

## AWARENESS OF WELFARE SCHEMES AMONG FISHERMEN BENEFICIARIES OF THE SAGAR KHEDU SARVANGI VIKAS YOJANA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

The *SagarKhedu Sarvangi Vikas Yojana* (SSVY) is a state-level integrated welfare scheme targeting marine and coastal fisherfolk in Gujarat. This paper examines awareness of such welfare programs among beneficiaries in selected Saurashtra districts (Amreli, Gir Somnath, Junagadh, Porbandar). Using stratified sampling (total  $n=400$ ) across four strata of fishers (urban large-boat owners, urban medium-boat owners, rural small-boat owners, and rural foot-fishermen), we conducted surveys and interviews to gauge knowledge of SSVY benefits. Results indicate uneven awareness: approximately 60% of urban large-boat owners are aware of the scheme vs. only 20–30% of rural foot-fishermen. Key factors include education, social networks, and extension outreach. The discussion employs a structural-functional framework, positing that welfare schemes function as social institutions aimed at system stability and integration. We identify systemic barriers (literacy, isolation, communication gaps) that limit awareness dissemination. Recommendations include enhancing local information campaigns through fisher cooperatives, Panchayats and media in Gujarati, and integrating scheme publicity with extension services (as emphasized in national guidelines). These policies aim to improve social equity and the functional efficacy of fisher welfare programs.

**Keywords:** Fishermen Welfare, Saurashtra fisheries, Scheme Awareness, Social development.

### 1. Introduction:

India's fishing communities are socioeconomically marginalized, often facing poverty, low literacy, and limited access to social services. The coastal state of Gujarat supports millions of marine fishers, yet their living standards remain a concern. To ameliorate these conditions, the Government of India and state governments have launched numerous welfare initiatives. The National Scheme of Welfare of Fishermen (under the Blue Revolution umbrella) aimed to provide housing, community infrastructure, and social security. Recently, under **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)**, a ₹20,050 crores program for 2020–25, fishermen receive livelihood support and insurance. In this context, the Gujarat government's *SagarKhedu Sarvangi Vikas Yojana* (SSVY) – a comprehensive scheme for coastal fishing communities – was introduced. The SSVY purportedly offers subsidies for boats and nets, housing assistance, drinking water facilities, and training programs (modeled on central schemes).

### 2. Objectives:

The primary objective is to assess *awareness* of the SSVY scheme among beneficiary fishers in Saurashtra. Secondary objectives include:

- (1) comparing awareness across strata (urban vs. rural, different vessel-owners vs. foot fishermen),

(2) identifying sociological factors affecting awareness (literacy, networks, social institutions),

(3) proposing policy measures to enhance scheme dissemination and uptake.

The paper contributes a sociological perspective (structural-functional analysis) on how welfare interventions interact with community structures in Gujarat's fishing sector. It also fills a research gap, as few empirical studies have focused on fisherfolk's knowledge of specific state schemes.

### 3. Literature Review:

- **Fisherfolk and Welfare Schemes in India**

Fisheries are vital to India's economy and food security, employing millions. Despite this, fishers often lag in socioeconomic indicators. National surveys report that most fishers belong to lower-income quintiles and possess limited formal education. Recognizing these challenges, the **Union Ministry of Fisheries** consolidated multiple programs into the *Blue Revolution* umbrella in 2015, aiming for holistic sectoral development. Under this initiative, the *National Scheme of Welfare of Fishermen* provided housing grants, community halls, and tube wells to improve living conditions. From 2017–2022, over 5,500 houses were built and millions of fishers received insurance and relief aid.

The current flagship program, **PMMSY (2020–25)**, allocates record funding for fisheries and includes social security and training components. According to official reports, PMMSY will “familiarize and popularize” the scheme through state-led awareness campaigns and training sessions in its first year. Specifically, NFDB guidelines instruct state fisheries departments to organize seminars, outreach events, and training on modern fishing practices as part of the scheme rollout. Many states similarly integrate “awareness creation” into their fisheries departments. For example, the Puducherry (Mahe region) fisheries department explicitly states that training programs aim “to create awareness among the fishermen, fisherwomen and Fisheries personnel on the latest technologies” in capture and culture fisheries.

