



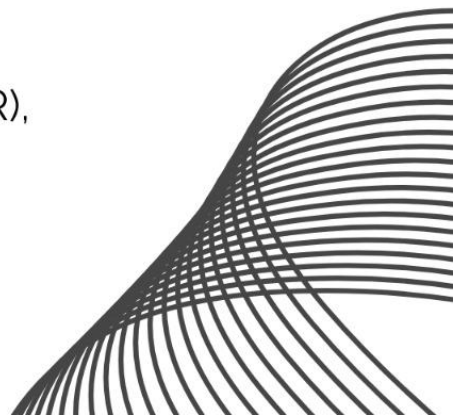
Evaluation of Grama Sachivalayam in Andhra Pradesh 2026

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Evaluation of Grama Sachivalayam in Andhra Pradesh:

A Comprehensive Policy Study

Submitted to
**Ministry of Panchayati Raj
Government of India**

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**INSTITUTE OF
RURAL MANAGEMENT
ANAND**

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List of Abbreviations

ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
AP	Andhra Pradesh
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DDO	Drawing and Disbursement Officer
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GO	Government Order
GP	Gram Panchayat
GS	Grama Sachivalayam
IRMA	Institute of Rural Management Anand
LSG	Local Self-Government or Local Self-Governance
MPDO	Mandal Parishad Development Office(r)
PRRD	Panchayati Raj and Rural Development
PS	Panchayat Secretary
SIRD	State Institute for Rural Development
SRS	Simple Random Sampling
SD	Standard Deviation
t-test	Student's t-test for statistical significance
VS	Village Secretariat
VSMOP	Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019, Govt. of AP
YSR	Yeduguri Sandinti Rajasekhara Reddy (refers to YSR district in AP), now renamed "Kadapa"

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Executive Summary

This policy brief provides an overview of our study which attempted to evaluate the Grama Sachivalayam (GS), or Village Secretariat (VS) System launched by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 2019. Designed as an administrative reform to enhance rural governance, the system is geared toward delivering essential public services at the grassroots level, fostering inclusivity, and promoting accountability. Our study explores the benefits, effectiveness, challenges and loopholes of the GS system by examining perspectives from diverse stakeholders, including Panchayat Secretaries, GS staff, volunteers, elected representatives of the Panchayat, and the beneficiaries. The findings and recommendations presented here aim to support policy improvements and ensure the long-term sustainability of this system.

Background

The Grama Sachivalayam system is an initiative by the Andhra Pradesh government to bring essential services directly to rural communities. With a significant focus on timely and accessible public service delivery, this model embodies a shift from centralized government services to decentralized, community-centered administration. The GS system is aligned with India's broader commitment to local self-governance, following the guidelines of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. This amendment called for greater autonomy and empowerment of local bodies, particularly Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Despite these provisions, local governance across Indian states, including Andhra Pradesh, has faced challenges, such as inadequate service delivery and limited accountability at the grassroots level.

Through the Village Secretariat system, Andhra Pradesh introduced a single-window approach that facilitates convergence across government departments, enabling residents to access a wide range of public services—from issuing essential documents to delivering welfare schemes—without needing to travel long distances. Each Village Secretariat serves approximately 2,000 people and includes trained functional assistants who support the delivery of services across different government programs. The GS model aims to improve governance through direct, door-to-door service delivery, promote social inclusion by bringing services closer to marginalized populations, and enhance local accountability.

The GS system is also structured to implement Andhra Pradesh's flagship welfare programs, referred to as *Navarathnalu*, which focus on core areas like agriculture, education, health, and housing. Each Village Secretariat supports these programs by ensuring that eligible beneficiaries are informed about their entitlements, have guidance through the application process and receive services promptly. Functional assistants assigned to specific domains, such as agriculture, health, and revenue, work in collaboration to ensure the integrated delivery of these services.

Research objectives

This study was designed to explore the GS system along seven main objectives:

1. **To decode the framework and implementation of GS system:** This objective aims to develop a detailed understanding of the GS system, with special focus on uncovering the administrative structure, processes, and ground realities of its implementation.
2. **To document stakeholder perspectives on GS effectiveness:** This objective aims to capture views on accessibility, responsiveness, and inclusivity of services delivered through GS, as expressed by Panchayat Secretaries, Village Secretariat staff, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders.
3. **To examine challenges and enablers within the GS system:** This objective explores factors that impact GS operations, including infrastructural constraints, administrative hurdles, and collaborative practices that support efficient service delivery.
4. **To unpack mechanisms of change within the GS system:** This objective investigates how GS's single-window mechanism and interdepartmental coordination drive change in service delivery and governance. It examines the role of various staff in facilitating these outcomes.
5. **To assess whether the GS system has strengthened the PRIs:** This objective aims to understand whether the GS system has been successful in assigning more functions to the PRIs and whether it could result in strengthening the PRIs.
6. **To provide recommendations for GS sustainability and improvement:** Based on findings, this objective aims to develop recommendations that address resource allocation, training, and policy enhancements to sustain GS as an effective model for local governance.
7. **To examine the replicability of the GS model in other states:** This objective aims to compare and contrast the GS model with various other models of local governance and examine the replicability of the model in other states. Based on these observations, we suggest a comprehensive and integrated governance model for strengthening the local governance models by collating positives from various local self-governance models.

Methodology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the GS system, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. This approach combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) across six districts in Andhra Pradesh. The salient features are as follows:

- The sample for quantitative study consisted of 40 Village Secretariats, and data were collected from a total of 416 respondents, including 160 beneficiaries, 200 volunteers, and 56 Panchayat Secretaries. The quantitative surveys provided insights into service delivery metrics, such as efficiency, satisfaction, inclusivity, and accessibility, from the perspective of beneficiaries and volunteers.
- This was complemented with qualitative surveys with a sample of 51 semi-structured interviews and FGDs with all five stakeholders of the system. These surveys highlighted aspects of coordination, role clarity, and the administrative challenges

they face within the GS structure, and added layered understanding around experiences, perspectives, and suggestions for improving the GS system.

Key findings

The study revealed a mix of positive and negative aspects of the Grama Sachivalayam system. A summary of the findings, observations and subsequent assessment is as follows:

Benefits of the GS system

1. Improved accessibility and inclusivity of services

- a. The GS system has reportedly enhanced service accessibility for rural residents, especially for marginalized groups. The availability of services within the village, often delivered at the beneficiary's doorstep, was seen as a significant improvement over the previous system, which required multiple trips to Mandal or district offices.
- b. Beneficiaries reported high satisfaction with service quality of welfare service delivery. The convenience of localized services has reduced time and travel costs, which has been especially beneficial for the elderly and physically challenged.
- c. Service inclusivity was rated positively, with beneficiaries highlighting that the system ensures access to essential services, regardless of social status or literacy level.

2. Effective Inter-departmental Coordination

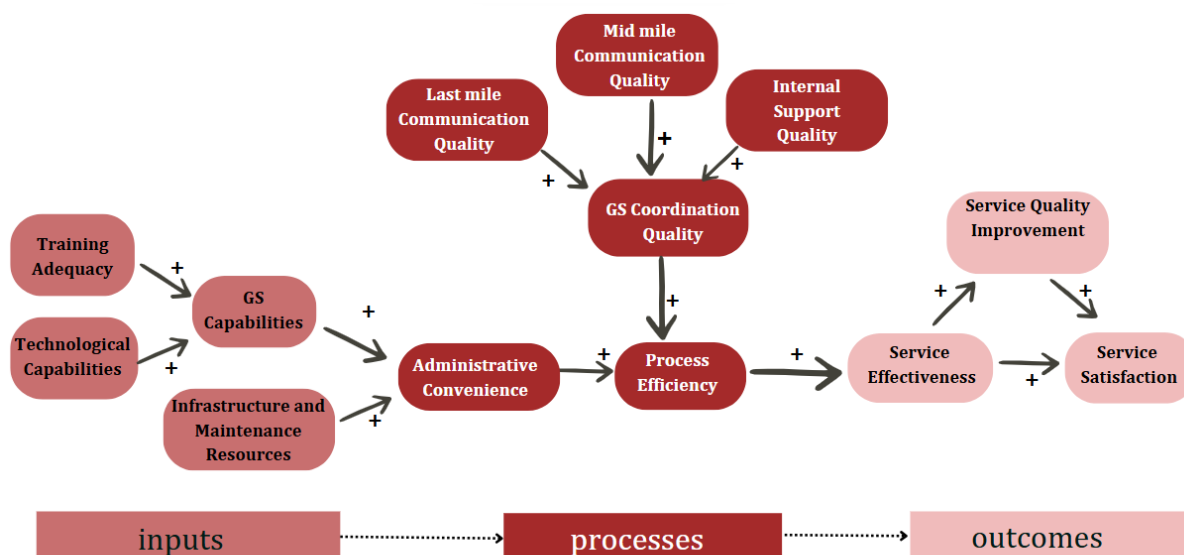
- a. GS has introduced a model of convergence that allows functional assistants from various departments to work collaboratively. This inter-departmental coordination was perceived as effective in promoting timely service delivery and creating a supportive work environment for Panchayat Secretaries.
- b. However, dual-reporting structures, where VS staff report both to Panchayat Secretary and line departments, created role ambiguities, causing confusion and sometimes delaying services.

Based on these findings, we developed the GS Service Delivery Conceptual Model which provides a structured framework for analyzing service delivery within the Grama Sachivalayam (GS) system (Figure 1). It connects three core dimensions: service inputs, processes, and outcomes, aligning the roles of key stakeholders in enhancing service delivery effectiveness. The model begins with Service Inputs, encompassing the foundational resources—such as human, financial, and technological capital—that drive the system's operations. These inputs are essential for building capacity and ensuring that the infrastructure and skills meet the demands of effective governance.

Moving to the Service Process, the model emphasizes the importance of efficient coordination and structured policies that facilitate smooth operations. This dimension ensures that the internal mechanisms of the GS system are optimized for maximum efficiency, balancing administrative convenience and stakeholder engagement.

Finally, the Service Outcomes section captures the goal of the GS system: beneficiary satisfaction. It examines how service quality and effectiveness directly impact satisfaction levels among the community, highlighting the importance of accessibility, inclusivity, and

timeliness in service delivery. Together, this framework offers a comprehensive, systematic approach to enhance local governance and improve service delivery outcomes at the grassroots level.



Source: IRMA Research Team's inferential analysis based on Primary field data (triangulated)

Figure 1 GS Service Delivery Conceptual Model

Challenges with the GS system

1. Resource Constraints and Infrastructure Limitations

- While the GS system shows improved performance in delivering welfare services, it fails to address the essential development-related services, such as waste, water and sanitation, lighting and electricity, and utilities maintenance. This has been primarily due to inadequate field staff for the essential services (the ground-level executors). Panchayat Secretaries frequently cited the lack of on-ground personnel as a barrier to timely service delivery, especially in addressing infrastructure maintenance.
- Funding inconsistencies further impacted service quality. The system often relies on fluctuating local revenue collections, leading to payment delays for sanitation workers and limited maintenance resources.
- Beneficiaries expressed mixed satisfaction with service times, with some services, particularly related to public infrastructure, experiencing delays due to limited resources and bureaucratic procedures.

2. Inadequate Training and Skill Development

- Limited training opportunities hinder the GS system's operational capacity. Staff are often trained only on the narrow domains and roles, that too only on welfare schemes, leaving gaps in administration and skills crucial for community engagement and service interactions. Panchayat Secretaries and volunteers both indicated the need for a more comprehensive training program covering technical, interpersonal, and administrative skills.

- b. The lack of routine refresher sessions contributes to inconsistent service quality and leaves some staff unprepared for their broader roles within the community.

3. Challenges in Role Clarity and Coordination

- a. The dual reporting structure for GS staff created challenges in coordinating between line departments and local Panchayat Secretaries. Role ambiguities led to overlapping responsibilities and unclear authority, adversely impacting focused service delivery measures.
- b. This lack of clarity often forced staff to balance conflicting priorities, hindering efficiency and accountability within the system.

4. Political Influences in Service Delivery

While the reach and inclusivity in the delivery of welfare schemes improved significantly, political pressures were still found to influence the distribution of welfare schemes in some specific cases. There have been cases of revisions of the age and other details in Aadhar card to manipulate the eligibility of certain sections of beneficiaries. This sometimes led to skepticism within communities, as some deserving beneficiaries perceived favoritism in scheme allocation.

Structural Gaps in the GS model

The structural gaps in the GS model were assessed based on the triangulation and analytical assessment of the GS functioning with respect to the objectives of self-government. The structural gaps were identified at three levels: *a.) Conceptualization gaps* - the gaps between the (desired) objectives and conceptualization, *b.) Implementation gaps* - the gaps between conceptualization and implementation, and *c.) Achievement gaps* - the gaps between implementation and the actual outcomes achieved. The summary of the gaps is as follows:

1. Conceptualization gaps

CG1: The GS system lacks specific provisions to divert the controlling authority of the local issues to the local self-government.

CG2: The conceptualization of GS system's prime responsibility as the delivery of welfare schemes dilutes the purpose of a local self-government, rendering the developmental activities secondary consideration.

CG3: The GS system offers limited support to create more own-source revenue capabilities, or local taxation capabilities. On the contrary, it increases burden on the Panchayat system for maintenance of additional resources.

CG4: The GS system fails to create resources for maintenance and upkeep of the village works, retaining the interference and dependency on the line departments for day-to-day activities.

CG5: The mismatch between the reporting relationships and the performance appraisal system dilutes the accountability of the functional assistants towards the local self-government.

CG6: The work measurement system and the career progression path has been inadequately accounted for in the presently conceptualized GS system. This could be a hurdle in effective service delivery.

CG7: Due to the above dependencies, the GS system does not succeed in creating holistic self-sustaining local self-government.

2. Implementation gaps

IG1: The present GS functioning lags in creating enough coordination between the Panchayat System and the GS functionaries.

IG2: The present GS functioning undermines the role of Sarpanch and Elected representatives in the GS administration, rendering the GS as a parallel government body, rather than a complementary body.

IG3: The present GS functioning creates more functions through more functionaries but does not adequately strengthen the administrative capabilities of the local self-government.

IG4: The present GS functioning predominantly focuses on state government welfare service delivery, with secondary importance to developmental activities, revenue generation activities, and public goods creation.

IG5: The present GS functioning has inequitable work-load distribution, leading to wasteful resource deployment in some functions and Panchayats, while leaving significant resource gaps at other places.

IG6: The power and reporting structures in the present GS system dilute the authority of the village Panchayats, giving an opportunity for the GS functionaries to game the system, and deepening dependencies on the line departments at Mandal and District Levels.

3. Achievement Gaps

AG1: The present GS system has only incrementally contributed in the betterment of engineering works and civil works such as water, roads, construction and sanitation projects.

AG2: The present GS system has not been successful in garnering more maintenance and regulatory resource. As such, it has offered negligible benefits in terms of maintenance service improvements at the Panchayat level.

AG3: The present GS system has been incapable of creating or fostering autonomy of the local self-government. On the contrary, it has created additional dependency on and interventionism by the line departments.

AG4: The present GS system has not been able to boost the local own-source revenue generation for the Panchayats. As such, it hasn't offered noticeable benefits to local taxation and self-sustenance of the pre-existing local self-government system.

AG5: The present GS system has not been able to demarcate the workloads of functionaries effectively, and has not been successful to drive intrinsic motivation for the GS functionaries and PRI officials.

Overall impact of the GS model

The overall impact of the GS model has been assessed based on the following three questions, which pertain to the general objectives and success of a good local self-government system.

Q1. Has the system been successful in assigning more functions to PRIs?

- The findings have been affirmative, as the GS has been successful in creating both more functions and functional capabilities within the PRIs.

Q2. Has there been significant improvement in the capabilities and functioning of local self-government?

- The observations have been mixed. While there has been visible improvement in the effectiveness of service delivery and reduction in administrative hassles of infrastructure development projects, the majority focus has been towards the delivery of State Government's welfare schemes only, with little improvement in the delivery of essential maintenance and routine services. Further, there has been a clear internal disconnect between the ERs and GS functionaries at the village level.

Q3. Has the GS system strengthened the PRIs?

- While the system has created accountability within the LSGs, it has not been able to provide the autonomy and independence required for their self-reliance, nor have the developmental activities at PRIs have not picked up. On the contrary, the GS system has emerged as a parallel system to the existing PRIs, rather than complementing their capabilities. As a result, they have had limited success in strengthening the LSGs.

Core causes for the limited success of the present GS model

The following policy design-level conceptualization gaps are core causes for the limited success of the GS model in its present form:

1. The core objective of conceptualization of the GS system deviated from the main focus of an ideal local self-government (CG2, CG3, CG4 & CG7).
2. The HR and the work-design issues of the GS functionaries (CG5 & CG6).

Replicability of the AP's GS model

The replicability of the system was assessed along the dimensions of requisites of any self-sustained local self-government system, and the existing loopholes in the PRIs. The salient findings are as follows:

1. The present GS model has managed to improve monitoring, supervision and control over the service delivery at the village level. It has been impactful in improving the service performance of the local self-governments in delivering welfare services as well as improving the speed of execution of new developmental projects. However, it has failed to improve maintenance-related and routine responsibilities of the PRIs, such as Waste Management, Water and Sanitation, Roads and Repairs, Lighting and Electricity, etc., which are the core activities of a local self-government body.
2. The present GS model has not been able to reduce the dependency of the PRIs on the line departments and higher-level governments for their day-to-day operations.
3. The present GS model has not been able to increase the capabilities of PRIs to generate more own-source revenues or create more economic activities for their autonomy, self-reliance and self-sustenance.

4. The present GS model has not been able to complement the strength of PRIs in enabling them to become local self-governments in true sense. Rather, they have emerged as parallel governance structures at the village level.

As such, the GS model in its present structure and implementation style doesn't offer enough value-for-money and effort. So, it shouldn't be attempted for replication in other states in its present form.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on insights gathered from field observations, data analysis, mechanisms of change, verified relationships, the GS system's conceptual model, observed challenges and loopholes, structural gaps, and the assessment of overall impact and replicability of the present GS model. These recommendations are organized at two levels — policy-design level and implementation level — to resolve the existing structural gaps and improve the existing GS system. This structured approach is intended to enhance local governance effectiveness, with a specific focus on maximizing the impact of the Grama Sachivalayam (GS) system.

Policy Design-level Recommendations

The GS system has shown to have effectively delivered welfare benefits, but a reorientation toward broader village development goals is needed to support self-sustaining villages. The following recommendations address this gap:

a. Reconceptualizing the Core Need and Objective of the GS system:

The core need and objectives of the GS system need to be reconceptualized and realigned by amending the primary focus as Panchayat development and assistance in its core development and economic activities, even while retaining its focus on welfare services delivery.

This could be achieved through systematic adoption of the following '3R' framework:

1. Re-calibrating the Grama Sachivalayam functions to address the administration-related issues, including active engagement in works related to Water, Sanitation, Roads, and Electricity.
2. Re-orienting the energies towards income & employment-generation programmes and public goods creation.
3. Re-thinking the model to build ecosystems and support to generate, maintain and sustain the economic and developmental activities.

b. Reforming the Work Design and the Administrative Relationships of the LSG bodies

The implementation of the reconceptualized GS model would require a stronger synergy between the presently isolated local self-government bodies - the PRI and the GS systems. It is required to design robust mechanisms to create incentive compatibility between the two groups of LSG staff.

The administrative relationships and work design of the LSG staff needs to be realigned by rationalizing the functions, reporting relationships, work load, and career progression

to induce process ownership and innovation. This could be achieved through systematic application of the following **‘8R’ framework** of change:

1. Re-defining the GS functionaries’ administrative roles, controlling and reporting relationships, workflow, and accountability to integrate them with the Gram Panchayat requirements. Appropriate controlling authority needs to be allowed for the Panchayat Secretary and the GP-level elected representatives in performance review and appraisal of the GS functional assistants.
2. Re-forming the work measurement norms of and undertaking administrative capacity building measures for the GS functionaries to encourage benchmarking with best practices, innovation and entrepreneurial culture.
3. Re-working on the career progression of the GS functionaries and bringing in policy certainty.
4. Re-vitalising the roles of elected representatives and ward members to sensitise their importance and encouraging them to substitute the volunteers’ roles. The Sarpanches and ERs should be motivated to make use of their authority.
5. Re-inforcing the PRI capabilities with authority and capacity to hire and plan requisite on-ground execution manpower and resources.
6. Re-sizing the number of functional assistants at the Panchayat level.
7. Rationalizing the workload, work allocation and recording norms, span of control of GS functionaries. A part of this authority needs to be vested with the Sarpanch and the PS.
8. Re-organizing the mode of service delivery: The GS, by virtue of its existence in village, solves the purpose of ease of governance through single point of contact - the Digital Assistant. To this effect, the ‘Service to the doorsteps’ role could be bundled and replaced by ‘Service at Village premises’ for all welfare-related benefits.

To achieve the same, we have recommended specific staff resizing and work-load rationalization framework in Section 6.1.1.b.

Implementation-level Recommendations

To align the processes with the redefined objectives, a relook and alignment of inputs is crucial. The input alignment should focus at building the requisite capabilities in terms of human capacity building, technological capabilities, and raising working capital funds for operational expenses and maintenance resources. We recommend the following measures to address each of these pain points:

a. Re-designing Accountability Mechanisms

Streamlining processes to align with the redefined outcomes would require redesign of accountability mechanisms to ensure clearer role definition, transparent and seamless information flow, and internal coordination protocols. We recommend following measures as a way forward:

1. Develop an integrated application which brings together all the functions. This should be developed as a single application with common database management system, with provision for departmental customization.

