awareness, access to benefits, and perceived adequacy of the scheme. While awareness and benefit uptake were relatively high in villages with active cooperative societies (e.g., Nambiyar Nagar with 98% beneficiary coverage), other villages such as Kodiyakarai demonstrated limited outreach and greater administrative bottlenecks. Delays in fund disbursement and the inadequacy of the fixed relief amount emerged as significant challenges. The exclusion of allied fishing workers, especially women, further pointed to issues of inclusivity within the welfare scheme framework.

The research highlights the critical role of Fishermen's Cooperative Societies and local administrative mechanisms in ensuring the last-mile delivery of welfare benefits. Strengthening these institutions, improving communication and awareness strategies, and expanding the scheme's coverage to include all vulnerable participants in the fishing economy are essential steps forward. Additionally, promoting skill development and alternative livelihood options can reduce overdependence on seasonal fishing and enhance community resilience.

In conclusion, while the relief scheme has provided some degree of financial support during the fishing ban, its full potential remains unrealized due to operational and structural limitations. A more holistic, inclusive, and timely approach—grounded in community participation and sustained institutional support—is essential to improve the socioeconomic well-being of marine fishing communities in Nagapattinam and similar coastal districts. This study underscores the importance of aligning conservation policy with livelihood protection, ensuring that ecological sustainability does not come at the cost of human vulnerability.

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