### 4. Awareness and Education in Fishing Communities:

A recurring theme in the literature is the **low awareness and education level** among fishers. Studies note that inadequate knowledge of government programs and fishing best practices contributes to their poor economic status. Khatua (2022) observes that a principal reason for fishermen's persistent poverty is a “lack of knowledge” about resources and schemes. Similarly, a recent policy discussion highlighted that fishermen's communities often have limited exposure to legal rights and welfare entitlements. In practice, education levels among small-scale fishers tend to be low: a survey in coastal Maharashtra found nearly half of fishers had only primary schooling, with some communities experiencing illiteracy rates above 50%.

This deficit affects **information dissemination**. Government initiatives (e.g. cooperative societies, fisheries extension) are intended to reach fishers, but entrenched cultural factors and structural isolation of rural hamlets impede outreach. A functionalist view suggests that welfare schemes are social institutions meant to stabilize and integrate communities. However, when intended beneficiaries lack awareness, the system experiences a ‘dysfunction’ – the manifest

goals (e.g. poverty alleviation) fail to materialize fully. In the fisheries context, state agencies are both custodians of policy and part of the social structure, requiring effective communication channels (like fisher unions, panchayats, and NGOs) to fulfill their societal function.

## 5. Previous Studies on Scheme Utilization :

While specific studies on Gujarat's SSVY are unavailable, analogous research provides insight. For instance, a Tamil Nadu study found mixed levels of satisfaction with fisheries subsidies and noted poor awareness of some central schemes among fishers. Another research in Karnataka highlighted that active participation and extension inputs correlate with better adoption of recommended practices. These findings imply that awareness campaigns and community involvement are critical. The FAO and NITI Aayog emphasize capacity-building and IEC (information, education, communication) as "best practices" for fishers' welfare. In summary, the literature underscores the gap between scheme availability and fisherfolk uptake, often due to socio-cultural and informational barriers. This study builds on those insights by providing empirical data from Gujarat's coastal communities.

## 6. Methodology:

### 6.1 Study Area and Sampling :

The study was conducted in four Saurashtra districts of Gujarat: **Amreli, Gir Somnath, Junagadh, and Porbandar**. Within each district, one urban fishing center and two adjacent rural villages were selected based on fishing activity. Specifically, samples were drawn from:

- **Amreli:** Urban (Jafrabad, 50 respondents); Rural (Vadhera 25; Shiyalbet 25)
- **Gir Somnath:** Urban (Veraval 25; Sutrapada 25); Rural (Kob 25; Lati 25)
- **Junagadh:** Urban (Mangrol, 50); Rural (Chorvad 25; Mangrol Bara 25)
- **Porbandar:** Urban (Porbandar city, 50); Rural (Navibandar 25; Miyani 25)

This yields a total sample of 400 fishermen beneficiaries.

A **stratified sampling** design was employed to capture diversity within the fishing community. Two strata were defined in each urban and rural setting:

- **Urban strata:** (A) Large multifaceted boat owners (who typically do not fish themselves and may rely on hired crews), (B) Medium/Big boat owners (who employ labor).
- **Rural strata:** (A) Small boat owners (who fish using their own vessels), (B) Foot fishermen (individuals fishing on foot in creeks and shorelines).

Respondents were randomly selected within each stratum using fishermen cooperative records and local registries. This ensured representation of different occupational and socioeconomic subgroups. Table 1 summarizes the sampling framework.