2. Create and formalize clear workflow structures with specific predefined paths. However, this should be made flexible enough to incorporate specific modifications on field, with modification power vested with the individual functionary, and approved through the immediate higher controlling officer.

b. Human Capacity Building

The above policy-level improvements need to be complemented with appropriate capabilities of the human resource. we recommend the following actionable measures:

1. Redefine capacity and training requirements to incorporate administrative acumen, alongside the functional expertise. The training should encompass comprehensive modules on general administration, rural administration, along with special focus on soft skills such as personality and leadership training, manpower and fund management, conflict resolution, etc. For this purpose, the GS functionaries could be brought under the purview of Revamped RGSA, whose general training modules are designed for the purpose.
2. Organize refreshers to reinforce the skills over time, ensuring that the entire GS team remains equipped to serve their communities effectively.

c. Financial and Operational Capabilities

Implementing any such reforms and creating self-sustaining local self-government models would require developing adequate financial and operational capabilities. We recommend the following measures:

1. The proposed integration of GS with the PRIs would allow greater access to Panchayat funds through direct access to the 15th Finance Grants and Own- source Revenues of the Panchayat. These synergies are the byproduct of the win-win offered to the Panchayat Presidents, as against the erstwhile model which alienates the Sarpanches and Elected Representatives, constraining free fund flow.
2. Freeing the GS of the liabilities of Volunteer honourarium and bundling of multiple services would directly translate to the surplus funds, provided those funds are not held back by the upper governments. In this respect, the state government should take a long-term and rational perspective towards fund allocation and diversion.
3. As the suggested model is geared up to incentivise development activities, the virtuous cycle thus generated offers huge scope for generating own-source revenues. Till the time, the state government should fund the working capital requirements and operational expenses for certain time, say one year, followed by partial withdrawal of support to incentivize early promotion of revenue generation activities and innovations.

Recommendations about GS model replication

We posit that creation of a self-sustaining local self-governance system doesn't necessarily require creation of extra and parallel structures such as GS. We recommend an **integrated local self-governance model** for strengthening of LSGs through appropriate re-orientation of '7S's of the model – *Strategy, Shared Values, Structure, Staff, Skills, Systems* and *Style*. Through judicious and customized application of the suggested framework in specific state-level and local contexts, we posit that the existing PRI systems could be transformed into local self-governing bodies in true sense.

Concluding remarks

This policy brief on Grama Sachivalayam system of Andhra Pradesh has been a sincere attempt towards investigation of various dimensions of the GS model, its implementation, and the nitty-gritty of the system's practical aspects, providing a pragmatic reflection about the decentralized local governance systems. The major outcomes of the study are the reflections obtained for betterment of local self-governance models, which has been guided by the rigorous analysis of quantitative and qualitative field data. The conceptual model, structural gaps, core issues, and the recommendations suggested thereof, open doors to multiple dialogues about how to better local governance systems. It is expected that the dialogues, thus initiated, benefit the larger masses of disadvantaged rural communities and help in achieving the larger good.

1. Introduction

The Village Secretariat System, or Grama Sachivalayam, introduced by the Government of Andhra Pradesh on October 2, 2019, is an innovative administrative reform designed to transform local governance and public service delivery at the village level. This system represents a pathbreaking effort by the Government of Andhra Pradesh to revitalize rural governance. By bringing essential services to the doorstep of every villager, the system strives to achieve the dual objectives of improving access to public services and fostering greater community participation, social inclusion, and local accountability. It marks a significant departure from the previous system of centralized service delivery and sets a new benchmark for good governance in rural India. Through this initiative, Andhra Pradesh has attempted to demonstrate how administrative reforms can empower rural communities and bridge the gap between the government and the people.

1.1 Background of the Study

This study caters to the extension of the main research project - “An evaluation of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Revamped Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)”, as an added objective, awarded by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, to the research team of the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) in April 2024. The Ministry has envisaged to undertake a detailed case study of the Grama Sachivalayam system, a local governance-based intervention of the erstwhile state government of the state of Andhra Pradesh. The major objectives include detailed understanding of the system, exploring the benefits, enablers and barriers of implementation, and drawing insights into the usefulness of the system with a view to scale up such systems in other states, if found useful and beneficial.

The study involves detailed investigation through literature review and empirical surveys, followed by drawing relevant themes to assess the overall essence of the system. The main framework of this study was designed in July 2024, while the fieldwork portion and analysis were conducted in the month of October 2024, in wake of transitioning landscape of the system due to the change in state government in AP, following state elections in May 2024. This output of the study is a scientific research based policy brief, prepared through rigorous fieldwork involving mixed-method approach, and written in the format of a journal article, as suggested by the Ministry. The major study outcomes are detailed understanding of the system, recommendations for betterment of the system, and identifying the replicability of the system.

1.2 Structure of the Report

This policy brief has been structured as a white paper journal article to capture various aspects of the GS system and our investigation findings in a holistic manner. In Chapter 2, we capture multiple dimensions of the GS framework, its genesis, its functions and functionaries, the administrative structure, and its implementation and evolution. Through the initial grasp of the system, we venture out to streamline our research objectives, craft our research design, the survey design, and the data collection in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, we analyse the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the primary survey, triangulate the findings, and generate detailed insights and themes,

including uncovering the benefits, enablers, barriers, mechanisms of change and derive the conceptual model of GS service delivery. In chapter 5, we conduct a detailed and critical assessment of the GS model through various lens, undertake thematic analysis of the specific issues, unravel the structural gaps, and finally assess the overall impact of the GS system in AP and its replicability in other states of India. Chapter 6 is where we reflect on the findings, suggest recommendations for betterment of the system, and propose an integrated model for self-sustainable local self-governments. Finally, we conclude by highlighting the major outcomes and limitations of the study, with closing remarks on future opportunities. The survey instruments developed and used for our field investigation are annexed as appendices.

2. Grama Sachivalayam System: A Debrief

This chapter reflects on the framework of the Grama Sachivalayam system and attempts to synthesize it with the understandings from field to provide a detailed debrief. The following sections highlight various aspects of the GS system in a thematic form, which attempts to prime the reader with a comprehensive grasp over the concept and the manner in which the system has evolved.

2.1 Genesis and Evolution of the Grama Sachivalayam System

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment, enacted in 1992, was a turning point for local governance in India, granting Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) the constitutional status to perform governance and development functions at the grassroots level and empowering local institutions to manage and govern their communities effectively, marking a pivotal moment for local self-governance in India. This amendment mandates that local governments take responsibility for the preparation and implementation of plans for economic development and social justice in areas concerning 29 subjects listed in Schedule XI of the Constitution, including agriculture, education, health, and sanitation. The amendment provided a framework for organizing local bodies at three levels: Gram Panchayats at the village level, Mandal Parishads at the intermediate level, and Zilla Parishads at the district level, thereby establishing a three-tier system of governance. Further, the amendment also laid the groundwork for devolving powers, responsibilities, and resources to local institutions to foster economic development and social justice. This shift was meant to promote participatory governance where communities, through their elected representatives, would have a say in local planning, development, and the delivery of essential services.

Despite the constitutional provisions, the actual devolution of powers and responsibilities to Panchayats across various states has been perennially observed to be uneven, and local governance continued to be fraught with challenges, including inefficiencies in service delivery, lack of accountability, bureaucratic hurdles, and insufficient local capacity to handle development planning and execution. The implementation of this constitutional provision was uneven and slow across India, including Andhra Pradesh, leading to gaps in service delivery and governance. This situation created a perceived disconnect between the government and the rural populace, particularly in ensuring timely access to essential services and welfare schemes. Our interactions with various stakeholders from sixteen states during the first phase of our study (revamped RGSA evaluation) clearly corroborates and validates these arguments.

In response to these challenges, the then AP government took a landmark step toward revitalizing local governance with the introduction of the Village Secretariat System (Grama Sachivalayam) in 2019. The system was envisioned with dual purposes of decentralizing service delivery and ensuring that public services reach every household in rural areas in a timely, transparent, and efficient manner. This system is particularly significant in the context of Andhra Pradesh's governance reforms, as it places the local bodies (GP and GS) at the centre of local administration, supported by a network of trained functional assistants responsible for service delivery across a range of government schemes and programmes.

2.2 Objectives of the Grama Sachivalayam System

The formal establishment of the Village Secretariat system was authorized through G.O. Ms. No. 110, issued on July 19, 2019, by the Department of Panchayat Raj & Rural Development. This government order laid down the administrative framework, staffing norms, and operational guidelines for the Secretariats. Under this system, nearly 95,088 functional assistants were recruited and deployed across the state to support the delivery of services related to the *Navarathnal* (nine key welfare schemes) introduced by the Andhra Pradesh government. Each Secretariat, catering to approximately 2,000 people, consists of 11 to 12 functional assistants representing various government departments such as Agriculture, Revenue, Health, Women and Child Welfare, and Education, among others. These assistants are responsible for ensuring the delivery of services within their specific domains, under the coordination of the Panchayat Secretary, who acts as the convener of the Village Secretariat. Each Village Secretariat functions as a service delivery hub, coordinating the activities of various departments at the grassroots level.

Box 2.1: Grama Sachivalayam Infra Architecture



Picture 1: Draksharama Grama Sachivalayam,
Konaseema District



Picture 2: Kuppambaduru Grama Sachivalayam,
Tirupati district

The Grama Sachivalayam buildings in Andhra Pradesh are designed as community hubs, integrating services like Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs), health clinics, Bulk Milk Collection Units (BMCUs), and digital libraries to provide comprehensive support to villagers. As part of the "NAVARATNALU" initiative, 11,709 Grama Sachivalayam buildings have been constructed to bring service delivery to the citizens' doorstep.

The architecture of these buildings emphasizes durability and functionality, ensuring they serve as long-lasting assets for the community. Each building is constructed with an estimated cost of ₹2,70,000, reflecting the government's commitment to creating durable and functional community assets.

One of the most worthwhile innovations within the Grama Sachivalayam system is the integration of the state's flagship welfare programmes of the erstwhile state government, collectively known as *Navarathnal*, into the delivery mechanisms of Village Secretariats. *Navarathnal* consisted of nine core welfare schemes designed to improve the livelihoods and well-being of the state's rural population. These schemes included YSR¹ Rythu Bharosa, YSR Pension Kanuka, Jagananna Ammavodi, Pedal Andariki Illu, YSR Arogyasri,

¹ The names of the schemes in this report pertain to those during the survey period May to September 2024. Some schemes have renamed, some modified and some discontinued post state elections in May 2024, which resulted in change of the state government.

among others. The functional assistants at each Village Secretariat ensured that these schemes reach the eligible beneficiaries and that the delivery is free from delays or administrative hurdles. Since the newly elected state government in June 2024, the administrative structure is undergoing slight modifications, but the major objectives have been the same, with special focus to pension delivery (as on the date of writing this report).

The primary objectives of the Grama Sachivalayam system, as outlined in the G.O., include:

1. **Restructuring service delivery mechanisms:** The primary objective of the Village Secretariat system is to create a single-window mechanism that ensures the timely and efficient delivery of government services, with a specific focus on rural local governance.
2. **Providing services at the doorstep:** Historically, the delivery of services in rural areas was centralized, requiring villagers to travel to distant Mandal offices to access government services. This resulted in delays, corruption, and a lack of accountability. One of the core purposes of the Village Secretariat system is to deliver various government services at the citizens' doorstep, ensuring that public services reach even the most remote areas and marginalized communities. This is achieved through a network of functional assistants assigned to each Village Secretariat.
3. **Enabling convergence of departments:** The Village Secretariat system is designed to function as an integrated governance unit, where all departments physically come together in a common office space to collaborate at the grassroots level, avoiding the bureaucratic silos that often hamper service delivery in traditional government setups. This model of convergence allows for greater efficiency and accountability, as the Secretariat becomes the single point of contact for all public services in the village. It envisages to eliminate the need for citizens to visit multiple offices or navigate complex administrative processes, thus streamlining service delivery and improving governance outcomes. For instance, the Agriculture Assistant, Revenue Assistant, and Engineering Assistant may work together on projects related to land management and irrigation, while the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) and Women & Child Welfare Assistant collaborate on health and nutrition programs for women and children.
4. **Promote efficiency, accountability and transparency:** At the heart of the Village Secretariat system is its commitment to transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. Each Village Secretariat operates according to a well-defined Citizen Charter, which outlines the services available and the time frame within which these services must be delivered. This ensures that villagers are not only aware of their entitlements but can also hold the Secretariat staff accountable for delays or mismanagement.
5. **Supporting the Navarathnalu programs:** The conceptualization of the Village Secretariat System is rooted in the vision of the *Navarathnalu*—the nine major welfare programs initiated by the government of Andhra Pradesh to uplift rural communities. This comprehensive welfare package covers areas such as agriculture (through YSR Rythu Bharosa), healthcare (Arogyasri), housing (Pedalandariki Illu), and education (Jagananna Ammavodi). These schemes are integral to the Village Secretariat system, as they represent the core services that functional assistants are tasked with delivering directly to villagers. The integration of multiple departments within the

Secretariat system is central to its effectiveness, ensuring a convergence of resources and expertise in delivering essential services.

6. **Enabling local governance and citizen participation:** In addition to improving governance efficiency, the Village Secretariat system plays a critical role in empowering local governments and fostering citizen participation. By involving local communities in governance processes—whether through Grama Sabhas or Gram Panchayat meetings—the system strengthens the democratic fabric of rural Andhra Pradesh. Citizens are not just passive recipients of government schemes but are actively involved in local development plans, identifying local needs, monitoring service delivery and holding local officials accountable.

Box 2.2: Rythu Bharosa (Seva) Kendra

Rythu Bharosa Kendra (RBKs), renamed as Rythu Seva Kendras are village-level facilitation centers in Andhra Pradesh, launched on May 30, 2020, to provide farmers with quality agri-inputs, advisory services, and market access. These one-stop centers ensure the availability of certified seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides while offering digital tools like kiosks, e-Crop booking, and the YSRAPP for monitoring. RBKs also act as procurement centers, ensuring Minimum Support Prices (MSP) and financial services through banking correspondents. Additionally, RBKs focus on farmer training through Dr. YSR Polambadi (Farmer Field Schools) and livestock programs like Pasu Vignana Badi. Veterinary and fisheries services are strengthened through disease surveillance apps and Matsya Sagu Badi (MSB) for aqua farmers.

Future expansions include Multipurpose Processing Facilities (MPFCs) and Custom Hiring Centers (CHCs) for mechanization. RBKs represent a transformative model integrating technology, finance, and scientific knowledge for sustainable agriculture and rural development.



Picture 3: Rythu Bharosa Kendram, Thotapeta, Ramachandrapuram, Konaseema District

2.3 Functions of Grama Sachivalayam

The Grama Sachivalayam system functions as a single-window mechanism for the delivery of a wide range of government services at the village level. The specific functions of the Village Secretariat include have been summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2. 1 Functions of the Grama Sachivalayam

Function	Description
Service Delivery and Accessibility	• A single-window administrative unit for essential services. • Provides certificates (birth, death, caste, income) and welfare services at the village level.
Implementation of Welfare Schemes	• Facilitates delivery and monitoring of welfare programs. • Identifies eligible beneficiaries, enrolls them, and ensures benefit disbursement. • Provides doorstep delivery of welfare benefits.

Decentralised Planning and Development	• Supports bottom-up planning through community involvement in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). • Uses Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques. • Focuses on sectoral development (infrastructure, agriculture, education) coordinated by the Panchayat Secretary.
Coordination and Convergence of Departments	• Acts as a convergence platform for various departments (e.g., Agriculture, Health, Revenue, Social Welfare) for integrated service delivery. • Enables cross-functional solutions facilitated by roles like the Engineering Assistant and Digital Assistant.
Administrative Support and Record Maintenance	• Maintains records and supports Panchayat's statutory functions. • Helps organize Gram Panchayat sessions and Gram Sabhas. • Assists the Panchayat Secretary in record-keeping related to taxes, land transactions, and community assets
Monitoring, Accountability and Grievance Redressal	• Ensures accountability through systematic performance reviews. • Manages grievance redressal mechanisms like the "Spandana" programme
Legal Enforcement and Regulatory Functions	• Enforces regulations such as the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, child labor laws, and health standards. • Functionaries prevent land encroachments and enforce public health standards to control disease outbreaks
Community Mobilization and Capacity Building	• Promotes community self-reliance through training and mobilization of self-help groups (SHGs). • Engages in literacy initiatives and public participation in resource management. • Community members interact directly with functionaries like the Women and Child Welfare Assistant.

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis, adapted from the AP VSMOP, 2019

2.4 Administrative Structure, Roles and Responsibilities of GS Staff

The Grama Sachivalayam is a collaborative structure which encompasses a matrix of reporting relationships, which has been envisaged to align various line functionaries with the requirements of the Panchayat deliverables. All the GS staff are housed under a common Grama Sachivalayam building, which has a standard design and has been created under the one-time capital investment, along with required furniture and capital resources, such as computers, printers, etc. Thus, it attempts to bring all the major functions together, both physically and administratively.

- The **Panchayat Secretary (PS)** of the corresponding Gram Panchayat (the GP with the largest population in case of small Panchayats) is the administrative authority of the Grama Sachivalayam, who is the Drawing and Disbursement Officer (DDO) for all the other Village Secretariat Staff and the Volunteers. The DDO is responsible for monitoring all the activities and tasks executed by the other GS staff, and thus, is ideally supposed to be informed about and sub-delegate the tasks to the relevant staff (which may not always be the case, as our observations in Chapter 3 highlight). The PS is the common link between the GP (i.e., the Panchayati Raj system) and the GS system, and is the overseer of both systems.

- The GS system created a provision for an additional **Panchayat Secretary in Grade 5**, who is the overseer of the other GS staff as far as the day-to-day operational activities

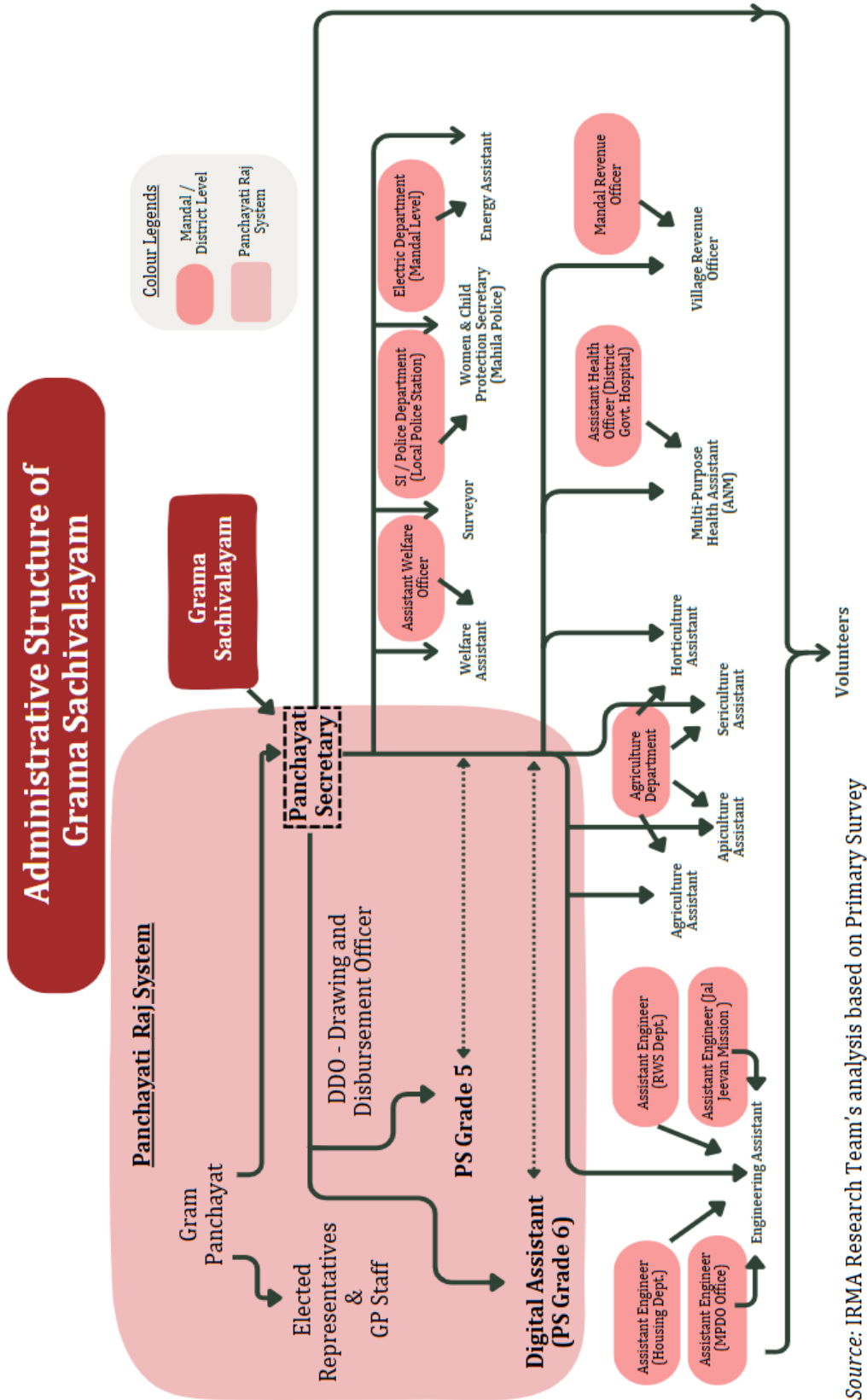


Figure 2. 1 Administrative Structure of the Grama Sachivalayam System

and logistics issues are concerned. In most scenarios where a single GP contains multiple GSs, the PS (Grade-5) has been functioning with independent charge as the DDO of the respective GS.

