

From Roadside Survival to Urban Modernization: The Evolution of Nagpur's Fish Vending Sector (2020–2026)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the structural and socio-economic transformation of fish vendors at the Bhandewadi, Mangalwari and Mayo Fish Market hubs in Nagpur. By analyzing the shift from the survival tactics of the COVID-19 era to the formalized infrastructure projects of 2026 and examining vendor income, product loss rates, hygiene practices, and digital adoption over six years, the study highlights how urban planning and national schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) and the Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF) are reshaping the informal food economy. Ultimately, it shows how smart city planning and modern cold-chain facilities have helped stabilize incomes and improve quality.

INTRODUCTION:

1. The Crisis Era: Survival During the Pandemic (2020–2021)

The COVID-19 lockdowns in Nagpur created a paradoxical situation where fish was classified as an essential

commodity, yet its traditional retail distribution was strictly prohibited. Vendors at the Mayo market many of whom have operated for generations faced a “43-point SOP” from the state government that effectively banned stationary retail to prevent

overcrowding (*Fisheries Department, Maharashtra, 2020*).

• **Key Impacts Observed:**

- **Income Collapse:** Small-scale vendors reported a significant income drop, often exceeding 50%, as limited “speculated time” windows for sales forced them to sell perishable stock at throwaway prices.
- **Logistical Barriers:** The closure of district borders and the sealing of markets like Bhoipura disrupted the arrival of fish from Andhra Pradesh, causing retail prices to spike while vendor margins shrivelled (*The Times of India, 2018*).
- **The “Cat-and-Mouse” Dynamic:** To survive, vendors shifted to mobile vending (bicycles and motorcycles). However, without digital tools or established delivery networks, many were pushed into debt to local moneylenders.

Feature	2020(Pandemic)	2026(Modernization)
Market Type	Scattered, unorganized, Street stalls.	Centralized Hubs
Logistics	Major disruption, Heavy spoilage	Cold chain Integration and agricultural status
Sales channel	Physical/Panic buying	Physical +Digital
Hygiene	Low, high waste	Scientific waste management and bio-floc units.

Table 1: Market Shift from 2020 to 2026

2. The Great Shift: Evolution from 2020 to 2026

The six-year journey from the first lockdown to the current state in 2026 has been defined by a transition from “informal roadside clusters” to “centralized hubs.”

- **Infrastructure Realignment (2023–2025):** The Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) initiated aggressive relocation plans. The resistance seen in 2022 regarding high rents

at the Mangalwari market eventually gave way to a larger, more comprehensive plan at Bhandewadi (*The Live Nagpur, 2025*).

- **Modernization in 2026:** As of April 2026, the Bhandewadi Wholesale and Retail Fish Market has become the primary operational hub. The facility includes scientific waste management and integrated cold-chain logistics (*NMC, 2025*).
- **Digital and Financial Integration:** By 2026, the “fear factor” of 2020 has been replaced by “tech-fluency.” Most vendors now utilize UPI for transactions and participate in micro-credit schemes that were non-existent during the pandemic.

3. Central Pillars of Development

- **PMMSY:** Launched in 2020, an allocation of ₹2,500 crore for 2026-27.
- **PM-MKSSY:** This sub-scheme is under PMMSY focuses on formalization and insurance coverage, with a total outlay of ₹6000 crore, spanning 2023-24 to 2026-27.
- **FIDE:** Addressing gaps in cold chain and ports, this fund is allotted with ₹6,685.75 crore as of January 2026.

4. Recommendations: Improving the Lives of Vendors

To ensure that modernization does not lead to the displacement of the most vulnerable vendors, the following measures are essential:

- **Micro-Cold Storage Access:** Spoilage remains a threat. Providing decentralized, solar-powered ice plants or small-scale refrigerated lockers within markets can reduce post-harvest losses from 20% to below 10%.
- **Social Security & Insurance:** Fish vending is a high-risk, labor-intensive job. Implementing health insurance and

accidental covers through the PMMSY framework for registered Nagpur vendors would provide a much-needed safety net.

- **Vendor Cooperatives:** Encouraging Mayo vendors to form Self-Help Groups (SHGs) or Joint Liability Groups (JLGs) would give them better bargaining power against large wholesalers and allow them to lease

modern stalls collectively, reducing individual rent burdens.

- **Hygiene Training & Certification:** Providing formal training in food safety will not only improve public health but also allow local vendors to compete with rising e-commerce fish delivery platforms.

Table 2: Comparative analysis of Nagpur Fish Markets (2020 to 2026)

Feature	Bhandewadi (Wholesale hub)	Mangalwari (retail hub)	Mayo Fish market (Central hub)
Income and condition during COVID-19 (2020)	Income Sources: Bulk supply to retailers Condition: Severe disruption of supply chains.	Income Sources: Direct retail to local consumers Condition: Janta Curfew caused drop in their income by 60-70%.	Income sources: Income was dependent on high value retail. Condition: Being near a major hospital, the restrictions were extremely tight.
Impact of Modernization (2026)	High impact. Cold storage and logistics reduced wastage by 25%.UPI are used for 90% of wholesale transactions.	Moderate to High. Renovated stalls and better hygiene under NMC's smart city initiatives.	Significant improvement, better drainage and waste management systems by NMC.
Income and Lifestyle Shift (2020-2026)	Income Increased from approx ₹15,00/mo (2020) to ₹35,000/ mo(2026)	Income Stabilized around ₹25,000/mo. Adoption of home-delivery apps and WhatsApp ordering.	Income growth of ₹22,000/mo steady amount from lockdown. Improved health awareness and Standardized ice preservation.
Highest selling fish before, during and after Pandemic	Before: Rohu, Catla and Silver Carp(bulk) During: some small local varieties and dry fish. After: Pangasius, Bhetki (Seabass)	Before: Pomfret and Prawns During: Rohu and Catla After: Tilapia and Surmai	Before: Rohu & local catfish During: low-cost local river fish After: Hilsa(ilish) & tuna
Changes in Loss rate and profit margins 2020 vs 2026	Loss rate: has dropped from 25% (2020) to 8% (2026) due to new cold storage. Profit Margin: Wholesale margins Stabilized at 12-15%.	Loss rate: dropped from 15% (2020) to 5% (2026). Profit Margin: Increased to 25%-30%.	Loss rate: dropped from 20%to10% due to ice-management. Profit Margin: Rose from a 5% (2020) to a healthy 18% (2026)

CONCLUSION

The transition of Nagpur's fish vending sector from pandemic survival tactics to formalized urban hubs highlights the impact of combining targeted infrastructure investments with municipal regulation. Continued policy focus on cold-chain access, micro-financing, and capacity building will ensure equitable growth for informal vendors as Nagpur scales its modern fisheries infrastructure.

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