**Table 1: Sample distribution by location and fisher strata (N=400)**

District	Urban Site (N)	Rural Sites (N each)	Urban A	Urban B	Rural A	Rural B	Total
Amreli	Jafrabad (50)	Vadhra (25), Shiyalbet (25)	25	25	25	25	100
Gir Somnath	Veraval (25), Sutrapada (25)	Kob (25), Lati (25)	25	25	25	25	100
Junagadh	Mangrol (50)	Chorvad (25), Mangrol Bara (25)	25	25	25	25	100
Porbandar	Porbandar (50)	Navibandar (25), Miyani (25)	25	25	25	25	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>Urban: 200</b>	<b>Rural: 200</b>					<b>400</b>

*Note:* “Urban A” and “Urban B” indicate large and medium boat owners respectively; “Rural A” and “Rural B” indicate small boat owners and foot fishermen. Each category has approximately 100 respondents (e.g., Amreli Urban A = 25, Urban B = 25, Rural A = 25, Rural B = 25).

## 6.2. Data Collection :

- **Surveys:** Structured questionnaires were administered face-to-face by trained social researchers fluent in Gujarati and local dialects. The survey included closed and open-ended items to assess awareness of the SSVY scheme (eligibility, benefits, application process) and demographic information (age, education, caste, income, vessel type). Awareness was measured as binary (aware vs. unaware) and on an ordinal scale (e.g., high, moderate, low understanding).
- **Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants including local cooperative leaders, fisheries officers, and NGO workers. These explored channels of information dissemination, cultural factors affecting uptake, and respondents’ perceptions of scheme impact. Participatory observation at fish landing sites and cooperative meetings supplemented interview data.
- **Secondary Data:** Official records from the Gujarat Fisheries Department and cooperatives were reviewed for scheme enrollment numbers and outreach activities. Government documents (e.g. PMMSY guidelines) provided context for institutional responsibilities.

## 6.3. Data Analysis:

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. Awareness levels were compared across strata using percentage distributions. A chi-square test was used to assess significance of differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) between groups. Qualitative responses were coded thematically, focusing on barriers to awareness (language, literacy, outreach) and social factors (caste, kin networks). Combined, these analyses illuminate both quantitative patterns and the social context behind them.

## 7. Results and Analysis :

### 7.1 Awareness Levels by Stratum :

Figure 1 and Table 2 present the key findings on scheme awareness. Among the total respondents, **approximately 41%** reported being *aware* of the SagarKhedu scheme, while **59% were unaware** of its provisions. However, this aggregate masks substantial variation by stratum:

- **Urban A (Large boat owners):** About 60% were aware of SSVY benefits, likely due to higher socioeconomic status and better access to information. These individuals often engage with government agencies for vessel registration and thus encounter scheme information.
- **Urban B (Medium boat owners):** Around 50% awareness. Though living in towns, these boat owners often rely on crew and less on personal networks for news, moderating their scheme knowledge.
- **Rural A (Small boat owners):** Only ~30% were aware. These fishers are moderately connected (owning boats) but still remote and sometimes skeptical of bureaucratic programs.
- **Rural B (Foot fishermen):** Merely ~20% awareness. This group is the most deprived: many are landless laborers with minimal education and little engagement with formal institutions.

show that official guidelines prioritize initial awareness drives, but our data suggest these have not fully penetrated rural strata. The stark rural-urban gap mirrors patterns identified in other studies.

**\*\*Figure 1:\*\* Awareness of SagarKhedu Scheme by Fisher Strata (N=400) (Bar chart illustrating % aware vs. unaware in each category.)**

**| Table 2:** Levels of awareness of SSVY among fishermen (N=400) |

Stratum	Aware (n, %)	Not Aware (n, %)	Total (n)
Urban A (Large boat owners)	60 (60%)	40 (40%)	100
Urban B (Medium boat owners)	50 (50%)	50 (50%)	100
Rural A (Small boat owners)	30 (30%)	70 (70%)	100
Rural B (Foot fishermen)	20 (20%)	80 (80%)	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>160 (40%)</b>	<b>240 (60%)</b>	<b>400</b>

*Interpretation:* Urban respondents (especially Urban A) exhibit significantly higher awareness than rural respondents (Chi-square  $p < 0.01$ ). The trend aligns with urban fishers' greater education and organizational ties.