- Yet another staff - the **Digital Assistant (DA)**, recruited as PS Grade-6, is another nodal point in the GS system. The PS, PS(Grade-5) and the Digital Assistant are under both the administrative control and functional control of the Panchayati Raj system. The Digital Assistant responsible for creating the service tickets, sub-delegating all the service requests to corresponding line functionaries, tracking, and recording, digitizing, organizing, and maintaining all the data related to beneficiary service requests. Through acting as the direct interface between the beneficiaries and the GS, the DA could be regarded as the heart of the entire system.
- In addition to the direct Panchayat staff, the GS comprises of various line functionaries such as the **Village Revenue Officer (VRO)**, **Surveyor**, **Welfare and Education Assistant**, **Engineering Assistant**, **Women and Child Protection Assistant** (aka *Mahila Police*), **Multi-Purpose Health Assistant** (aka *Auxiliary Nurse Midwife - ANM*), **Agricultural Assistant**, **Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Assistant**, and **Energy Assistant**.
- Additionally, some GSs contain other specialist functional staff such as **Village Horticulture Assistant**, **Village Sericulture Assistant**, etc., based on the occupational requirements of the village. Each of these staff are under the administrative control of the PS and under the functional control of the respective line departments at the Mandal or the District levels.

Figure 2.1 captures the administrative structure of the Grama Sachivalayam system holistically, along with the detailed reporting relationships and the levels of the government and respective authorities. The functional roles and responsibilities of the GS functionaries are summarized in Table 2.2.

Box 2.3: Recruitment of GS Staff

The Grama Sachivalayam staff are recruited by the state government through a structured approach conducted. Candidates are selected through a competitive examination overseen by the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) or other designated recruitment bodies. The selection is based on merit, with reservations provided for socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

Once recruited, staff members are appointed to specific roles within the village secretariats, handling services related to revenue, welfare, civil supplies, and other government schemes. These appointments are typically contractual, with provisions for regularization based on performance and policy decisions. Employees work under the direct supervision of higher government officials, ensuring accountability and efficiency in service delivery at the grassroots level.

Table 2. 2 Roles and Responsibilities of Grama Sachivalayam Functionaries

Functionary	Key roles and Responsibilities
Panchayat Secretary	• Integrate Grama Sachivalayam with Gram Panchayat functioning • Oversee Village Secretariat functionaries • DDO for salaries of VS staff and Volunteers; manage finances • Enforce law and order; promote community welfare

Digital Assistant (PS - Grade 6)	- Promote digital literacy and online services (Aadhaar, ration cards, welfare schemes, etc.) - Manage digital records and support e-governance - Coordinate with all other functionaries to track and ensure timely service delivery
Welfare and Education Assistant	- Promote literacy and school enrollment; disburse eligible scholarships; monitor mid-day meals - Support marginalized groups with all relevant welfare schemes (SC/ST) - Report to Panchayat Secretary and welfare departments
Village Revenue Officer (VRO)	- Maintain revenue records; collect taxes - Assist with beneficiary identification; issue certificates - Provide calamity assistance; protect government properties
Multi-Purpose Health Assistant / Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)	- Provide maternal and child health services; organize vaccinations - Monitor malnutrition; promote family planning - Work with ASHA workers; report to Medical Officer and Panchayat Secretary
Women and Child Welfare Assistant (Mahila Police)	- Ensure safety and welfare of women/children - Address domestic violence; collaborate with law enforcement - Promote SHGs; support health/nutrition initiatives - Report to local police (SHO) and Panchayat Secretary
Engineering Assistant	- Oversee infrastructure projects (roads, water supply) and maintenance - Collaborate on Jal Jeevan Mission projects - Report to Panchayat Raj Department; work with Panchayat Secretary
Energy Assistant	- Maintain electrical infrastructure; assist with street lights - Address power issues; promote renewable energy - Coordinate with Panchayat Secretary and local authorities
Village Agriculture Assistant	- Support farmers with subsidies, seeds, fertilizers; promote organic farming - Monitor crops; provide pest control advice - Report to Agriculture Department; work with Panchayat Secretary
Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Assistant	- Offer veterinary services; promote breeding and milk production - Support poultry/goat farming; manage schemes like Mini Gokulam - Report to Animal Husbandry Department; coordinate with Panchayat Secretary
Village Horticulture Assistant	- Support fruit, vegetable, and flower cultivation - Promote horticulture-based livelihoods; - Provide training on plant protection and post-harvest management
Village Sericulture Assistant	- Promote silk farming; assist with government schemes - Train farmers in mulberry cultivation and silkworm management
Village Fisheries Assistant	- Support fish farming; distribute resources - Facilitate government schemes for fisheries; promote sustainable practices
Village Volunteers	- Act as a bridge between villagers and Secretariat - Deliver services at doorsteps; identify beneficiaries; collect information - Raise awareness of welfare schemes

Source: Adapted from the AP VSMOP, 2019, complemented with findings of the IRMA Research team

- Yet other key stakeholders and an important pillar of the GS system are the Volunteers, who act as the first- mile information agents for the GS staff and last-mile delivery

Box 2.4: The Last Mile Warriors : GS Volunteers

As originally conceptualized, Volunteers are the key pillars of GS Operations. For delivery and administrative convenience, a GS was spatially subdivided into multiple clusters, each comprising between 50 to 80 households, and one such cluster was allocated to a GS volunteer. The volunteers were under the direct administrative control of the PS and assisted the PS and GS staff in conducting surveys, reaching out to potential beneficiaries, collecting information, raising service tickets at the GS, following up with the relevant line functionary, and disbursement of benefits for the ultimate beneficiaries. They were compensated for their service orientation through a monthly honorarium of INR 5000.

The Volunteer system has been presently discontinued since July 2024, as part of restructuring the system.

agents for the beneficiaries.

The Grama Sachivalayam system, thus, has multiple dimensions through which it endeavors to take governance closer to the public through its detailed implementation framework.

3. Research Design

In this chapter, we attempt to detail the research objectives, research methodology and the operationalization of the research study. The following sections develop the framework adopted for our investigation.

3.1 Research Objectives

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. **To decode the framework and implementation of GS system:** We aim to develop a detailed understanding of the GS system, with special focus on uncovering the administrative structure, processes, and ground realities of its implementation. (Chapter 4)
2. **To document the perspectives on the effectiveness of the GS system** as reported by diverse stakeholders, including beneficiaries: Through this study, we aim to capture the views of various stakeholders involved in the GS system, including beneficiaries, Panchayat Secretaries, Village Secretariat staff, and other government functionaries. The goal is to document their experiences, perceptions, and satisfaction with the services delivered by the GS system. Key areas of focus include assessing the accessibility, responsiveness, and inclusivity of the services provided. By understanding how different groups perceive the system's performance, we can identify the strengths and areas of improvement from the end user perspective. (Chapter 4)
3. **To examine the benefits, facilitators and challenges of the GS system:** We focus on identifying the factors that hinder or facilitate the effective operation of the GS system. This includes exploring infrastructural constraints, financial limitations, administrative challenges, and workforce issues. Additionally, it aims to identify facilitators, such as training, interdepartmental collaboration, and digital platforms, that support smooth service delivery. By analyzing these factors, we aim to uncover the operational realities that impact the effectiveness of the GS system. (Chapter 4)
4. **To uncover the mechanisms of change and potential impact through the GS system:** We investigate how GS's single-window mechanism and interdepartmental coordination drive change in service delivery and governance. We aim to systematically unravel if and how the GS system has caused potential change and impact in the society. This we do through a multi-dimensional approach using the gaps and pain points, inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes of the intervention in a qualitative manner. (Chapter 4)
5. **To assess whether the GS system has strengthened the PRIs:** This objective aims to understand whether the GS system has been successful in assigning more functions to the PRIs and whether it could result in strengthening the PRIs. This entails detailed examination of various outcomes with reference to the broad objectives of establishing GS system, and critically evaluating the gaps (Chapter 5).
6. **To provide recommendations for the sustainability of the GS system:** The final objective is to develop actionable recommendations to enhance the GS system's sustainability. This involves critically examining the existing practices, resource

allocation, workforce training, and other structural aspects that contribute to the long-term viability of the GS model. By focusing on sustainability, the research intends to offer strategic insights that could help strengthen the GS system, making it a resilient model for rural governance and service delivery in Andhra Pradesh (Chapter 6).

7. **To examine the replicability of the GS model in other states:** This objective aims to compare and contrast the GS model with various other models of local governance and examine the replicability of the model in other states. Based on these observations, we suggest a comprehensive and integrated governance model for strengthening the local governance models by collating positives and success stories from various local self-governance models (Chapter 5).

3.2 Methodology

We utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the above defined research questions. Mixed methods approach is particularly suited for exploring complex governance systems like GS because it allows for the collection of both in-depth qualitative insights from key stakeholders and quantitative data that can be analyzed for patterns and trends (Creswell, 2014). In the case of the GS system, this approach is especially valuable because it captures the experiences and perceptions of different stakeholders—ranging from Panchayat Secretaries and Sarpanches to Village Secretariat staff and beneficiaries—while also allowing for an empirical assessment of service delivery and satisfaction levels through quantitative measures. The following flowchart in Figure 3.1 graphically illustrates the research design, described further in the following sections.

3.3 Literature Review

Our quest began with a thorough literature review and background study of the concept of Grama Sachivalayam, and the way it was conceptualized in AP, its guiding frameworks, and its detailed structure and implementation plan through the relevant Government Orders (GOs), Manuals, circulars, newspaper articles and reports, and the existing academic articles which have attempted to analyze the system from various perspectives. This gave us the initial understanding required to ascertain various questions to be asked, things to be enquired, and practices to be observed during the scoping visit.

3.4 Scoping Visit

The purpose of the scoping visit was to practically verify the implementation framework, and deepen our understanding about various unreported and unsaid aspects of the GS system. To ascertain balanced view of the system, we visited and interacted with various relevant stakeholders, such as the officials of the AP-PRRD Office, trainers of the AP- SIRD, CEOs and officials of a couple of District Panchayats (Eluru and Krishna districts), and a couple of GPs and GSs (Yarlagadda and Challapally-2 in the Krishna district).

The scoping visit enhanced our clarity about the processes and the general practices, which guided us in crafting our survey design.

Research Design : Grama Sachivalayam Case Study



Source: Created by IRMA Research Team

Figure 3. 1 Research Design

3.5 Survey Design

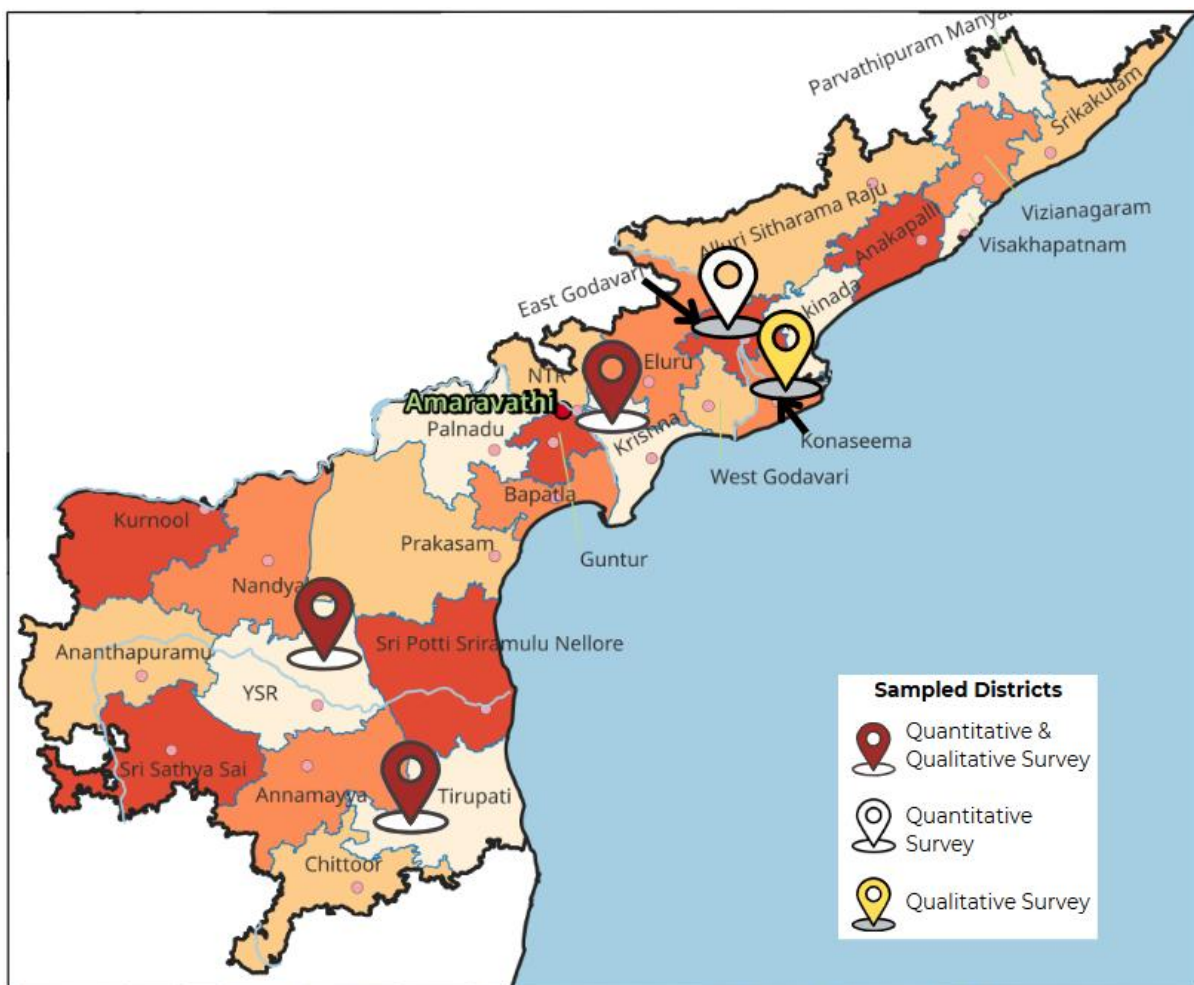
The survey design for the case study comprised defining the sampling strategy for identifying the GSs for both qualitative and quantitative inquiry, sample size calculations,

sampling plan for respondent choice within sampled GSs, stakeholder identification, and the survey instrument design for qualitative and quantitative inquiry with each relevant stakeholder.

3.5.1 Sampling design

The sampling design for this study was crucial in ensuring that the data collected represents the diverse GS systems across Andhra Pradesh. To achieve this, we employed a judicious combination of both random and purposive sampling strategies, which are tailored to the specific needs of the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, respectively.

In the quantitative phase, a multi-stage random sampling strategy was adopted. The first stage involved the random selection of four districts within Andhra Pradesh, ensuring geographical diversity across the state (Figure 3.2).



Source: Created by IRMA's Research Team using Andhra Pradesh Political Map

Figure 3. 2 Sample Districts Representation

Among the districts so selected, the next stage involved selecting two Mandals within each district. This selection was done using stratified sampling, wherein Mandals were divided into two strata based on their proximity to the district headquarters. Specifically, the median distance from the district headquarters was used as the cutoff for stratification. This method allowed for the inclusion of both Mandals that are close to the district center

and those that are more remote, ensuring that the sample reflects variations in service delivery based on geographical location.

Within each selected Mandal, five Village Secretariats (or Grama Sachivalayams) were chosen using Simple Random Sampling (SRS). The SRS method ensures that every Village Secretariat in the Mandal has an equal probability of being selected, thus providing a representative sample of Sachivalayams. Thus, we sampled a total of 40 Village Secretariats, as 4 districts x 2 Mandals / district x 5 Sachivalayams / Mandal (Table 3.1).

Table 3. 1 Sampled Districts and Grama Sachivalayams (Quantitative Survey)

District	Mandal	Gram Sachivalayams (GS)
East Godavari	Korukonda	Bolledupalem, Burugupudi, Dosakayalapalli-1, Jagannadhapuram, Narasapuram
	Rajamahendravaram-R	Hukumpeta-3, Katheru-4, Kolamuru-1, Pidimgoyyi-2, Rajavolu-1
Krishna	Challapally - R	Challapalli-2, Lakshmipuram-2, Mangalapuram, Puritigadda, Yarlagadda
	Machilipatnam - R	Chinnapuram-1, N.Gollapalem, Pothepalli, Rudravaram, S.N.Gollapalem
Tirupati	Ramachandrapuram	Gangireddipalle, K.K.V.Puram, Kuppambaduru, Mittakandriga, Nadavaluru
	Sullurpeta	Abaka, K.C.N. Gunta, Kotapoluru1, Mangalampadu, Manganellore
Kadapa [#]	Chinakomma Dinne	Busireddypalli, C.K.Dinne, Ippapenta-2, Korpparthi, Thadigotla
	Jammalamadugu	Gudemcheruvu, Moragudi-2, P. Bommepalli-1, Pedandluru, Ponnathota

[#]: The district has been renamed from erstwhile YSR after the survey period.

Source: Created by IRMA Research Team

To determine the required sample size for this study, we used a statistical estimation method that accounts for a 90% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. Accordingly, we required a minimum sample size of approximately 273 respondents to capture variations and demonstrate robust effects.

For the field study in this phase, we adopted a structured sampling plan where we collected data from Village Secretariats. The sampling plan required to include at least one Panchayat Secretary, three beneficiaries and three volunteers from each Village Secretariat. This approach would allow us to capture perspectives across these different stakeholder groups, ensuring a balanced representation of the interactions and service delivery outcomes. Given that we were surveying 40 Village Secretariats, the total sample size includes a minimum of 40 Panchayat Secretaries, 120 beneficiaries, and 120 volunteers, requiring a minimum of 280 respondents (which is higher than the requisite sample size). Our final sample included 416 respondents, which ensured that the study would be able to detect meaningful variances in outcomes of interest.

In the qualitative phase of the research, we employed a mix of random sampling and purposive sampling strategy to focus on 10 Grama Sachivalayams. The choice of Sachivalayams for qualitative interactions was guided by the administrative structure of the Sachivalayams. The administrative head of a Sachivalayam is the Panchayat Secretary of the respective Gram Panchayat. Considering that Gram Panchayats have wide

variability in their populations, and the fact that one Sachivalayam has been provisioned for a population of around 2000 citizens, there are three possible scenarios:

- Scenario-1: One GP is associated with one Grama Sachivalayam (1GP = 1GS).
- Scenario-2: One GP is associated with multiple Grama Sachivalayams, when the population of a GP is large
- Scenario-3: Multiple small GPs are associated with one Gram Sachivalayam

Our Sampling strategy for Sachivalayam selection is designed to capture these structural and operational diversities within the GS system. To have a comprehensive understanding, we chose to have at least three Sachivalayams in our sample which correspond to each of the above scenarios. Accordingly, we randomly chose four study districts satisfying the mentioned criteria (Table 3.2). Within each sampled district, we purposively chose the Mandals to honor the criteria. Within each mandal, we randomly choose between one to two Sachivalayams, so that the overall count is maintained as per the inclusion criteria.

Table 3. 2 Sampled districts and Grama Sachivalayams (Qualitative survey)

S. No.	District	Mandal	Grama Sachivalayam	Scenario
1	Kadapa [#]	Chintakomma Dinne	C.K.Dinne	1 GP = 1 GS
2		Jammalamadugu	Pedandluru	1 GP = 1 GS
3	Krishna	Challapally-R	Challapally-2	More than 1 GS in one GP
4		Challapally-R	Yarlagadda	1 GS for more than one GP
5		Machilipatnam-R	Rudravaram	1 GP = 1 GS
6	Konaseema	Ramachandrapuram	Draksharama-1	More than 1 GS in one GP
7		Ramachandrapuram	Thotapeta	1 GP = 1 GS
8		Ainavilli	K J Puram	1 GS for more than one GP
9	Tirupati	Ramachandrapuram	Kuppambaduru	1 GS for more than one GP
10		Sullurpeta	Kotapoluru1	More than 1 GS in one GP

[#]: The district has been renamed from erstwhile YSR post survey period

Source: Created by IRMA Research Team

The sampling plan for this phase involved collecting data from at least five respondents within each Village Secretariat to ensure diverse perspectives. The respondents included one Panchayat Secretary, at least one volunteer, at least two VS staff members, and at least one beneficiary, with additional efforts made to include the Sarpanch, whenever possible. These respondents participated in various interaction formats, including one- on-one interviews, joint interviews, and FGDs. We leveraged this mixed approach to capture both individual insights and group dynamics. In total, the sampling plan for the qualitative component aimed for a minimum of 40 interactions across all VS in our final sample.

3.5.2 Quantitative inquiry

The quantitative component of the study involved administering structured survey questionnaires to Panchayat Secretaries, volunteers, and beneficiaries. The Panchayat Secretary represents the system administration (process), volunteers represent the system execution (inputs), whereas the beneficiaries represent the system objective (outcome). The survey instruments were designed to capture key indicators of the GS system's performance, such as the efficiency of service delivery, the perceived effectiveness, and the overall satisfaction with the services delivered. This data is

particularly important for understanding the objective outcomes of the GS system, as it provides empirical numeric evidence of its perceived successes and limitations. The questionnaire was vetted and validated by an SIRD official from the State SIRD, during which minor suggestions were incorporated. We collected the data through engaging skilled and trained personnel from a third-party survey agency. To check the internal validity, we treated the first thirty responses as pilot survey and conducted the basic reliability check, which yielded a sufficiently large value. Then we collected the remaining data, and analyzed the data using descriptive statistics. We also used inferential statistics to observe some relations between various metrics and stakeholders. The detailed quantitative survey instruments are annexed as [Appendix A](#).

Quantitative Data: Sociodemographic Details

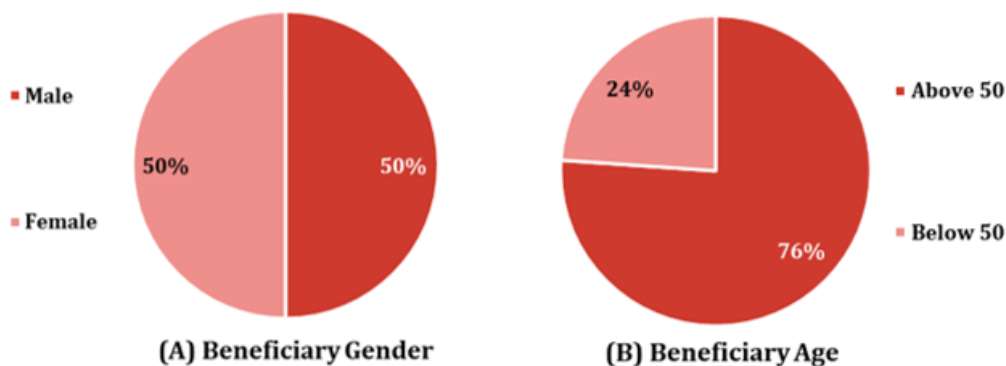
Our quantitative survey conducted in four districts of AP comprised of three key stakeholders who capture the entire value chain of Grama Sachivalayam system - the beneficiaries (representing the outcome), the Panchayat Secretaries (representing the process), and the volunteers (representing the inputs and execution). We had an even mix of stake- holders across forty sampled Grama Sachivalayams from four districts, as presented in Table 3.3.

Table 3. 3 District-wise respondents representation (Quantitative Survey)

District	Beneficiaries	Volunteers	Panchayat Secretaries
East Godavari	40 (25.00%)	41 (20.50%)	20 (35.71%)
Krishna	43 (26.88%)	48 (24.00%)	10 (17.86%)
Tirupati	41 (25.62%)	61 (30.50%)	12 (21.43%)
Kadapa	36 (22.50%)	50 (25.00%)	14 (25.00%)
Total (N=416)	160	200	56

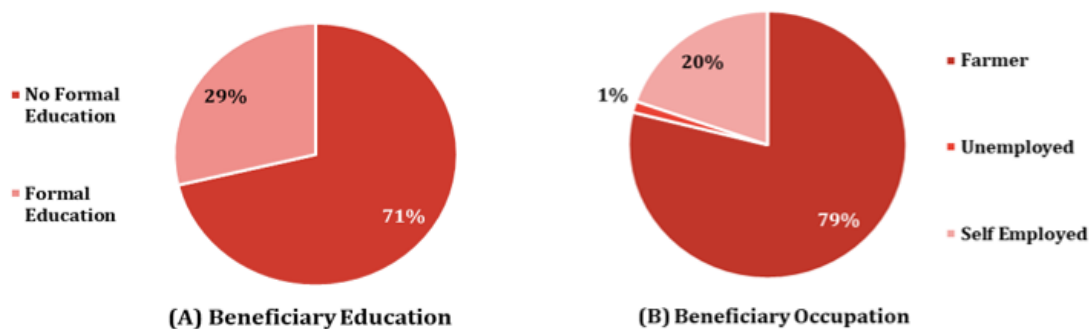
Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on the Primary Data

We attempted to maintain a reasonable representation of beneficiaries across occupations, ages, and educational levels to capture any nuanced differences in perceiving the VS system to be (in)effective. By occupation, our beneficiary sample comprised predominantly of farmers. A huge majority of the sample were also above 50 years old and with no formal education.



Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary data (N=160)

Figure 3. 3 Beneficiary Respondents' Gender and Age Representation



Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary data (N=160)

Figure 3. 4 Beneficiary Respondents' Education and Occupation Representation

Our distribution of Panchayat secretaries is also quite diverse (Tables 3.4 & 3.5). The distribution of Panchayat secretaries by years of experience is relatively evenly spread across categories, with the highest representation in the 3–5 years range (30.36%). Most of the Panchayat Secretaries in the former three categories represent the Officials who have been appointed to the position as Grade-5 Panchayat Secretary under the provisions of the Grama Sachivalayam and have been given independent charge during the last five years as Drawing and Disbursement Officers (DDOs), the administrative heads of their respective Sachivalayams. The latter group of Panchayat Secretaries are those who have been appointed under the State Panchayat Raj Act and serve as the joint in-charges of the Gram Panchayat and the Grama Sachivalayam. These set of Panchayat Secretaries have witnessed the administration both before and after the implementation of the Grama Sachivalayam system, and thus, serve as the most valuable respondents about the process.

Table 3. 4 Experience as Panchayat Secretary

Experience as Panchayat Secretary	Percentage (N=56)
Less than 1 year	16.07
1–3 years	26.79
3–5 years	30.36
More than 5 years	26.79

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis, based on Primary Data (PS)

Table 3. 5 Households under Panchayat Secretary's Jurisdiction

No. of Households under Jurisdiction	Percentage (N=56)
Less than 500	19.64
500–1,000	30.36
1,001–2,000	42.86
More than 2,000	7.14

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis, based on Primary Data (PS)

In terms of households under their jurisdiction (Table 3.5), around one-third of the Panchayat secretaries manage between 500–1,000 households. Typically, these correspond to the scenario where every Gram Panchayat has one Grama Sachivalayam. The first category, where the Panchayat Secretary is the in-charge for less than 500 households typically correspond to the scenario where a Grama Sachivalayam contains more than one Gram Panchayats. In such cases, the Panchayat Secretary of the largest

Panchayat is generally appointed as the DDO for the Grama Sachivalayam. The latter two groups, which represent around half of the sample, correspond to large villages, where a single Gram Panchayat has multiple Grama Sachivalayams to assist their welfare schemes. Thus, the final sample allowed us to account for the diverse administrative responsibilities of the Panchayat Secretaries.

3.5.3 Qualitative Inquiry

The qualitative component of the study was utilized to unpack the experiences and perspectives of those directly involved in the GS system using semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). We used in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the primary method to gather this data. We conducted these interviews with Panchayat Secretaries, Sarpanches, Village Volunteers, functional assistants, other Village Secretariat staff, and the beneficiaries. Additionally, we employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather collective insights from groups of Village Secretariat staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. The stakeholder representation and the survey instruments used are summarized in Table 3.6.

Table 3. 6 Qualitative Data Stakeholder Representation

Stakeholder	FGDs	SSIs	Total
Panchayat Secretary	-	10	10
VS Staff	8	6	14
Volunteers	4	6	10
ER & Sarpanch	1	6	7
Beneficiaries	10	-	10
Total	23	28	51

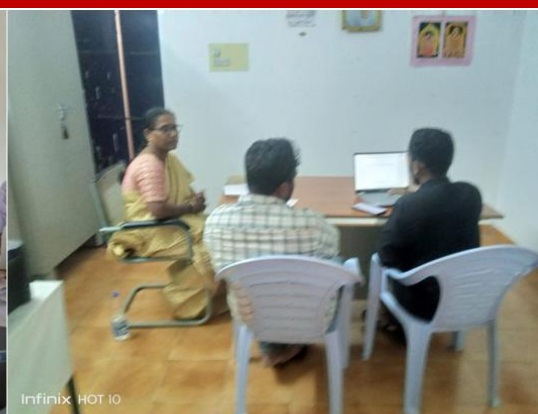
Note: FGD - Focus Group Discussion; SSI: Semi-Structured Interview

Source: IRMA Research Team's Primary Data

Box 3.1: FGDs and Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews



Picture 4: Focus Group Discussion at Kuppambaduru GS



Picture 5: Semi-structured Group Interviews Sarpanch and PS at Pedandluru GS

This evaluation study employed both semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather rich qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews, utilizing a pre-determined set of open-ended questions, allowed for in-depth exploration of individual perspectives from key stakeholders. FGDs, bringing together small groups of similar stakeholders, facilitated interactive discussions and the emergence of shared

understandings and collective insights, enriching the data with diverse viewpoints and nuanced interpretations. The combination of these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the Grama Sachivalayam system's strengths, challenges, and impact on various stakeholders.

The focus for internal stakeholders was on understanding the roles, responsibilities, and challenges faced by these actors within the GS system, as well as their perceptions of its efficacy in delivering welfare schemes and public services. Particularly, FGDs helped us explore the operational dynamics within the GS system, offering a broader understanding of how the Secretarial staff perceive their roles and the challenges they encounter in delivering services. The Village Volunteers, who act as intermediaries between the citizens and the Village Secretariat, offered a unique perspective on their integral role in ensuring the system's functioning. The interviews and FGDs with the external stakeholders gave us insights into how the beneficiaries perceive the earlier system vis-a-vis the GS system, and how Sarpanch and the ward members, the elected representatives, perceive about the complementing role of GS to the GP functioning. The detailed qualitative survey instruments are annexed as [Appendix B](#).

3.6 Data analysis approach

We analyzed the quantitative data collected through structured survey questionnaires, using statistical software STATA version 18 and MS Excel.

We captured basic insights through descriptive statistics, which gave us insights into the important metrics and variables. Following these observations, we went on to perform *inferential statistics* such as *t-tests* and *linear regressions* among relevant metrics to identify significant factors and assess potential relationships.

In the qualitative phase, interviews and FGDs were recorded, transcribed, translated and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as Braun and Clarke (2006) note, is a flexible and rigorous approach to analyzing qualitative data, providing a systematic way to identify key themes that emerge from the interviews and FGDs. The framework for thematic analysis is mentioned below:

1. *Familiarization*: Become familiar with the data by reading and re-reading it without taking notes.
2. *Generate codes*: Create initial codes.
3. *Search for themes*: Combine codes into themes.
4. *Review themes*: Review the themes.
5. *Define and name themes*: Name the themes concisely, informatively, and memorably.
6. *Write-up*: Create a report of the findings.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative data not only provided a comprehensive understanding of the GS system but also enabled the rich insights through triangulation of findings. The qualitative analysis enabled us to identify relevant anecdotes and stories which support the quantitative findings and helped us derive coherent arguments and establish mechanisms of change. The analysis and assessment is presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

4. Assessment of the GS System: The Enablers of Change

In this chapter, we present detailed analysis of our field observations and present a comprehensive assessment of the Grama Sachivalayam through specific insights and themes through following sections.

4.1 GS Functions and Functionaries

GS has been conceptualised as a complementary structure to the strengthen the existing PRI system through assigning more functionaries and functions to PRIs. We captured the voice of these functionaries through semi-structured interviews and FGDs. We attempt to capture main functions and of various functionaries in the GS setup through specific case studies, based on our field experiences and observations on the implementation of the GS system. The case studies capture the manner in which the roles of these functionaries have evolved over the last five years, their routines, contributions, major challenges faced, and their perspectives about the betterment of the systems.

Our observations reveal that the Panchayat Secretary, Digital Assistant, Engineering Assistant and the Welfare Assistant are the most important functionaries in the GS system. These four functionaries play a major role in Panchayat working through direct involvement in developmental activities. On the other hand, the other functionaries play a more peripheral and negligible role in the Panchayat administration. In this section, we present a summary account of the four functionaries through case studies. Further, we capture a brief account of other functionaries as a separate Sub-section 4.1.6.

4.1.1 Case Highlight: The Panchayat Secretary's Pivotal Role in Andhra Pradesh's Grama Sachivalayam System

The role of Panchayat Secretary (PS) is central to the functioning of the Grama Sachivalayam. Their role has evolved considerably since the system's inception. While the PS's traditional contribution extends to panchayat development, including planning and overseeing developmental works (roads, water supply, sanitation), coordinating with local bodies, and organizing gramsabhas, their responsibilities extend far beyond traditional panchayat administration. They now serve as the primary coordinating officer for the Sachivalayam, overseeing the diverse range of government services provided within it. As a Drawing and Disbursement Officer (DDO) of the GS system, their role entails managing the work of multiple departmental assistants (Digital Assistant, Welfare Assistant, ANM, etc.), ensuring the timely and efficient delivery of welfare schemes, and facilitating citizen access to services. Daily routines involve overseeing staff attendance, coordinating with various departments, addressing citizen queries, and ensuring that the Sachivalayam functions smoothly. The PS also plays a key role in data management, tracking service delivery, and preparing reports to higher authorities. This enhanced responsibility reflect the Sachivalayam's aim to bring government services closer to the people.

4.1.2 Case Highlight: Bridging the Digital Divide: Digital Assistants at the Heart of Andhra Pradesh's Grama Sachivalayams

At the heart of the local governance transformation are Digital Assistants (DAs), typically possessing B.Tech degrees, who serve as crucial intermediaries between citizens and the diverse government services offered within the Sachivalayam. Their daily routines involve processing a high volume of applications for various services – from caste and income certificates to agricultural passes and land records – often interacting directly with citizens to obtain necessary information and applications. DAs play a critical role in digitizing these processes, ensuring greater transparency and efficiency compared to the previous system. They utilize numerous online portals and applications, often receiving training and updates through online meetings and provided manuals. This crucial role was previously supported by village volunteers through outreach and data collection. Presently, post the removal of volunteer system, the DAs directly handle a greater volume of citizen interactions.

4.1.3 Case Highlight: The Multifaceted Role of Assistant Engineers in Grama Sachivalayam

Assistant Engineers (AEs) within the Andhra Pradesh Grama Sachivalayam system play a crucial and multifaceted role extending beyond traditional engineering functions. Their responsibilities encompass a wide range of development activities at the village level, including infrastructure development (roads, drains, water supply systems, school renovations under Nadu-Nedu), housing schemes (monitoring construction, beneficiary identification, bill processing), and sanitation initiatives. AEs are involved in the implementation of various government schemes, interacting with multiple departments (Panchayat Raj, RWS, Housing) and coordinating with other secretariat staff (Secretaries, VROs, Digital Assistants). Their routine involves field visits, technical assessments, report preparation, and interaction with beneficiaries, often facing the challenge of managing simultaneous tasks and coordinating with multiple stakeholders. The success of several schemes, particularly housing and infrastructure projects, depends significantly on the AE's ability to efficiently coordinate, monitor and execute these projects. Data collection and reporting through various digital platforms are also integral parts of their work, adding a further layer of complexity to their daily routines.

The contributions of AEs extend to the broader context of Panchayat development. They are often involved in the planning and execution of development projects, working with Sarpanchs and MPTCs (Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies) and participating in decision-making processes regarding resource allocation. They bridge the gap between government schemes and their implementation at the ground level, ensuring efficient utilization of resources.

4.1.4 Case Highlight: Welfare Assistants: Navigating the Complexities of Social Welfare Delivery

Welfare Assistants (WAs) are central to the delivery of various social welfare schemes, playing a crucial role in connecting beneficiaries with government support. Their responsibilities include receiving applications for different welfare schemes (pensions, student scholarships, housing assistance), verifying eligibility, conducting physical

verifications (often involving home visits to collect biometric data), and monitoring the disbursement of funds through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). WAs work closely with Digital Assistants, who process online applications, and Panchayat Secretaries, who oversee the overall process. They interact extensively with beneficiaries, explaining scheme details, resolving queries, and addressing complaints. A significant portion of their time is devoted to pension distribution, requiring meticulous record-keeping, monitoring, and coordinating with banks to ensure timely payments. Their work often extends beyond office hours, requiring field visits, especially for pension distribution, often at inconvenient times such as early mornings.

The WA's role extends beyond the simple processing of applications. They are often the first point of contact for beneficiaries seeking assistance with welfare schemes, providing crucial information, guidance, and support. This necessitates significant interaction with the community and requires a high level of interpersonal skills and patience.

4.1.5 Case Highlight: Last Mile Warriors – The GS Volunteers

Integral to the initial success of the GS were its volunteers, acting as "last mile warriors" in bridging the gap between government services and the rural population. These individuals, often drawn from the local communities they served, played a pivotal role in ensuring the accessibility and effectiveness of GS initiatives. Their responsibilities extended far beyond simple delivery of benefits; they were the crucial link connecting government schemes with the people. Volunteers undertook door-to-door delivery of welfare schemes, pensions, and ration cards, ensuring that even the most remote and vulnerable members of the community received the support they were entitled to. They actively participated in conducting household surveys, gathering critical data for various government programs related to health, agriculture, and other vital aspects of rural life. Their intimate understanding of local contexts and needs enabled them to effectively identify beneficiaries, address individual circumstances, and overcome potential barriers to access.

The contribution of GS volunteers extended beyond service delivery; they fostered greater community participation and trust in government initiatives. Their role as community liaisons proved invaluable in disseminating information, building awareness about various schemes, and promoting transparency and accountability. The volunteers' deep understanding of the local dynamics and challenges proved essential in ensuring the contextual relevance and effectiveness of government programs. They facilitated greater engagement with the community, ensuring that those most in need received the support designed to help them. In essence, these volunteers formed a critical human link, translating government policy into tangible benefits and building stronger community ties. Their dedication and local knowledge were instrumental in creating a more responsive and effective rural development system.

However, the GS system has discontinued volunteer support since July 2024, with an aim of restructuring and re-organizing the governance structure. Our field enquiry, doesn't however, reveal any major bottlenecks due to the discontinuation of Volunteer support. The beneficiaries and staff perceive that while having Volunteer support made their life easy, their absence has not significantly affected their capabilities to receive or offer welfare services.

4.1.6 Other functionaries – a Brief Summary

Beyond the technical roles of Digital Assistants, Engineering Assistants, and Welfare Assistants, several other key positions significantly contribute to the system's success and impact on rural development. Here, we examine the roles and contributions of the Village Revenue Officer (VRO), Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), and Mahila Police within the Grama Sachivalayam. Additionally, we also brief the key contributions of the Agricultural and Veterinary Assistants in village development in Box 4.1.

Box 4.1: Case Highlights: Support Functionaries of GS

The **VRO**, a long-standing position within the rural administration, plays a crucial role in verifying land records and issuing related certificates. Their expertise in land ownership and related processes is essential for confirming eligibility for various government schemes (housing, welfare, etc.). Although their work is now partially integrated into the online systems of the Sachivalayam, they remain indispensable for verifying information and providing on-the-ground confirmation.

The **ANM**, responsible for maternal and child healthcare, undertakes crucial preventative and curative healthcare work within the village. Their door-to-door services, including antenatal and postnatal care, immunization drives, and health awareness programs, directly benefit the community and contribute to improved health outcomes. The integration of their work within the Sachivalayam facilitates better coordination and resource allocation, as the ANMs' data is easily accessible to other relevant functionaries. They work closely with the ASHA workers, collecting and compiling data on various health parameters, disease surveillance, and the utilization of government healthcare programs. Their presence within the Sachivalayam has streamlined information flow, facilitating better data-driven decision-making and resource allocation, resulting better health services in the villages.

The **Mahila Police**, tasked with ensuring women's safety and addressing gender-based violence, actively engages with the community through counseling, awareness programs, and assistance with filing complaints. Their presence provides crucial support to women and enhances the Sachivalayam's role in addressing social issues. The integration of this crucial role into the village secretariat increases accessibility and reduces the stigma associated with reporting such sensitive matters.