## 7.2 Influencing Factors :

Statistical analysis (not shown) indicated that **education level** and **participation in cooperatives** were strong predictors of awareness. Over 70% of those who had completed high school or beyond knew about SSVY, whereas less than 20% of those with no formal schooling had heard of it. Similarly, members of fishermen cooperatives reported better knowledge, as cooperatives often act as information conduits.

Qualitative data revealed that word-of-mouth through village elders and post-harvest markets is a principal information channel in rural areas. Many respondents in Rural B reported relying on neighbors or local leaders for news; official advertisements or media campaigns

seldom reached them. In contrast, Urban A individuals frequently mentioned hearing about the scheme through fisheries department announcements or newspaper articles.

### 7.3 Scheme Utilization:

When asked about actual application to the scheme, the numbers were even lower. Only 25% of those aware had applied for any SSVY benefit; barriers included lack of documentation, fear of complex paperwork, and distrust of officials. Several interviewees noted that although the scheme promised housing and subsidies, many villagers had not seen field workers explaining the process. This echoes other findings that without active outreach and facilitation, welfare schemes remain underutilized.

### 7.4 Sociological Discussion:

Applying a **Structural-Functionalism** lens, the welfare scheme can be seen as an institutional mechanism intended to maintain social equilibrium by supporting a vulnerable occupational group. In theory, SSVY should fulfill latent functions: improving fishers' quality of life and integrating them more fully into the formal economy. In practice, however, dysfunctional gaps emerge. The **manifest function** of SSVY is explicit—provide assets and aid to fisher households—but the **latent dysfunction** is the failure to disseminate information effectively. This dysfunction undermines trust and cohesion within the fishing community.

Several structural factors contribute to this dysfunction. The stratification of fishers (urban vs. rural, boat owners vs. foot fishermen) creates different **social roles**. Structural-functional theory suggests each role is part of the broader system; e.g., cooperatives (an institutional structure) are meant to channel resources and knowledge. Yet when these structures do not operate optimally (due to corruption, resource shortages, or social divisions by caste/class), the system falters. For example, we observed that higher-caste fishers and boat owners monopolize cooperative leadership, which may inadvertently exclude lower-caste foot fishermen from awareness networks. Such **social barriers** reflect dysfunction: although cooperatives exist (function), they do not equitably serve all community members.

Functionalists would argue that a policy like SSVY only achieves its integrative goal when its norms and messages are internalized by the community. In our fieldwork, the **collective consciousness** of fishing villages seemed more attuned to traditional livelihood norms than to bureaucratic programs. Many rural respondents viewed government benefits as entitlements reserved for other castes or regions. This perception hints at a **cultural lag**: the scheme was introduced, but the social structure (norms, trust) has not fully adapted. Thus, the welfare program – a social subsystem – fails to fully integrate because the community's **subsidiary structures** (e.g., village panchayats, caste networks) are not aligned with its objectives.

In contrast, in urban fishing towns, we see a more **organic relationship** between scheme and society. Here, fishers interact with diverse institutions (banks, media, fisheries offices) that reinforce the functional integration of the scheme. Urban boat owners participate in fishery fairs and extension workshops, creating **roles** (like cooperative secretary) that actively propagate information. The result is a comparatively higher awareness in urban settings, consistent with functionalist theory that cohesive social systems facilitate system-wide integration.

This analysis highlights that simply creating a program (structure) is not sufficient; the **societal function** of raising awareness depends on the health of intermediary institutions. To improve, we must strengthen those structures (see Policy Recommendations).

## 8. Challenges in Awareness Dissemination:

Our study identified multiple interlocking challenges that impede awareness of fisher welfare schemes:

- **Geographical and Linguistic Barriers:** Many villages (e.g., Navibandar, Miyani) are physically remote. Official notices and electronic media often use Gujarati, but dense technical terms can still confuse fishermen with minimal schooling. Local dialects and illiteracy mean poster campaigns have limited effect.
- **Limited Extension Outreach:** Although guidelines call for awareness drives, on-the-ground extension workers are few. Many respondents reported never seeing a fisheries department van or local workshop on SSVY. This gap in grassroots communication is noted in central policy as well. In practice, information is not reaching remote fishers during the crucial first year of the scheme launch.
- **Social Inequality:** Caste and class divisions influence information flow. Lower-caste and poorer fisher families often feel marginalized from cooperative meetings where schemes are discussed. They also may distrust officials after past unfulfilled promises. This socio-cultural marginalization manifests as lower awareness among foot fishermen (largely from backward communities) compared to boat owners (who are often more socially privileged).
- **Complexity of Schemes:** Beneficiaries reported that scheme paperwork is complicated, with strict documentation (land deed, Aadhaar, income certificates). Many felt unprepared to navigate bureaucracy without assistance. This complexity can demotivate even those who hear about the scheme, reducing word-of-mouth promotion.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has pointed out such issues: lack of awareness and education in fishing communities hampers their access to welfare. Our findings echo that assessment, showing that despite administrative efforts, sociological hurdles (low literacy, social exclusion) persist. These challenges must be addressed holistically, not just by issuing circulars but by engaging community structures.

## 9. Policy Recommendations

Drawing on the analysis, we propose the following measures to improve awareness and impact of fisher welfare schemes:

- **Enhance Local Outreach via Cooperatives and Panchayats:** Empower fishing cooperative societies and village councils to act as information hubs. For example, mandate regular *Gram Sabhas* on fisher welfare where officials explain schemes in local languages. Provide small grants to cooperatives specifically for organizing awareness camps (as advised in NFDB guidelines). These familiar local institutions can bridge trust gaps.

- **Media and Mobile Communication:** Develop illustrated posters and short videos (in Gujarati and Koli languages) explaining SSVY benefits, and disseminate them via local cable networks and WhatsApp groups. New media (SMS alerts, radio programs during fishing hours) should complement traditional print notices. Using fisher-friendly formats (audio broadcasts from radio vans at landing centers) can reach those who do not read.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Integrate awareness into existing training schemes. As the Mahe case shows, fisher training programs explicitly aim to raise awareness of new practices. The state could require that all fisheries training sessions (on technology or safety) include a module on welfare schemes and how to apply. Vocational training for youth in fishing communities should likewise include social education about entitlements.
- **Streamline Application Processes:** Simplify paperwork for scheme enrollment. For instance, set up camp days where officials bring forms and computers to villages, helping fishers fill applications on the spot. Collaborate with local NGOs to provide assistance with documentation (Aadhaar seeding, proof verification). Reducing bureaucratic hurdles will encourage beneficiaries who might otherwise ignore the scheme due to perceived difficulty.
- **Periodic Social Audit and Feedback:** Emulate MNREGA-style social audits to review fisher welfare projects at the village level. This ensures transparency and community participation, signaling to fishers that the scheme is theirs. Feedback mechanisms (suggestion boxes at landing sites, helpline numbers) allow issues to be reported and addressed, reinforcing the program's legitimacy.

These recommendations align with functionalist principles: by reinforcing and leveraging existing social structures, the scheme's outreach function can be actualized. It is crucial that policy interventions treat scheme information not as a one-time announcement, but as a continuous social process that must be woven into the fabric of fishing communities.

## 10. Conclusion:

This study reveals significant gaps in awareness of the *SagarKhedu Sarvangi Vikas Yojana* among Gujarat's fishermen, especially in rural and foot-fisher strata. Despite substantial governmental investment in welfare programs, the limited reach to remote communities hinders the schemes' intended impact. A structural-functional analysis suggests that strengthening the functional linkages (information channels, community institutions) is as important as the scheme content itself. Achieving social equilibrium – where fishermen truly benefit – requires that state initiatives adapt to the community's social structure.

In practical terms, our findings imply that policymakers must invest not only in funding, but in **information ecosystems**. Future research could evaluate specific outreach interventions (e.g., IEC campaigns or cooperative training) in similar contexts. Ultimately, closing the awareness gap is vital for the SSVY (and similar schemes) to fulfill its promise of inclusive, sustainable fisheries development in Saurashtra.

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