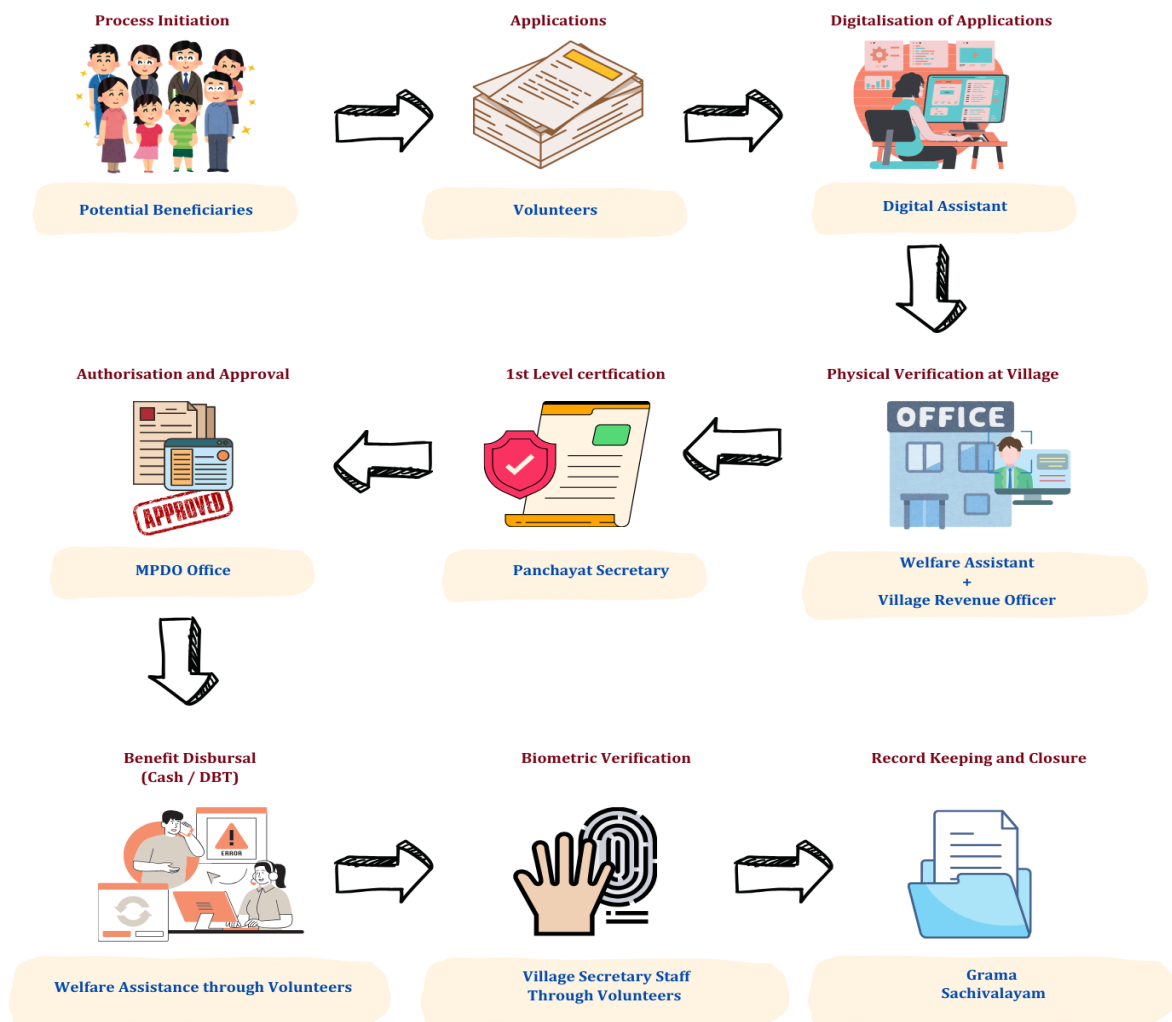
Agricultural Assistants (AA) support the farmers in improving agricultural practices and enhancing productivity. Their responsibilities include providing technical advice on crop cultivation, pest management, and soil health. They often conduct field visits, monitor crop yields, and assist farmers in accessing government subsidies and schemes. The AA's integration into the Grama Sachivalayam makes them readily accessible to farmers, significantly reducing the distance and time required to obtain essential information and resources. They are also involved in data collection and reporting for various government initiatives, contributing to better planning and decision-making. The availability of AAs within the Sachivalayam facilitates easier access to vital agricultural information and support.

Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Assistants (VA/AHA) support livestock development through promoting animal health and welfare within the village. Their responsibilities include providing preventive and curative healthcare for livestock, conducting vaccination drives, assisting with artificial insemination, and managing livestock insurance schemes. The VA/AHA also offer technical advice to farmers on

animal husbandry practices, feed management, and disease control. Their integration into the Sachivalayam improves accessibility to veterinary services, reduces response times in emergencies, and helps to minimize economic losses due to livestock disease. They also contribute to data collection related to livestock populations, health status, and the utilization of animal husbandry programs, enabling better monitoring and planning.

Thus, the Sachivalayam functionaries have been instrumental in creating multi-faceted functions through diverse functionariess, improving local governance capabilities and making more functions accessible to the general public.

Service Delivery Flowchart at Gram Sachivalayam (Welfare Schemes)



Source: Created by IRMA Research Team, based on Field Observations

Figure 4. 1 GS Service Delivery Process

4.2 GS Service Delivery Process

A primary objective of the GS system is to enable smooth delivery of the welfare services. The GS streamlines welfare scheme access for rural citizens through a well-defined service delivery process. It begins with potential beneficiaries approaching volunteers

with their applications, initiating the process. These applications are then forwarded to the Digital Assistant at the GS, who digitizes them for efficient online processing. The digitized applications undergo review and 1st level certification by the Panchayat Secretary, which runs concurrently with a physical verification conducted at the village level by the Welfare Assistant and Village Revenue Officer. The MPDO (Mandal Parishad Development Officer) then reviews the application and grants approval or rejection. Upon approval, benefits are disbursed to beneficiaries, either in cash or via Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). Throughout the process, the Village Secretary and staff, aided by the volunteers, meticulously maintain records, ensuring transparency and accountability before the process is formally closed and documented at the Grama Sachivalayam. This structured approach facilitates efficient and timely access to welfare schemes, strengthening local governance.

The detailed process flowchart for service delivery of welfare schemes at the GS level is summarized in Figure 4.1.

4.3 Perceived benefits and Challenges of the GS system

The Village Secretariat system has the vision of bringing governance closer to rural communities and enhancing the efficiency and accessibility of public services. In our research, by examining both quantitative data and qualitative insights gathered from multiple stakeholders of the system, we discuss the perceived benefits that emerged from our analysis.

Each stakeholder was asked to evaluate their experiences with the VS system on various indicators, and the data from each stakeholder provided a mixed but overall positive picture. One of the key attributes that the beneficiaries associated with the secretariat system was their perceived quality of service delivery. In our quantitative survey, responses on service quality were much more positive, with an average score of 3.80 (SD = 1.32) on a scale of 5, by the beneficiaries (Table 4.1). Beneficiaries generally felt that the services they received were reliable and of good quality.

Table 4. 1 Perceived Service Effectiveness (Beneficiaries)

Indicator	Obs	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Service lead time	159	2.58	1	5	1.43
Perceived Service quality	160	3.80	1	5	1.32
Service Response Experience	160	4.17	1	5	0.85
Service Inclusivity	145	4.26	1	5	1.05
Service Accessibility improvement	160	3.88	1	5	1.28
Perceived connectedness with Government	160	3.59	1	5	1.22
Overall Service Effectiveness (Mean of Indicators)	160	3.69	1.8	5	0.59

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Beneficiaries)

We found that for many respondents, the quality of services was interpreted through the understanding of how easy the service delivery has been. For many, the **convenience** of having services processed locally within the village (and mostly at the doorsteps) was a significant improvement over previous systems, where they would need to travel long distances to Mandal or district offices, that too multiple times. As some representative beneficiaries shared during FGDs,



From the field

"Before the Village Secretariat was established, we had to go to the Mandal office for everything. Now, I can get my pension right here in the village, which saves me a lot of time and money."

-A beneficiary from Konaseema district.

"Since the secretariat system has been introduced, they are making sure that everything is available here. They ensure that everything needed for agriculture is available, there is no need to go to the town."

- A beneficiary from Krishna district

Similar sentiments were echoed by many respondents, particularly elderly and physically-challenged individuals who benefitted from services like home-delivered pensions and the processing of essential certificates such as caste and income documents. Many qualitative interviews also highlighted similar instances, where the beneficiaries felt that the secretariat has contributed towards quality service delivery.

Fair service response experience which tried to capture whether the beneficiaries were treated fairly and respectfully, yet another crucial indicator, was rated at 4.17 (SD=0.85) (Table 4.1), suggesting that most beneficiaries felt that the staff at the Village Secretariat were non-judgmental, fair, and attentive to their needs. Several respondents in the interviews praised the secretarial staff for their approachability and willingness to help. One elderly woman exclaimed,



From the field

"Whenever I go to the Secretariat, they help me fill out the forms and explain things to me. I feel secured and comfortable going there."

-Beneficiary from Krishna district.

This level of personal interaction seems to have fostered trust and goodwill between the community and the Secretariat staff, which is essential for the system's long-term sustainability.

Inclusivity and equity emerged as a strength of the VS system. Beneficiaries gave it a high rating of 4.25 (SD=1.05) (Table 4.1), indicating that the system was perceived as inclusive and accessible to the marginalized. In the interviews, several respondents expressed appreciation for the way the system ensured that even marginalized groups had access to essential services. One respondent mentioned,

From the field

"In the past, some people in the village were left out of schemes because they didn't know how to apply or didn't have the right connections. Now, the staff and volunteers come to us, inform about the schemes which we are eligible for, help with relevant documents, and ensure that we are not left out."

-Beneficiary from marginalized community in Kadapa district.

This shift toward inclusivity represents a major success for the system, particularly in rural areas where marginalized populations have historically been underserved. Volunteer survey corroborated this. Volunteers reported great improvement in the inclusivity and coverage of services (mean score = 4.18; SD = 1.08), whereas Service Coverage was rated even higher, at 4.29 (SD = 0.85) (Table 4.5).

Table 4. 2 Perceived Service Effectiveness (Volunteers)

Indicator	Obs	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Service Efficiency Improvement	200	4.03	1	5	1.14
Service Lead Time	200	3.83	2	5	1.14
Service Inclusivity Improvement	200	4.18	1	5	1.08
Service Coverage	200	4.29	1	5	0.85
Service Accessibility Improvement	200	3.50	1	5	0.79
Perceived Process Transparency	200	4.23	1	5	0.87
Overall Service Effectiveness (Mean of Indicators)	200	4.01	2.17	4.83	0.57

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Volunteers)

One of the key objectives of the village secretariat system was to bring beneficiaries closer to the government welfare schemes, by providing them relevant information with clarity about the eligible schemes. In this line of inquiry, we asked the beneficiaries about how connected they feel with the government since the introduction of the VS system, to which they responded with an average of 3.59 (SD = 1.22) (Table 4.1). Beneficiaries noted that the Village Secretariat system had made essential government services **more accessible** by bringing them closer to their homes. One notable improvement was the local processing of documents such as birth and death certificates, which previously required multiple trips to distant offices. For many, that they no longer require to travel long distances for essential services is one of the most significant delimiters which the new system offers. A farmer from one village shared,

From the field

"I used to take a day off from work to go to the Mandal office for an income certificate. Now, I can just walk over to the Secretariat and get it within a few days."

- Beneficiary from Tirupati district.

However, there were still challenges in ensuring that all beneficiaries felt fully informed and empowered. A few indicated that some beneficiaries felt disconnected from the larger governance structure. During interviews and FGDs, several respondents mentioned that while they were able to access services, they did not always feel well-informed about their

eligibility for certain welfare schemes or the criteria for specific benefits. As one participant noted,

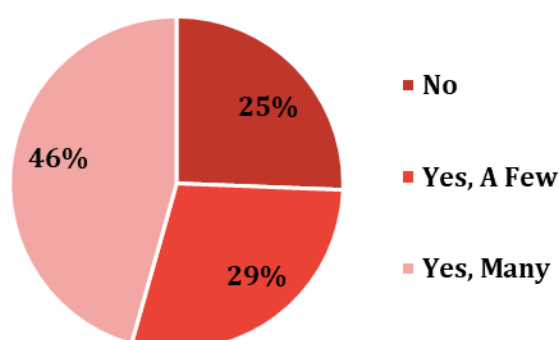


From the field

Sometimes I hear about a scheme, but I don't know if I qualify. It would be better if they explained these things in more detail when we visit the Secretariat."

- Beneficiary from Konaseema district.

In fact, our beneficiary survey also showed that about 74% of the beneficiaries reported having missed at least a few schemes because of lack of timely information (Figure 4.2).

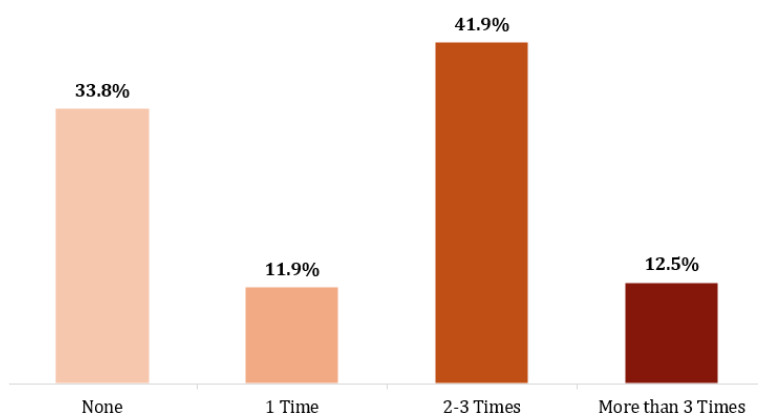


Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis

Figure 4. 2 Schemes Missed by Beneficiaries

There is a need for more proactive communication and education efforts to ensure that all beneficiaries fully understand their rights and the services available to them.

At this juncture, we wish to highlight that while the beneficiaries perceived the system to make their process of application and receiving of schemes smoother than before, it still requires good bit of efforts from the beneficiaries' side. For instance, more than 50% beneficiaries reported the need to visit the secretariat as follow-up for at least 2-3 times (Figure 4.3).



Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary data (Beneficiaries, N=160)

Figure 4. 3 Number of Follow-up Visits to Village Secretariat

These kind of gaps in the system have shown to likely have resulted in a low level of satisfaction with service time as perceived by the beneficiaries. One of the areas that received particular attention in our analysis was service time, referring to how quickly beneficiaries received after applying for the services they needed. On average, beneficiaries rated service time at a 2.58 (SD = 1.43)(Table 4.18), and service time improvement at 3.7 (SD=1.33) out of 5 (Table 4.3).

Table 4. 3 Perceived Process Efficiency and Satisfaction (Beneficiaries)

Indicator	Obs	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Perceived process transparency	160	3.88	1	5	1.17
Perceived information clarity	160	3.73	1	5	1.41
Perceived reduction in bureaucracy	160	3.65	1	5	1.48
Informedness about delays	160	4.18	1	5	1.16
Service time improvement	160	3.70	1	5	1.33
Overall Service Process Efficiency (Mean of Indicators)	160	3.83	1	5	0.92
Beneficiary satisfaction (reported)	160	3.89	1	5	1.30

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Beneficiaries)

The relatively low score could be suggestive of frustration among some beneficiaries with delays in service delivery, though others reported quicker, more efficient services. Qualitative interviews corroborate this finding, with several beneficiaries expressing dissatisfaction with the time taken for certain services (but this was mostly for larger public goods related services which does not come directly under the purview of the village secretariat system), such as infrastructure maintenance and housing schemes. One respondent from a Gram Sachivalayam noted,

From the field

"When only the panchayats were there, they came every month and installed streetlights. They all do bleach work. Since this secretariat was introduced, they don't care about putting on the lights. They come every two to three months, but I don't know when the lights will be repaired. If you ask them, they ask us to wait. The Panchayats will say that they have no money."

- Beneficiary from Krishna district.

Table 4. 4 Perceived Service Effectiveness (Panchayat Secretary)

Indicator	Obs	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Effectiveness of Coordination	56	4.59	3	5	0.65
Internal Support Quality	56	3.09	1	5	1.13
External Support Quality	56	4.45	1	5	1.01
Collaboration quality with volunteers	56	3.52	1	5	1.62
Service Promptness	56	1.54	1	4	0.89
Response time improvement	56	4.41	1	5	1.01
Overall Service Effectiveness (Mean of Indicators)	56	3.69	2.0	4.71	0.54

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (PS)

Such frustration with delays among beneficiaries highlights the need for the system to streamline certain services that require faster resolution, such as public infrastructure.

Similar reports were also highlighted in the Panchayat secretary survey. For Panchayat Secretaries experiencing delays was a common issue: Service promptness was rated significantly lower at 1.54 (SD = 0.89) (Table 4.4).

Anecdotal evidence from the Panchayat Secretaries, elected representatives and the Village Secretariat staff, especially the Engineering Assistant and Energy Assistant, provide a detailed insight into the cause and the nature of the delay. The discussion reveals that the process-related delay in infrastructure development is mainly due to the highly occupied and multi-tasking nature of the Engineering Assistant, who works simultaneously with multiple line departments, including the Engineering Department of the Mandal level, Rural Water and Sanitation Department, Housing Department, etc. (Figure 3.2). Further, the reporting structure of the Energy Assistant, which is mainly with the Electricity Department at the Mandal level, has diluted the control of the Panchayat elected representatives and Secretary, causing delayed response. This is further exacerbated by diversion of some Panchayat funds towards Village Secretariat maintenance, which constrains the already resource-scarce Panchayats from providing essential services. An anecdote from a Panchayat leader from a Gram Panchayat in Krishna district articulates this, as



From the field

"These are small panchayats that receive money from the larger panchayat for sanitation work. However, they don't generate any significant income from these activities. Their maintenance relies solely on collecting house taxes, which amount to one lakh rupees per year. This amount is expected to cover the entire year's maintenance, including tasks like repairing water taps, cleaning, and clearing thorny bushes.

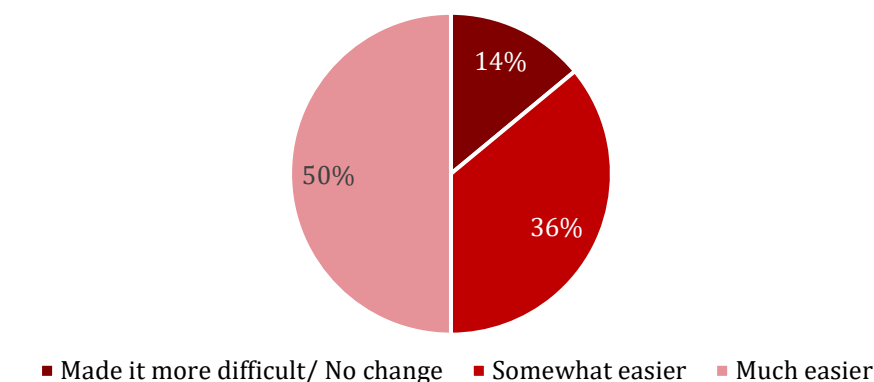
If any labourers need to be hired, it costs 1,000 rupees per worker, but these workers are brought in from the main panchayat. The local panchayat has no funds of its own. Panchayats where elections are not held don't receive proper grants, which hampers their ability to function. We even struggle to raise just 100 rupees in the panchayat."

- Panchayat Secretary from Krishna district.

This reflects a perception that services are not being delivered as quickly as they should be, potentially due to bureaucratic delays, technological issues, or insufficient staffing. Despite this, the system was perceived as being effective by the secretaries in improving response times (Mean = 4.41, SD = 1.01) (Table 4.4). This suggests that while services may not always be prompt, there have been improvements in how quickly the system responds to issues compared to prior system. Overall, secretaries rated the system's effectiveness positively, with an overall effectiveness rating of 4.27 (SD = 1.14), although the data highlights areas for continued improvement, particularly in internal coordination and service promptness.

The Village Secretariat system has not only benefited the beneficiaries it serves but has also **improved work experiences for Panchayat secretaries**. Key indicators show positive changes in their daily operations. The Panchayat secretaries rated highly (4.59) on the effectiveness of cooperation within the village secretariat staff, suggesting that secretaries feel more aligned and supported within the Secretariat. External support quality (4.45) was also rated favorably, indicating that guidance from higher authorities

has been clear and useful (Table 4.4). Internal support quality (3.09) scored moderately, implying there might be areas where support within the system could be stronger. Collaboration with volunteers (3.52) highlights the importance of teamwork with local volunteers, which helps to achieve community goals. Secretaries also shared that the transition from the old to new system has been easier for them (Figure 4.6). Overall, these findings suggest that the Village Secretariat system has created a more coordinated and supportive work environment for Panchayat secretaries.



Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (PS)

Figure 4. 4 Ease of transition from old to new system (PS)

Our qualitative interviews helped us to unpack more on this line of inquiry. For secretaries, while their workload has been similar (sometimes even more) relative to prior to transitioning to the VS system, they seem to have benefited from the additional staff.



From the field

My role remains the same as it was before; there has been no change in my responsibilities. The work I did then is the same work I do now—sanitation, water supply, and street lighting. The only difference is that now I have an assistant to help with these tasks. While the work remains the same, the assistants provided are offering some support, and we are making use of their help.

- A Panchayat Secretary.

4.4 Mechanisms of change

The narrative in the previous section indicates towards a welcome change in service delivery, though with some teething issues. In this section, we explore the different mechanisms through which the Village secretariat system has brought about changes.

4.4.1 Systematic coordination structure and human resource

We captured internal insights of the VS system through survey with the Panchayat secretaries and the volunteers, two implementing stakeholders, vital to this system. This gave a more internal administrative insight. First, it was evident that the transition to the VS system has yielded more effective coordination between the stakeholders (as discussed above). The **secretaries were at ease with the additional staff** at the village

secretariat as compared to the earlier system where things got delayed as there was no one to sub-delegate to. One Panchayat secretary very insightfully described thus,

From the field

"There are many benefits to having these offices. One key advantage is the timely uploading of information, particularly for welfare schemes. The secretariat staff are fully supporting the timely delivery of these schemes by going door to door to ensure they reach the beneficiaries. Having an engineering assistant is also a great help to the Sarpanch and us, as it allows us to complete projects on time. The Assistant helps significantly with generating estimates, preparing bills, and ensuring all tasks are completed efficiently. With an Engineering Assistant available, we can handle certain projects at the village level without needing to go to the mandal. Additionally, having a women's police force offers many advantages. In the past, everything required a trip to the police station. Now, without that necessity, the women police handle cases during festivals or minor thefts and forward them to the relevant departments.

- A panchayat Secretary

While the secretaries reported an increase in their workload due to the village secretariat responsibilities, they highlighted that the secretariat staff have eased out their transition with their logistical support.

From the field

"Earlier I used to look after only Gram Panchayat related tasks. Now additional tasks have also come. But along with that there is also flexibility due to the presence of the Secretariat staff."

- A panchayat Secretary.

Table 4. 5 Perceived Coordination Effectiveness (Volunteers)

Indicator	Obs	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Communication quality in last mile	200	3.98	1.00	5.00	1.19
Communication quality in mid mile	200	4.01	1.00	5.00	1.10
Internal Support Quality	200	3.88	1.00	5.00	1.10
Overall Coordination Effectiveness (Mean of Indicators)	200	3.96	2.00	5.00	0.82

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Volunteers)

One another essential logistical support pillar to the system were the volunteers (currently discontinued). Volunteers were key personnel from the village community, in a way attempted to bridge the gap between the government schemes and the beneficiaries, through house-to-house visits. The volunteers' services were appreciated by few beneficiaries,



From the field

"Whatever we need, volunteers from the secretariat come and write everything down and bring it to us. If all the details about us are correct in the card given by us, then all the documents will be received properly. Earlier, the age was not entered correctly in the Aadhaar card because of that, we were facing some difficulty in receiving pensions. The volunteers relieved us of such pressures by offering personalized service

- A beneficiary.

Viewing from the other side, the volunteers perceive effective communication and coordination with the GS staff (mid mile), beneficiaries (last mile), as well as the DDO (internal support quality) (Table 4.5). They expressed good satisfaction with the proactive support they received from the PS and the staff and a sense of achievement when the beneficiaries acknowledged their contribution in connecting them with the otherwise inaccessible services. A group of (ex-)volunteers reported,



From the field

"The beneficiaries, especially the old-aged and physically challenged ones, generally thank us for delivering benefits at their doorsteps. They bless us. Even today when we are no longer volunteers, they keep asking us for their help, and we approach the respective GS staff with their requests. I feel very happy that I could contribute.....The secretarial staff have been very helpful. We were supported by them in everything. They would also accompany us if necessary. Secretariat staff also worked with us on some schemes. Even if they had to stay till night, they used to work in the field with us till 9 o'clock. They guided us in achieving everything."

- Ex-Volunteers from Krishna district.

Some unique success stories of service delivery have been shared, which demonstrated the results of their coordination and teamwork. One such anecdote reveals how their concerted efforts facilitated in containing the spread of COVID-19 during the lockdown phases.



From the field

"We did house-to-house survey even during Covid time. If anyone has fever or any symptoms like cough and cold, then we used to explain them about where should they be approached we used to take them to ANM. ANM used to come with us and test with the covid kit. Even those who are suffering from covid, if they need anything, we used to take it and give it to them so that they don't have to go out."
"When the covid survey is going on, some are slow, some are fast. When that happens, the secretary will message us to do it little faster. If someone dies in the village, we are the ones who give them insurance."
"We travelled a lot during the covid time, many of the volunteers suffered from covid. We have conducted health camps with the help of 104."

- Instances from separate FGDs with (Ex)-Volunteers.

It could be worthwhile to mention the discomfort and insecurities we have noticed amongst the elected representatives about their positions and roles ever since the Grama

Sachivalayam system has been introduced. Most of the insecurities have been attributed to the volunteers, who have bypassed the elected ward members in promptly bringing the loopholes to the notice of the authorities. For instance, a group of elected representatives in Konaseema district asserted,



From the field

"We are born and brought up in the village and have groomed ourselves as the community leaders. We have detailed idea about the pain points of the village and have great incentive to work for our community development. We have earned our positions through creating confidence amongst our people. These volunteers who have come recently, through some random nomination, do things as they wish. They lack experience but bypass us and hardly take up any real issue."

- Elected Representatives from Konaseema district.

Such narratives and field observations point towards the increased sense of accountability of the elected representatives and pressure to perform under peer pressure, lest face the threat of becoming irrelevant. In such aspects, the **GS system has acted as a checkpoint and watchdog** to improve the overall local governance functioning.

4.4.2 Resource capabilities

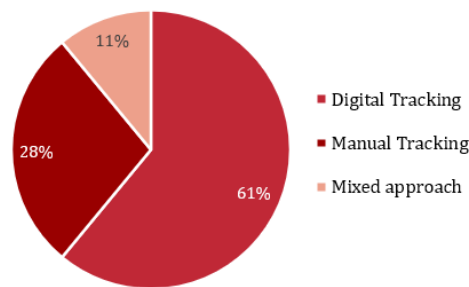
Resource capabilities typically form the critical success factors (CSF) of a policy implementation. We investigated the resource capacities of the GS system through perceived scores of all stakeholders, PS, GS staff and the volunteers using various indicators, such as adequacy of (human) capacity, capital infrastructure, support, maintenance resources, digital support, and perceived ease of Panchayat Administration, all of which contribute to Administrative Convenience.

The Engineering Assistant (EA) is a key technical officer in the Local Government, responsible for identifying and executing infrastructure projects like roads, drainage systems, rural water supply, and sanitation. They ensure project incorporation into the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), prepare estimates, oversee execution, and maintain quality. The EA manages government assets, conducts site inspections, monitors water supply, and ensures sanitation around drinking water sources. They handle public works, maintain records, and address grievances. Additionally, they conduct feasibility studies, promote eco-friendly housing models, and coordinate with local authorities. Their role is crucial in ensuring rural infrastructure development and community well-being.

The Digital Assistant (DA) is the Nodal Officer for IT and digitalization at the Village Secretariat, coordinating with all functionaries. They computerize household data, manage the Front Office (CSC/Me-Seva), and ensure smooth service delivery. Responsibilities include receiving applications, verifying documents, maintaining the Management Information System (MIS), and overseeing digital services like birth and death registrations, property valuation, and tax demand. The DA manages Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES) applications, online accounts (PRIA Soft, PFMS, CFMS), and updates the GPDP in Plan Plus. They track project progress, maintain government asset records, and update the Local Government's webpage. Additionally, they promote digital

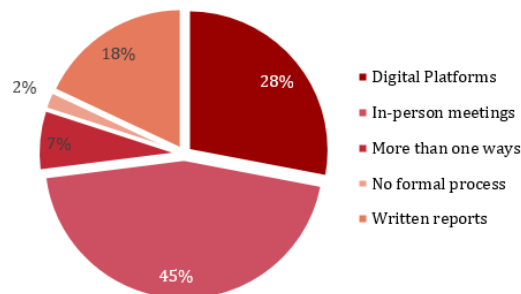
transactions, support daily operations, handle grievances, and manage the Common Service Centre (CSC). Any other e-Panchayat tasks assigned by authorities also fall under their duties.

The Welfare Assistant (WA) is responsible for implementing welfare schemes for weaker sections, ensuring eligible individuals receive benefits, and providing feedback to authorities. They oversee Village Volunteers in welfare-related duties and facilitate student admissions, scholarships, and social harmony. The WEA supports unemployed youth by coordinating skill development, self-employment, and financial assistance programs. They monitor pension disbursement, update records, process new applications, and address grievances. Additionally, they promote Self-Help Groups (SHGs), assist in availing government schemes, and ensure compliance with YSR Aasara, VLR, and Stree Nidhi initiatives. They also oversee YSR Bima enrolments, claims, and scholarship distributions, ensuring seamless access to government welfare programs.



Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on PS Responses

Figure 4. 6 Approaches to processing beneficiary issues (PS survey)



Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on PS Responses

Table 4. 6 Perceived Administrative Convenience (PS survey)

Figure 4. 5 Mechanisms to handle beneficiary grievances (PS survey)

Indicator	Obs	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Ease of Panchayat administration	56	4.29	1	5	0.89
Satisfaction with internal support	55	3.40	1	5	1.58
Adequacy of Capacity (HR)	56	4.43	1	5	1.06
Adequacy of capital infrastructure	56	2.41	1	5	1.60
Adequacy of maintenance resources	56	2.34	1	5	1.58
Support from digital platforms	56	4.20	1	5	1.17
Overall Administrative Convenience (Mean of Indicators)	56	3.51	1.5	4.83	0.58

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (PS)

The administrators perceive adequate capacity in terms of human resources, digital support and the resulting ease of Panchayat administration (Table 4.6). The GS functionaries frequently use digital tools for tasks such as beneficiary tracking, scheme enrollment, and biometric authentication (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). Since the broad objective of the secretariat system was to effectively and efficiently delivery the services to beneficiaries, digital tools have come handy. Digital tools were, thus, perceived as a strength in supporting administrative convenience.

4.5 From Observations to Relationships

In this section, we try to corroborate all the observations so far to identify any emerging patterns and relationships. Through inferential statistical analyses, we examine the significance of perceptions across stakeholder groups.

4.5.1 Perceived Service Effectiveness and Service Quality Improvement

We measured the overall perceived effectiveness of the Village Secretariat (VS) system for Beneficiaries and Panchayat Secretaries using a 1–5 rating scale (median rating = 3). To test if these perceptions were statistically higher than the neutral midpoint (3), we performed one-sample t-tests within each group. The results in Table 4.7 show that beneficiaries find the GS services more effective, with significant improvement in service quality post introduction of GS system. For instance, the one-sample test statistic value of 14.76 and a p-value of less than 0.01 for perceived service effectiveness indicates a strong, positive perception.

Table 4. 7 Tests for Service Effectiveness & Service Quality Improvement (Beneficiaries)

Metric	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	t-statistic	p-value
Overall service effectiveness	160	3.69	0.05	0.59	14.76	< 0.01
Service Quality Improvement	160	3.70	0.10	1.33	6.68	< 0.01
t-Test for Statistical Significance of the metric (Ho: Mean = 3)						

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Beneficiaries Survey)

The patterns hold for other stakeholders as well (Tables 4.8 and 4.9). Panchayat Secretaries find improvement in both the effectiveness and administrative convenience of the Village Secretariat system. The average effectiveness score of 3.69, with a t-value of 9.65 and a p-value of less than 0.01, indicates a strong positive perception of the system's performance. Likewise, the average administrative convenience score of 3.51, with a t-value of 6.60 and a p-value of less than 0.01, suggests that Secretaries find the system generally user-friendly and efficient. Both scores' confidence intervals confirm that these positive perceptions are statistically robust.

Table 4. 8 Tests for Service Effectiveness & Administrative Convenience (PS)

Metric	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	t-statistic	p-value
Overall service effectiveness	56	3.69	0.07	0.54	9.65	< 0.01
Overall Administrative Convenience	56	3.51	0.08	0.58	6.60	< 0.01
t-Test for Statistical Significance of the metric (Ho: Mean = 3)						

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (PS survey)

Similarly, the regression results in Table 4.9 reveal that even volunteers perceive significant service effectiveness and improvement in the service quality of GS system. Volunteers' perspectives are valuable here as they are native to the villages and have been observing the changes in the village's ecosystem quite closely. Additionally, their

knowledge about the GS system and the framework acquaints them with internal dynamics as well, making them the most eligible stakeholders to comment on the system's workings. The main drivers of service effectiveness are better overall coordination amongst the process owners, and better overall capabilities of the GS staff and volunteers.

Table 4. 9 Relationship between Coordination, Capabilities & Service Quality

Dependent Metric (DM)	Independent Metric (IM)	Obs	Co-efficient	p-value
Overall service effectiveness	Overall Coordination	200	0.125	< 0.01
	Overall Capabilities		0.212	< 0.01
Service Quality Improvement	Overall Service Effectiveness	200	0.652	< 0.01

Note: The table represents regression results for Statistical Significance of association between DM & IM, with relevant control variables. (p-value < 0.01 indicates significant association)

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Volunteers Survey)

4.5.2 Satisfaction with GS System

These findings illustrate that the Village Secretariat system is generally seen as effective and valuable by both beneficiaries and Panchayat Secretaries. Beneficiaries appreciate the easier access to services and feel the system has made a positive difference in service delivery. Panchayat Secretaries find the GS system helpful for their work, especially with the support of well-coordinated staff. The overall satisfaction and perceived improvements highlight that the system is meeting key needs in the community. Further, they corroborate that continued focus on staff coordination and resources could help sustain and strengthen the system's impact in delivering timely, quality services across villages.

Table 4. 10 Relationship between Service Effectiveness & Beneficiary Satisfaction

Dependent Metric (DM)	Independent Metric (IM)	Obs	Co-efficient	p-value
Overall Satisfaction	Overall Service Effectiveness	160	0.357	< 0.1

Note: The table represents regression results for Statistical Significance of association between DM & IM, with relevant control variables. (p-value < 0.01 indicates significant association at 10% LoS)

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Beneficiaries Survey)

4.5.3 Deriving the GS Service Delivery Conceptual Model

The relationships investigated earlier in this section demonstrate clear and significant relationships between various service delivery metrics, as perceived by the stakeholders representing all the relevant dimensions, i.e., the outcome (beneficiaries), process (Panchayat Secretary), and the input (Volunteers) side. By integrating the observations and findings, we derive the GS Service Delivery Conceptual Model, as depicted in Figure 4.9.

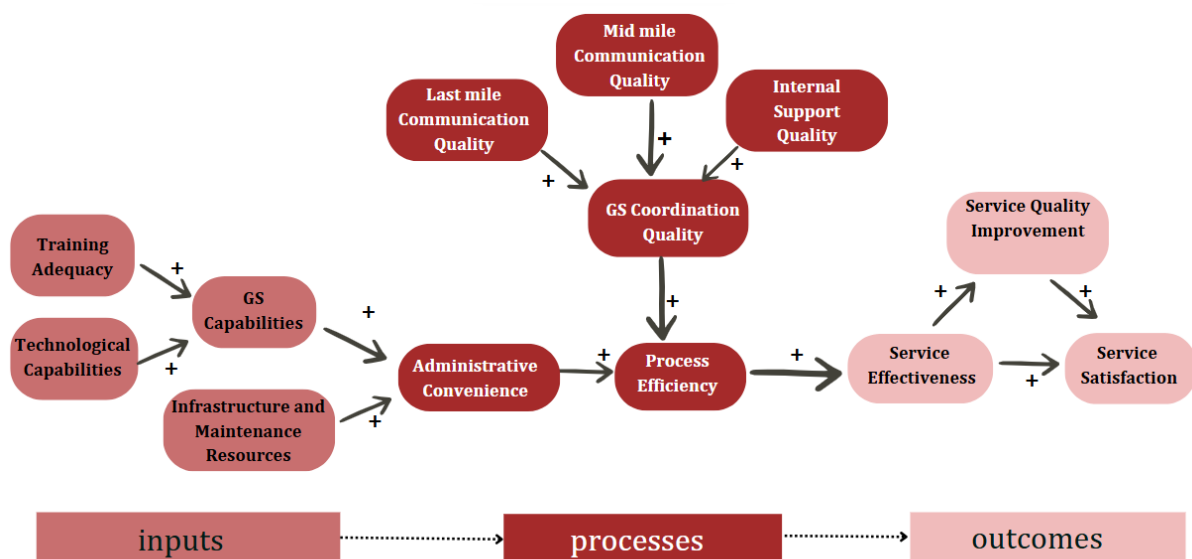
The conceptual model weaves together a strategic framework to strengthen the service implementation at the grassroots level. It comprises of three major blocks - the input, process, and outcomes (to be read from right to left).

Service Outcomes

The Outcome represents the purpose of the existence of a governance system. Any local public governance system exists primarily to serve its beneficiaries in the best possible

manner. The ultimate metric to measure service outcome is the impact it has on the beneficiaries, which could be measured through the latent construct of Service Satisfaction.

Service satisfaction is a result of service quality and service effectiveness. Based on our observations, we find two major mechanisms through which service effectiveness influences beneficiary satisfaction. One mechanism is direct, wherein perceived effectiveness of service directly appeals to the beneficiaries' cognitive capacity, driving up their satisfaction. Another more subtle channel could be represented by the moderating relationship between service effectiveness and beneficiary satisfaction. Effective service improves service quality through the betterment of on-time delivery, reach, accessibility and inclusivity. When beneficiaries experience improved service quality, their satisfaction increases.



Source: IRMA Research Team's inferential analysis based on Primary field data (triangulated)

Figure 4. 7 GS Service Delivery Conceptual Model

Service Process

The service outcomes are a direct result of the structure and process of service delivery. Service process efficiency is further impacted by the input resources and the internal synergies and the ease of administration (administrative convenience). The key to creating internal synergies is smooth coordination and information transfer, which depends on the quality of stakeholder interaction, internal policies and the support system. The internal policies determine the incentive structure, which drives the quality of internal support and communication.

Service Inputs

Service inputs primarily refer to the resources required for service delivery. The major inputs are the capital infrastructure, working capital for operations, human capital, and technological inputs. Human capital is a function of capacity-building efforts through recruiting the right manpower for the right work and providing adequate training for skilling and continual up-skilling. The overall capabilities of GS constitute the human capacity, technological capacity and infrastructural capacity. Alongside these, it needs to

be complemented with adequate funding support to undertake operational tasks and hire maintenance resources.

The above outcome-process-input framework, thus, captures the entire spectrum of 'Why', 'How', 'What' and 'Who' of the service delivery system. It provides a guiding tool to focus on relevant aspects of the system and, thus, enables better service delivery outcomes.

5. Critical Assessment of the GS System: GAP Analysis

The discussion in the previous chapter is centred around how the GS system has been instrumental in improving service delivery processes, effectiveness, accessibility and transparency. However, as the system has matured, various challenges have surfaced. In order to assess the challenges and major Gaps at various levels, we conducted a detailed analysis of qualitative information obtained through personal interactions with various stakeholders of the system through the FGDs and interviews.

While discussing the perceived benefits of the GS system in Section 4.3, we touched upon some basic issues observed in GS workings. In this section, we elaborate in much detail the major challenges perceived by various stakeholders (Section 5.1). We then provide a summarized account of various types of gaps and challenges through thematic analysis (Section 5.2). Then, we highlight the structural gaps in the system, by collating all the observations and insights derived (Section 5.3). Finally, we find the core issues and comment on the overall impact of GS system and its replicability (Section 5.4).

5.1 Challenges and Loopholes: Multi-stakeholder perspectives

Various stakeholders have perceived the GS system differently. Examining the pain points of each of these stakeholders provides quite diverse and contrasting picture of the system. We summarize stakeholders-wise pain points here.

Panchayat Secretaries

The PS is the most informed stakeholder in the GS system. As an administrator of the system, and the custodian of the Gram Panchayat, and the most accountable Officer at the grassroot level, their perspective has often been observed as sandwiched between the unsynergised objectives of the PRI, district-level and GS priorities. An important concern is about the lack of clear authority and the hierarchical structure, and the over-involvement of the Line Department officials. These could be better corroborated with the anecdotes of Panchayat Secretaries who have been in Panchayat administration long enough:

From the field

"Before my role here, I worked in another Panchayat (place names concealed for confidentiality reasons), where I witnessed the shift to the new secretariat system launched on August 15, 2019.

With over two decades of experience, I have seen several governments introduce new policies, often adding responsibilities without removing old ones. While the new system aims to benefit people by providing local services, there are multiple inefficiencies and redundancies. For instance, each secretariat is staffed with overseeing up to 2,000 people, yet the actual work volume is limited. In smaller units, where one person handles welfare distribution for around 2,000 residents, many staff members perform isolated tasks without an understanding of other roles.

Another pressing issue is authority. Unlike before, when the Panchayat Secretary had more direct control, the new system lacks clear accountability. The secretariats are staffed by multiple departments, and the Secretary's role is

more of a coordinator than a controller. This setup has led to misunderstandings, with staff following orders from their respective departments instead of local panchayat leadership, leading to inefficiency and neglect, and sometimes gaming the system. Moreover, there's a disconnect in responsibilities. Local governance, once a unified effort, now operates under fragmented administration, making it difficult to achieve effective control and support for the community."

- A Senior Panchayat Secretary.

In terms of workload, I sometimes feel overwhelmed as the number of welfare schemes have exploded, and the number of staff I need to monitor has increased, leaving a chance for errors. To add to this, I haven't been provided any authority to act on shirking, as the functional authority is too dispersed."

- Another Panchayat Secretary.

The major concern of the PSs revolves around a clear disconnect between the GS working and the PRI functioning, mainly as far as developmental activities and the execution staff are concerned. They have strongly expressed that while the general functioning has improved in terms of digitalization, ease of obtaining government certificates, more efficient collection of taxes and bills, pension and benefit delivery, the four major activities of GPs (Lighting, Sanitation, Roads, and Water Supply) no clear advantage. The PS have consistently expressed their displeasure that the maximum a GS staff does in the present system is to take note of some issues and register a complaint on that. But the shortage of field staff makes it very difficult to resolve any issue of actual importance. Neither are the GS staff trained in any administrative matters, nor have they been sensitized towards their accountability to the PRI system. Their focus is therefore, very limited, mainly to the delivery of welfare schemes. Some anecdotes by a seasoned PS exemplifies this:



From the field

"In this panchayat system, field workers are needed... our panchayat needs people who can go down to the field and work on leaking pipelines or sprinkle lime bleaching or repair the drain."

- A Panchayat Secretary.

"They have received training in the past, but it was not comprehensive. In my opinion, more complete training should be provided. We need more field executors, not supervisors. And the staff have been barely trained in administration."

- Another Panchayat Secretary, referring to the GS Staff.

Elected Representatives: The PRI representatives

The elected representatives were the groups with maximum displeasure from the GS system. There have been a mix of responses in this regard. One group of ERs have expressed insecurity over their reduced perceived importance in local governance. The ward members believed that the Volunteers and the GS staff have acted very opportunistically by getting involved in issues that don't matter, and have tried to bypass them at all levels, undermining the importance of democracy in local governance.



From the field

"When they came to Secretariat, they acted as if they had nothing to do with Sarpanch...Secretariat volunteers go directly to people's homes...They bypass us, and don't do any service either."

- Sarpanch, Rudravaram.

Yet another group of ERs have reiterated the Panchayat Secretaries' perspectives of the system being little useful for the development of the villages. They expressed disappointment about inefficiencies and a lack of community participation, despite well-intentioned goals of the GS system. They lamented the lack of funding for basic infrastructure maintenance, the challenges in employing sanitation workers, and the overall lack of accountability within the system. They provided a specific anecdote about a poorly managed construction project for a new Sachivalayam building, highlighting wasted funds and bureaucratic inefficiencies.



From the field

"The secretariat system has introduced new roles...but without proper sanitation workers, the system is incomplete...we are forced to either pay from our own pockets or leave things undone."

- Sarpanch, Challapally.

There has also been a common critique about the emphasis on numerical targets and performance metrics, which often overlooked the realities on the ground and the actual needs of the community.

Village Secretariat Staff

The GS staff are at the center of welfare service delivery. Their main concerns and challenges in the GS system relate to various dimensions regarding the structural and incentive-related issues, including infrastructure issues, motivation concerns, workload and lack of clarity, and political interventions. An important highlight has been their displeasure with the removal of volunteer system, which they feel has added to their workload. We provide their summarized account as follows:

a. Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources:

Physical Infrastructure: Many Sachivalayams lacked basic amenities such as proper washrooms and water facilities, along with sufficient furniture and office space. This impacted staff morale and productivity. Some locations even operated from repurposed spaces, leading to further difficulties.



From the field

"The office given to us was vacated as it was within the school premises...Even the building given to us, it is not suitable for us...there is a water problem in this building...there is no proper place for any meetings...we have lot of trouble regarding the washroom here."

- Welfare Assistant from Krishna Dist.

Technology: Frequent complaints arose about malfunctioning computers, unreliable internet connectivity, and insufficient mobile devices to handle the volume of apps and data management required by the system. This severely hampered efficiency and resulted in staff having to use their personal devices and data at times.



From the field

"Any equipment given by the government will work fine for two years after which it will be a bit troublesome...The phone is hung due to too many apps...we complained that systems were not working properly but they ignored...no one would come to repair it...we repaired them Panchayat aid."

- Digital Assistant from Konaseema Dist.

"We have been provided with two computers, but one of them is not working...the UPS is damaged...a router connection was installed, it has never worked...we are still using our personal mobile phones...there is no internet in the office."

- Digital Assistant from Krishna Dist.

Stationery and other maintenance resources: Recurring shortages of stationery hampered essential tasks like printing and record-keeping, leading to delays and frustration.



From the field

"We have been provided with papers, printer cartridge and other stationery at the time of commissioning of the Sachivalayam building. After that, we started using funds from the general budget to purchase paper and other essentials, but these are still sourced from the Panchayat and are being used sparingly."

- Digital Assistant from Krishna Dist.

b. Workload and Time Management:

Dual Reporting: The dual reporting structure (to both the Panchayat Secretary and line departments) created conflicting demands, overwhelming workloads, and prioritization difficulties. The constant pressure to meet targets from multiple supervisors resulted in long and irregular working hours.

Unclear Priorities: Conflicts frequently occurred when multiple departments assigned tasks simultaneously, without a clear mechanism for prioritizing urgent matters, leading to missed deadlines and inefficiencies.

Volume of Work: The number of services offered and the volume of applications processed created an extremely heavy workload that was not always adequately addressed by existing staffing levels. The absence of volunteers further increased individual burdens.

Lack of Job Clarity: The removal of volunteers resulted in confusion among some staff over exactly what duties were theirs and what would need to be handled by the respective line departments.



From the field

"Our work sometimes feels like no end. From morning we have work up to 20-25 apps from the government...we have to upload information in 25 apps."

- Village Health Secretary from Krishna District.

"I receive works simultaneously from the RWP, Water Department and Housing Department. Due to this dual reporting we face many difficulties...there will be work at the same time in panchayat raj and in that line department...Our work is 24/7 so we work on Saturdays as well as Sundays."

- Engineering Assistant from Tirupati District.

"When the PR department works, road works...while doing RWS works, pipeline works will be going on...we cannot be here and there at the same time...we are having a lot of trouble at that time."

- Engineering Assistant from Kadapa District

"Earlier, while Volunteers used to bring in the information, we could focus on actual execution. Now due to absence of these volunteers I have to contact the particular beneficiary which means first which volunteer, which range they belong to, which cluster they belong to, whether they are there now or all this will take a lot of time."

- Welfare Assistant from Konaseema District

c. Performance Evaluation, Recognition and Motivation:

Limited Promotional Opportunities: Some staff members expressed concern over the limited opportunities for career advancement within the Sachivalayam system, impacting morale and reducing job satisfaction.



From the field

"Only the Panchayat Secretary G5-5 and the Digital Assistant have been provided a Grade and a promotion ladder. All others of us don't have any clarity regarding that. If we are integrated into the line department then our chances of promotion are high. If we stay here, we have very little chance. Some of our departments do not have promotions yet."

- Welfare Assistant from Krishna District.

Emphasis on Metrics: The focus on numerical targets and percentage-based performance metrics often overlooked the complexities of the work, failed to recognize the efforts of staff, and created a stressful environment.

Lack of Appreciation: Many staff members expressed feelings of being overworked and underappreciated, particularly during challenging situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the field

"We don't know what we are measured on. They only care about how many pensions we have disbursed in a day. This evaluation is done by percentage...they do not consider this matter...they keep mocking about percentages. I don't understand the relation"

- ANM from Konaseema District.

Insufficient Training: While some initial training was provided, many felt it was inadequate for the complexities of the system, lacking ongoing training and technical support to address new schemes, apps, and technological updates.

From the field

"We had induction training...but we did not have any training in the department...After that, training did not take place...We face issues in managing any administration related works and connecting to the officials.

Many times the number of schemes come at such speed that it becomes difficult to handle, and we feel as if there is no respite."

- Digital Assistant from Konaseema District.

d. Interactions and Coordination:

Inter-departmental Coordination: While staff reported generally good internal coordination, challenges frequently occurred in coordinating effectively with different line departments. This was often due to differing priorities, communication gaps, and a lack of clearly defined reporting channels.

Community Engagement related concerns: The removal of volunteers significantly altered the interaction with the community, shifting it to more direct interactions and reducing the access to information and services. The necessity to interact directly with the entire community for information gathering increased the workload for the staff.

Political Interference: Concerns were expressed regarding political interference influencing decision-making and creating an unpredictable working environment.

The curious case of Volunteers

The overstaffing issue is real with respect to the volunteers as well. While beneficiaries, Panchayat Secretary, and Village Secretariat staff have appreciated the role and efforts of the volunteers, they have not been perceived successful and necessary for delivering services. A couple of relevant anecdotes in this regard articulate the point

From the field

"When volunteers were there, we used to involve them for offering doorstep services. Now all of us (referring to all the GS staff) collectively undertake those activities, and have been able to do them well, sometimes even faster."

- A GS Staff respondent from Tirupati district.

In a separate interview,

From the field

"Volunteers definitely helped us with delivering services. But when we see that most of the GS staff take advantage of them and get even their own works from them, we find it irrelevant. The staff free ride at the expense of volunteers. Now that volunteers not there, I see the staff members actually taking accountability and working."

When asked whether removal of volunteers would impact their service delivery, "No, it's irrelevant. We have been delivering services even more efficiently now. I feel more informed. Earlier I was bypassed lot of times and was difficult to keep track of some affairs."

- A Senior Panchayat Secretary.

Given that volunteers were part of the village community, internal social dynamics might have played out in a few cases. For instance, one beneficiary shared their utter dissatisfaction with the volunteers.

From the field

"Volunteers are not needed. Pensions are given once in a month. That's it. If we say that there are no lights, they don't respond properly. Volunteers' posts are just for status quo. If we ask something, they showed us attitude and didn't speak properly."

- A beneficiary.

Similar frustrations about volunteers were shared by a beneficiary from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background:

From the field

"The volunteer system is not proper; the intimation of volunteers is not proper. We are not given proper intimation by volunteers. Everyone should be treated equally, whether they are rich or poor. All facilities should be provided at home. They should come early in the morning and provide pensions. Everyone should be informed about the Raitu Bharosa details. They should inform everything at our houses. We stay most of the time in the fields, so if information through phone or notice boards is not sufficient, they should inform us personally. There are uneducated; information should be available to them too, and they should be informed personally."

- A beneficiary from socioeconomically disadvantaged background.

The elected representatives also brushed aside the need for volunteers saying that they were just cost centres, and they were primarily brought to push forward the political agenda of the erstwhile government. In fact, volunteers themselves admitted that they are redundant in the system, but have requested if their removal could be reconsidered. An ex-volunteer notes:

From the field

"I agree that services could be delivered even without us. But with us, there was a personalized connect, especially with the disabled and the aged ones who could

not talk for themselves. We have done lot of service under the expectation that we would be regularized sooner or later. Now we ask that it would be good if they could take us back. At least we would have some income source to talk of."

- An (Ex)- Volunteer.

Summary of Perceived Challenges by Functionaries

We summarize the critical concerns and challenges faced by each individual functionary group in the following Table 5.1.

Table 5. 1 Summary of Perceived Challenges with the GS System (GS Functionaries)

Functionary	Concerns and Perceived Challenges
Panchayat Secretary (DDO)	• Absence of a defined hierarchy within the Sachivalayam system, leading to confusion and power struggles. • Lack of control over Sachivalayam staff, leading to coordination and accountability issues. • Dual reporting responsibilities creating conflicting priorities and workload. • Lack of clear mechanisms for addressing staff grievances and performance issues. • Inadequate funding for panchayat operations, particularly sanitation, water supply, and street lighting. • Insufficient staff for routine tasks like maintenance, leading to delays and service disruptions. • Difficulty in consistently paying salaries to sanitation and other contract workers. • Political interference impacting decision-making and resource allocation.
Digital Assistant	• Inadequate infrastructure (computers, internet connectivity) hindering efficient service delivery. • High volume of applications requiring extended working hours. • Lack of system for addressing technical issues and providing timely solutions to problems. • Lack of formal training and technical support for new applications and software updates. • Dual reporting structure leading to conflicting priorities and workload pressures. • Difficulties in coordinating with other staff members due to conflicting work demands. • Removal of volunteers leading to increased workload and challenges in data collection. • Separate application for each service hinders coordination.
Engineering Assistant	• Dual reporting structure causing conflicting work demands and workload pressures from multiple departments. • Limited opportunities for promotion and career advancement within the current framework. • Difficulty in obtaining timely leave approvals due to multiple reporting channels. • Insufficient technical support from higher authorities and lack of recognition for their work. • Inadequate infrastructure (tools, equipment, stationery) hindering efficient work. • Political interference and delays in project approvals affecting timely project completion.
Welfare Assistant	• High workload, particularly during pension distribution, requiring early morning and extended working hours.

	• Insufficient staff to meet the demands of the high number of applications for welfare schemes. • Challenges in convincing beneficiaries about eligibility criteria and addressing complaints. • Difficulty in managing cases of ineligible applicants attempting to fraudulently receive benefits. • Separate app for each service makes data collection time intensive. • Mobile devices' inability to take these many apps. No replacement or repair assistance. • Non-replacement of biometric devices hindering work. • Reliance on volunteers for biometric authentication and data collection, which has been removed, causing issues.
Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)	• High workload balancing multiple health responsibilities, leading to extended working hours and stress. • Insufficient staff to adequately meet the community's healthcare needs. • Challenges in data collection and reporting due to lack of support staff. High workload due to the responsibility of data maintenance for numerous health programs. • High personal risk of facing accountability for negative health outcomes of pregnant women. • Challenges in managing high-risk pregnancies and providing timely interventions. • Pressure from higher authorities to meet vaccination targets and complete other tasks, potentially jeopardizing patient care. • Dual reporting structure, requiring simultaneous responses to the needs of multiple supervisors. • Difficulties in coordinating with various health workers (other ANMs, ASHA workers) due to communication and reporting challenges.
Mahila Police	• Insufficient resources and training for security duties and handling of cases. • Workload increases from awareness programs, complaints, and counselling. • Challenges in maintaining coordination with both the police department and the Sachivalayam. • Pressure from both superiors leading to difficult prioritization and extended work hours.
Agricultural/Horticultural Assistant	• Inadequate infrastructure and insufficient stationery supplies for continuity in services. • Insufficient resources and training to perform assigned tasks effectively. • Dual reporting structure creating conflicting demands and workload management issues. • Lack of clear demarcation of responsibilities between the Sachivalayam and the line department. • Lack of proper coordination with other Sachivalayam staff leading to challenges in service delivery. • Increased workload due to the demands of the e-cropping system and various surveys. Removal of volunteers impacting further.
Veterinary/Animal Husbandry Assistant	• High workload due to the demands of vaccination campaigns and other animal healthcare services. • Insufficient resources (vehicles, medicines, equipment) hindering efficient service delivery. • Challenges in managing cases of livestock disease and death. • Difficulty in coordinating with the Panchayat and their line department. • Delays in disbursement of livestock insurance funds.

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on primary data and field observations

5.2 Thematic Analysis of GS Issues

Based on the data collected on field and field interactions, we identified clear patterns in the issues with the GS system in its existing format. We performed a detailed thematic analysis along the lines mentioned in Section 3.6. These issues can be grouped into four primary themes: Infrastructure and Resource Allocation Issues, Staffing Issues and Role Ambiguity, Capacity building and Training Deficiencies, and Political Influences. Each of these areas reveals insights into the complexities and limitations that Panchayat Secretaries and other stakeholders encounter in daily operations.

a. Infrastructure and resource allocation

The (un)enabling environment of the VS ecosystem could hinder service delivery considerably. One of the key factors investigated through the survey is related to the (in)adequacy of the physical and financial infrastructure supporting the Village Secretariats. Adequacy of capital infrastructure received a low mean score of 2.41 (SD = 1.60), whereas adequacy of maintenance resources was rated similarly low at 2.34 (SD = 1.58) (Table 4.6). These scores reflect significant gaps in the resources available to support the Secretariat's physical operations, such as office buildings maintenance, technology upgrades, and providing for operational expenses. In most cases, secretaries have had to rely on volunteers or personal resources to ensure that services continue uninterrupted, which undermines the long-term sustainability of the system. Instances have been reported where services were delayed due to the lack of maintenance resources and day-to-day operational items such as stationery items. Anecdotes from qualitative interactions reveal,



From the field

"All facilities are provided. The building was built but the problem was only in maintenance. The stationery for the documentation is not proper, the Sarpanch has the drawing power in the Panchayat, they give it once in six months, but it is not enough. There is a lot of paper work in e-service, and there are more stationery for them."

- Anecdotes from interactions.

"Our activities require frequent consumption and replacement of stationery such as print papers, staples, pens, and consumables such as printer cartridges. We received those only at the beginning (five years ago) when GS was first introduced. Ever since we have been struggling to catch-up with the increasing work. While the secretary sometimes helps with Panchayat funds to replenish, usually we have to buy them on our own to keep going."

- Digital Assistant from Krishna district.

Such reliance on unstable funding sources impacts service quality and the morale of staff, who face payment delays due to irregular revenue streams. It's not only the Panchayat staff, but also the GS staff and volunteers who equivocate serious constraints of operational funds impacting their service delivery. Few anecdotes from distinct interviews and FGDs clarify it further:



From the field

"We were issued tabs with biometric readers when we joined five years ago. Later the number of schemes increased, the tabs became older and slower, the biometric readers stopped working. The systems need upgrade. As we knew there would be no funds for these, we have to shell down our personal money to get them repaired frequently."

- Welfare Assistant from Kadapa district.

We were provided mobile phones, sims and biometric recorders initially, which worked well for few months. When they stopped working, we had to arrange them ourselves. Lot of times, the repair itself costs more than the device. We are not even paid the TA/DA. Very difficult to manage with our limited honorarium."

-(Ex)- Volunteer from Kadapa district.

While the secretariat had ample staff for designated internal administrative work, one of the primary challenges faced by the Village Secretariat system is the lack of sufficient field staff for essential services such as sanitation, water supply, and lighting. This shortage is particularly critical for tasks that require on-ground interventions. As one Panchayat Secretary observed,



From the field

"In this panchayat system, field workers are needed... our panchayat needs people who can go down to the field and work on leaking pipelines or sprinkle lime bleaching or repair the drain."

- A Panchayat Secretary.

This emphasizes the gap between the system's design and the practical needs of the community. The absence of dedicated maintenance staff often leaves vital infrastructure issues unresolved, delaying service delivery to residents. Moreover, funding and resource scarcity exacerbates the situation, affecting the sustainability of the VS system. Every Secretary and elected representative note the difficulty of maintaining consistent resources, with some dependent on fluctuating local revenues, such as house tax. One Secretary shared the frustration this causes:



From the field

"Some panchayats are based on house tax, and some people do not pay this house tax. We didn't get 2 lakhs money on house tax last year, because of which the salaries of the sanitizers and the cleaners cannot be paid."

- A Panchayat Secretary.

b. Staffing Issues and Role Ambiguity

The GS system has provided for bringing all functional departments together under a common roof, through recruiting new staff. The increase in the taskforce, although came with some positives, has reportedly come with its own cost. There were reportedly several issues with such staffing and reporting structures.

Overstaffing and Irrational Workload

Two of the most crucial observations has been regarding the overstaffing and the irrational workload distribution of the GS staff, and the lack of clear authority with the DDO. Almost every PS, some staff, some volunteers, and every elected representative equivocally endorsed this issue. A senior secretary narrated this issue well.



From the field

"In terms of workload, I sometimes feel overwhelmed as the number of welfare schemes have exploded, and the number of staff I need to monitor has increased, leaving a chance for errors. To add to this, I haven't been provided any authority to act on shirking, as the functional authority is too dispersed."

- A Senior Panchayat Secretary.

Unity in Command issues

When there is a larger taskforce, clear guidelines often are perceived to be effective in mitigating any confusion. Many a times, staff are assigned roles to multiple departments. In such cases, participants have highlighted concerns about a lack of clear guidelines. There have been clear reports of conflicts of interests, wherein the line staff tend to game the system. Coordination challenges have emerged as one of the most complex issues in the GS system, particularly due to dual reporting structures. Secretariat staff often report directly to line departments rather than the Panchayat, which can erode the authority of the Panchayat Secretary and hinder local decision-making. For instance, a Secretary shared,



From the field

"The Panchayat should be informed about everything... the Secretary's signature was only used for displaying the notice."

- A Panchayat Secretary.

Dual reporting challenges also arise when line departments and the Panchayat issue orders simultaneously, often leading to conflicting tasks such as engineering work, housing-related assignments, and surveys. This creates pressure on staff who must balance multiple responsibilities. When surveys or urgent tasks from superiors require full attention, other ongoing duties—whether office-related or fieldwork—must be adjusted to accommodate these demands. Managing these overlapping responsibilities requires flexibility and constant prioritization to address all tasks effectively. This issue could be further articulated better when viewed from the perspective of the line staff of GS. For instance,



From the field

"I face severe challenges in managing work allocated by both the departments. Initially, conflicts arose due to overlapping instructions and unclear roles, particularly when multiple departments assigned tasks simultaneously. This lack of coordination led to confusion about responsibilities."

A government order (GO) later clarified the duties, advising personnel to prioritize local duties over station work. Despite these adjustments, we were

reassigned to security duties on several occasions, tasks for which we hadn't been formally trained for. We faced several discomforts when our requests for exemptions were outrightly turned down. Female staff members often face early morning assignments and report a lack of mutual respect between departments. We often face mockery when shifting between responsibilities."

*- A GS staff respondent (Secretary Women and Child Protection/Women Police)
from Kadapa district*

Such informal way of managing overlapping roles indicates a lack of clear guidelines on prioritizing tasks, potentially delaying services and creating confusion about responsibilities. This lack of transparency in decision-making weakens the Panchayat's role and leaves the community out of the loop on critical issues. Furthermore, the overlapping responsibilities of roles, such as the engineering assistant, create additional complications. One Secretary from a remote VS in Krishna district expressed the difficulty in managing conflicting directives,



From the field

"In such cases, they inform us that we are currently busy, and we understand the situation and take care not to burden them, all this is based on understanding. But end of the day, we are accountable and we are not sure if they are true or are gaming the system."

- A Panchayat Secretary from Krishna district.

c. Capacity Building and Training deficiencies

While a new system was transitioning with newer expectations and technological affordability, trainings were inadequately perceived across stakeholders.

GS framework for Panchayat Secretaries

Our qualitative interactions with Panchayat Secretaries highlight significant gaps in training for the Secretariat staff, emphasizing the need for both administrative and personal development. While annual training sessions cover general administration topics like Gram Sabhas, meetings, and fund utilization, there is no dedicated training on Secretariat-specific responsibilities. A Panchayat Secretary notes,



From the field

"No training is provided to us specifically for the Secretariat. While training is conducted annually on general administration—covering topics such as Gram Sabhas, general meetings, and fund utilization—there is no training focused on the Secretariat itself."

- A Panchayat Secretary.

Administrative training for GS Staff

On the other hand, concerning the VS staff, past training sessions were insufficient, with limited success in implementation, leaving them unprepared for administrative roles. Training deficiencies limit the effectiveness of the VS system. Many secretariat staff lack formal training, which affects their preparedness for both technical and interpersonal responsibilities. While the staff had received initial induction training (which had to be

missed by few due to lack of schedules) and have been receiving regular updates about the welfare schemes, they grossly lacked any comprehensive training that includes administrative tasks, discipline, punctuality, and effective public engagement. Training, when available, is often limited to basic skills rather than the holistic preparation required for community engagement and administrative duties. The narrow focus on operational training means that staff may be unprepared to handle broader responsibilities such as beneficiary guidance and community interaction, which are essential for their roles. Below are some of the narratives by the Panchayat secretaries that highlight this.



From the field

"Training was provided, but the staff could not receive it effectively. It was not successful in terms of implementation."

"They have received training in the past, but it was not comprehensive. In my opinion, more complete training should be provided. We need more field executors, not supervisors. And the staff have been barely trained in administration."

"Training should be provided in administrative processes as well as in personal discipline. It should cover what needs to be done, meeting people, attending work on time, completing tasks punctually, and maintaining discipline. Training should be thorough and comprehensive. In the past, it was given to some branches, but not completely."

- Narratives by Panchayat Secretaries.

Comprehensive training for Volunteers

Lack of training was also highlighted as a concern by the volunteers. The adequacy of training was rated at 3.21 (SD = 0.88) (Table 4.10), which, while moderate, suggests that there the need for improvement in preparing volunteers for their roles. Volunteers were often tasked with implementing a wide range of services, from agricultural support to pension distribution and health services, and it was crucial that they receive comprehensive training in all aspects of their responsibilities.

Table 5. 2 Perceived Capabilities indicators (Volunteers)

Indicator	Obs	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Adequacy of Training	200	3.21	1	4	0.88
Technological Capability	200	3.08	1	4	0.84
Perceived Overall Capabilities (Mean of Indicators)	200	3.14	1	4	0.74

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on Primary Data (Volunteer Survey)

Technological capabilities were also rated similarly, at 3.08 (SD = 0.85) (Table 5.2), suggesting challenges in the volunteers' ability to use digital tools effectively. Although digital platforms play a significant role in supporting service delivery, the lower score indicates that volunteers may struggle with technology, particularly when devices malfunction or when adequate training in their use is lacking. This corroborates with the Panchayat Secretaries' feedback regarding inadequate infrastructure and maintenance resources, which affects both volunteers and secretaries alike.

Ensuring that all technical and field staff receive complete training could improve service delivery, enhance professionalism, and foster a disciplined approach, ultimately benefiting the Secretariat's efficiency and community relations.

d. Political influences

Political factors often shape the functioning of the Village Secretariat, influencing which welfare schemes receive priority and which individuals benefit. Such influence can lead to inequitable distribution of services, with some deserving residents excluded while others, perhaps less eligible, are prioritized due to political pressures. A senior Secretary reflected on this issue, stating,



From the field

"On one side we are giving to those who do not deserve, on the other hand we are unable to give to those who are in need. A lot of those are guided by political will and selective information transfer."

- A Senior Panchayat Secretary.

Reportedly, this situation arises due to the inherent political inclinations of the volunteers. It highlights the systemic challenges in ensuring fair and equitable service distribution within the VS system. Political influences not only undermine the original objectives of the Village Secretariat but also foster skepticism within communities, with residents perceiving favoritism in welfare programs.

5.3 Unraveling the Structural Gaps

The structural gaps in any policy, scheme or programme could be visualized at three levels: *a.) Conceptualization gaps* - the gaps between the (desired) objectives and conceptualization, *b.) Implementation gaps* - the gaps between conceptualization and implementation, and *c.) Achievement gaps* - the gaps between implementation and the actual outcomes achieved. We attempt to identify structural gaps at various levels based on our field observations and the data². To investigate these gaps, we rely heavily on various definitions and conceptualizations of a local self-government from the literature (Mohapatra, 2013; Srivastava, 2002).

Srivastava (2002) corroborates an ideal conceptualization of local self-government³ as "an administration of a locality – a village, a town, a city or any other area smaller than a state, by a body representing local inhabitants, enjoying a certain degree of of autonomy, raising a part of its revenue through local taxation and spending it on services which are local in character as distinct from the services provided by the state or central agencies." The distinguishing features and the most important requisites of local self-government are:

² We would like to present a disclaimer that most of these gaps have been obtained through our direct interactions with the stakeholders we could interact with. As we couldn't interact with some key informants, our observations should be taken with a word of caution.

³ Based on Srivastava's (2002) summarization of Venkatrangaiya and Pattabhiram's seminal work: *Local Government in India: Select Readings*, p 3.

Srivastava, T. N. (2002). Local'self'government and the constitution. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 3190-3198.

- i. **R1:** *a local body,*
- ii. **R2:** *local inhabitants electing that body and ultimately controlling that body,*
- iii. **R3:** *freedom from control of higher authorities within a limited sphere to denote autonomy,*
- iv. **R4:** *a recognition of distinction between local and non-local services, and*
- v. **R5:** *local taxation.*

Furthermore, they observed the following loopholes ailing village-level panchayats in most states (L refers to limitations or loopholes):

- i. **L1:** Meagre staff for regulatory and maintenance work,
- ii. **L2:** Unintended dependency on the line departments for the maintenance works,
- iii. **L3:** Undue control of line department officials on the village-level staff bypassing the panchayats,
- iv. **L4:** Lack of power to create any post or regulate their staff's remuneration
- v. **L5:** Disparity of posts created by state with the paying capacity of a panchayat.

Due to such misalignments, the local self-government systems could not be revived to their full capacity despite seven decades of Independence (Mohapatra, 2013). Our field observations during the evaluation study of Revamped RGSA (Report-1) clearly indicate that these loopholes still persist in almost all states, making Srivastava's (2002) observations relevant till today. Therefore, we adapt these as the benchmark loopholes.

5.3.1 Conceptualization Gaps:

The conceptualization gaps refer to the inconsistencies between the primary need of such a system as GS (an ideal local self-governance system, as in Srivastava (2002)) and the way it has been conceptualized (Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019). These gaps reflect the shortcomings in the policy design.

In order to uncover these gaps, we begin with the premise that the GS has been envisaged to strengthen local self-government by empowering the villages with more functions through functionaries (Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019). Any such system is supposed to overcome all the major structural challenges in the pre-existing local self-government system(s) through PRIs, and complement their functioning through appropriate integration (Mohapatra, 2013; Srivastava, 2002). Therefore, we discuss the above-listed major shortcomings in the light of our major field findings.

The Point 3.1 of the Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019 conceptualizes the need for Village Secretariat system as follows:

- i. **N1:** Restructuring the delivery systems to function as an effective mechanism to deliver services.
- ii. **N2:** A strong & workable channel for implementation of *Navarathnalu*.
- iii. **N3:** Transparency and accountability in delivery of government services to the citizens
- iv. **N4:** Ensure convergence among departments providing services at village level.

Whereas the objectives of the GS system are stated as follows (Point 3.2 of the Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019):

- i. **01:** To provide various Government / other services at the doorsteps of Citizens through single window system and ensure delivery of *Navarathnal*.
- ii. **02:** Enable convergence of all line departments that provide services at the Village level.
- iii. **03:** Preparation and timely implementation of village plans.
- iv. **04:** Mapping the field level functionaries with clearly specified roles making them accountable to Gram Panchayats/Gram Sabha with a well-defined Citizen Charter.
- v. **05:** Integrate the institution of village volunteers with village secretariat system enabling them to provide citizen services efficiently.

We attempt to map these perceived need (N1-N4) and the objectives (O1-O5) with the requisites of a local self-government (R1-R5), in light of which of the existing loopholes (L1-L5) the present GS system's conceptualization attempts to resolve.

Table 5.3 Uncovering Conceptualization Gaps of GS System - 1

Need	Objective	Requisite addressed	Loophole resolved	Conceptualization Gaps
N1, N4	O2, O5	R1	None	While the GS system creates a local body for delivery of services, it is neither by the local inhabitants, nor does it have any control or autonomy of functioning. All the rules are centralized from the State level.
N2	O1	R4	None	While the GS system helps in distinguishing local and non-local services by resolving many trivial issues and operational welfare-related services at the village level, the services are focused more towards the delivery of welfare schemes of <i>Navarathnal</i> , with little empowerment or local income-generation focus.
N3	O4, O3, O2	R3	L2 (partially)	The GS system provides transparency in service delivery and improves service times and efficiency. However, it plays more of a supervisory role only, with little improvement in the ground staff. While the dependency on the MPDO or ZPDO has reduced, the reduction is mainly oriented towards welfare service delivery, and not on the maintenance works. The dependency on the line department still exists for most of the works.

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on field observations

Table 5.3 provides a clear indication of the insufficiency of the existing conceptualization of GS system in resolving the loopholes or complementing the essential requisites of a local self-government. While the welfare service delivery has improved and become more efficient through addition of more governance functions and functionaries at the village level, the lack of autonomy in terms of maintenance work and inability to create additional posts at the village level has not improved service delivery for more essential

and basic Even within the developmental works, the availability of dedicated Engineering Assistant and Energy Assistant theoretically eases the administrative hurdles in planning of essential services. But without empowerment in deploying more ground force, the planning tends to merely remain on paper, or when implemented, it tends to be delayed (**L1-L5**).

Apart from these observations, we would like to highlight a couple of more inconsistencies and conceptualization gaps between the need, pre-existing loopholes, and the actual structuring of the GS System in Table 5.4. In this table, we refer to the specific clause / provision of the Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019 and comment with our observations in those areas.

Table 5. 4 Uncovering Conceptualization Gaps of GS System - 1

Manual Clause	Was meant to be	Conceptualization GAP(s)
The provisions and roles of GS Functionaries		
5.5.5	The prime duty of the Village Secretariat Functionaries is to provide various Government / other services at the doorsteps of Citizens and ensure effective delivery of <i>Navarathnalu</i> .	- While this could be an important duty of local self-governments to disseminate the government schemes, declaring it as the most important duty could be counter-productive. - The mention of the most important duty of the GS functionaries as delivery of welfare services envisaged by the State government is not completely in the spirit of local self-government (not in line with R3 & R4). - It leaves enough room for the state governments to push their political agenda, probably at the cost of public good creation and developmental activities. This could affect the degree of control and autonomy of the local self-government (R3) and belittle opportunities of own-source revenue creation and local taxation (R5). - While this could be an important duty of local self-governments to disseminate the government schemes, declaring it as the most important duty could be counter-productive.
5.5.21	The performance of the Functional Assistants shall be reviewed periodically by the Mandal/district level officers concerned and periodically submit the performance appraisal reports.	- The performance appraisal of Functional Assistants deployed at the local self-government level by the authorities at Mandal/District level officers automatically encourages more interference and undue control of line department officials on village-level staff, bypassing the Panchayats (L3). - This would, in turn, shift the locus of control to higher authorities, increasing dependency and challenging local autonomy (R4, L2). - Additionally, this would also induce sycophancy and gaming behaviour among the

		GS functionaries, which could lead to undesirable effects for local governance. To avoid such effects, the higher authorities could, at best, facilitate the DDO in assessing the performance by providing specific comments and inputs on performance improvement.
Work measurement system and career progression of GS functionaries		
5.2.20	The functionaries recruited initially will be on probation for a period of two years at a consolidated stipend of Rs. 15,000/- per month. There after the concerned Departments will take necessary action as per service rules in force for confirming the probation.	The work measurement system and career progression of the Grama Sachivalayam functionaries hasn't been well-defined. This could have impact on the general motivation levels, role ownership and lead to dissonance in the working. • Except two functionaries – the PS (Grade-V) and the Digital Assistant, the career progression ladder is not specified, leading to ambiguity in growth and development opportunities. • Although, the present salaries of the functionaries are being paid through special funding from the State PRRD funds for GS, there is absence of clear long-term plan for compensating the GS functionaries. This has a potential to levy financial burden on the already constrained Gram Panchayats (L5). • The provisions for work measurement of the functionaries is not clearly defined, leaving an opportunity for opportunism by both reporting officers and the GS functionaries. • The pay scales and work reporting norms (attendance) has been standardised for all functionaries. This is an important consideration due to the differential work-loading and types of works performed by different functionaries. Some functionaries such as Engineering Assistant, ANM, Energy Assistant, Welfare Assistant, etc. are more mission-oriented and high-response demanding works with 24-hour engagement. Whereas, some other works are relatively certain, more routine natured, and regular works. It is not appropriate to apply same terms to both categories of functionaries (Refer 4.6.3.b(i) for more details on work assessment) and could lead to long-term comparison and dissatisfaction due to incentive incompatibility issues.
5.2.22	The Functional Assistants shall converge their functioning with Village Secretariats keeping proper linkages with other departments, to act as a single unit of administration. Organic links must be established among various Departments and institutions.	
5.11.a	All staff and employees of the Village Secretariat Office other than the Office Attendant shall attend the Office from 10 am to 5.30 pm, unless otherwise prescribed in any special or general order.	

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on field observations

Thus, the following conceptualization gaps persist in the existing GS system:

Box 5.1: Conceptualization gaps in the GS system

CG1: The GS system lacks specific provisions to divert the controlling authority of the local issues to the local self-government.

CG2: The conceptualization of GS system's prime responsibility as the delivery of welfare schemes dilutes the purpose of a local self-government, rendering the developmental activities secondary consideration.

CG3: The GS system offers limited support to create more own-source revenue capabilities, or local taxation capabilities. On the contrary, it increases burden on the Panchayat system for maintenance of additional resources.

CG4: The GS system fails to create resources for maintenance and upkeep of the village works, retaining the interference and dependency on the line departments for day-to-day activities.

CG5: The mismatch between the reporting relationships and the performance appraisal system dilutes the accountability of the functional assistants towards the local self-government.

CG6: The work measurement system and the career progression path has been inadequately accounted for in the presently conceptualized GS system. This could be a hurdle in effective service delivery.

CG7: Due to the above dependencies, the GS system does not succeed in creating holistic self-sustaining local self-government.

To emphasize these further, we have observed all the above ill effects of these conceptualization gaps come true in the GS functioning. We brief some of them while discussing the implementation gaps.

5.3.2 Implementation Gaps:

The implementation gaps refer to the inconsistencies between the way the GS system has been conceptualized, and the way the ground implementation has occurred. In order to uncover these, we refer to specific clauses and provisions of the GS system as per the Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019 and attempt to highlight anomalies in their implementation, with reference to our specific field observations.

Table 5.5 Unraveling Implementation Gaps of GS System

Manual Clause	Was meant to be	Implementation GAP(s)
The roles of Sarpanch in GS		
5.2.1	Ensure proper functioning of the Village Secretariat Office and all Functionaries of the Grama Panchayat.	The involvement of the Sarpanch and Elected representatives in the GS working has reflected a gross mismatch. Barring a few GS offices, the Sarpanch is neither involved in the day-to-day working of the GS system, nor is reported about the progress and works of the GS. This arrangement is mutual.
5.2.3	Exercise supervision and control over the activities of all officers and staff of the Village Secretariat and prepare/review	

	their Confidential Reports (CRs).	- Due to this, there is a clear disconnect in the Panchayat administration, and the GS staff is primarily engaged only in the welfare service delivery, with little synergy in all other developmental works (with an exception of Engineering Assistant, who too suffers with multiple reporting relationship issues). - The dissonance is much more prominent in GPs which have multiple GS. In such GSs, there have been frequent reports of excess and inefficient manpower allocation (L5). - Due to this disconnect, the maintenance resources of the GS, for which it is dependent on the GP revenues is not assured. This hampers the GS functioning as well.
5.2.4	Send report regarding the service of government officers or employees whose service has been lent to the Local Government from time to time to the concerned appointing authority and the said report shall also be taken into account when their confidential reports are prepared.	
5.2.7	In the light of the Act and standing orders, the Sarpanch can give necessary directions or pass orders on those records/files.	
The administrative unit and structure		
5.5.2	The office of Gram Panchayat will be termed as “Village Secretariat”	- The GS Office and Gram Panchayat are operating as separate Offices. In few Sachivalayams, the GP Office has merged into GS Office as a Secretariat, but the merging has not translated into practice. - This arrangement is not possible in the current structure in case of small GPs where a GS caters to more than one GP. - In many Panchayats with more than one GS, the GS functionaries mostly occupied a common facility, whereas the other buildings and facilities have not been utilized. This has led to wasteful capital expenditure
The provisions and roles of GS Functionaries		
5.5.3	All the Village Secretariat Functionaries are the employees of the Local Government and are responsible to the Gram Panchayat.	- This is partly followed, but the responsibility is more towards the line functionaries and delivery of welfare schemes only. (5.5.5) - While the GS staff participate in GPDP formulation and conduct of Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings, their role is restricted mostly to resolution of specific queries and forwarding and liasioning the requests with the concerned line departments, against being an active part of solution themselves. This is due to the shortage of ground-level execution manpower, which the GS system failed to offer (L1 & L4). - The Volunteer system partly helped in the above by catering to the last-mile delivery of
5.5.18	All the Village Secretariat Functionaries shall ensure the implementation of AP Panchayat Raj Act, 1994.	
5.5.9	The Functional Assistants of line departments will function as per the job chart provided by their respective line	

	departments and report to Gram Panchayat.	soft services, but has not been effective in resolving the basic issues of GP.
5.8.i	The organizational functions of the Grama Panchayat as envisaged by the Act are carried out through the collective activities of elected representatives and Local Governments staff.	• Due to persisting dependency on the line departments for actual developmental field works, the delivery of such works have witnessed no improvement (L2). • Resultantly, the independence of the GS functionaries and the envisaged coordination between the GP and GS have been compromised.
5.8.iv	The independence and impartiality of Village Secretariat employees as Local Government Officials in the performance of their duties and functions shall be upheld.	• There have been many reports of frequent gaming of GP affairs by the GS staff due to the over-interference of Line department officials in the day-to-day GP functioning (L3). ○ This issue is much more prominent with specific functionaries such as Energy Assistant, Mahila Police, VRO and Surveyor. • To add to these, the GS functionaries have not been trained enough in GP day-to-day administration, due to which they often work in silos through their line departments only. They are at times less equipped to contribute to the actual improvement in the larger scheme of things of village development.
5.5.5	The prime duty of the Village Secretariat Functionaries is to provide various Government / other services at the doorsteps of Citizens and ensure effective delivery of <i>Navarathnalu</i> .	• These are the only duties that have been observed to be undertaken in true spirit. • While the functionaries have been successful in gathering public grievances and following-up on them, the time for their resolution has not really improved due to shortage of actual ground staff to execute the works (L1 & L2).
5.5.17	All the Village Secretariat Functionaries shall take follow up action on the grievances received under 'Spandana' and other grievances at GP level.	• This has driven up the dependency on the line department functionaries (L2 & L3)
5.5.23	The Functional Assistants shall apply for the Casual leave (Annexure I) to the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat.	• The reporting relationships, the leave sanctioning authority and the Drawing and Disbursement of salaries are structurally misaligned.
5.11.m	In the exigency of service, staff shall attend the office on holidays also as per the Office Order issued by the Panchayat Secretary. For such holiday	• The sanctioning of casual leaves has been observed to be under the respective line departmental heads, with no (actual) authority of either the Sarpanch or the Panchayat Secretary in either sanctioning casual or compensatory leaves.

	duty, Compensatory Leave will be allowed.	- This further led to increased interference and intrusion by the line department officials, undermining the Panchayat autonomy (L3) - This has undermined the control the Panchayat has on the functional assistants, impacting the work dynamics, power relationships and the trust (L4). - Due to the above reasons, the Panchayat Officials are not in a position to demand exigency work, further impacting the service level
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Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on field observations

5.3.2.1 Work Assessment and Workload Mapping of GS functionaries

In addition to the implementation inconsistencies observed with respect to the specific provisions of the GS system, a major inconsistency has been observed with respect to the workload distribution and allocation of the GS functionaries. Based on the workload and the contribution level to the Panchayat functioning, the functionaries can be categorised into following five categories using the VED (Vital, Essential, Desirable) Analysis. This assessment shall help in rationalizing the functionaries, their workloads and incentive system at the systemic level.

Category-1: Vital-available Functionaries (EPS, DA, EA, WA, ANM)

- The **Panchayat Secretary**, being the DDO of the GS system, has been bestowed with more accountability than the pre-GS era, with no practical authority to exercise control over the actions of the GS functionaries or enforcement of clear accountable actions. While their workload has reduced on some respects due to digitalisation of processes, added hands to monitor the works and easing in welfare service delivery, the disconnect between the GS and GP roles on ground has diverted most of the efforts towards conflict management between the two parallel systems. Also, when it comes to the main developmental responsibilities of the GP, the workload has barely reduced.
- The introduction of **Digital Assistant (DA)** at the village level has been instrumental in improving the transparency, access and lead times of various services at the Panchayat level. It has enabled creation of a single-window clearance system and focal point of contact for all administrative and developmental services at the village. By virtue of being absorbed in the PRI system, the DA contributes heavily in coordinating both GS and GP functions. With around 500+ support services to coordinate, the DA is one of the most pivotal foot soldier of the GS and an "always loaded" personnel.
- The availability of **Engineering Assistant** at the village level has loosened the administrative hurdles related to development and asset creation activities at the Panchayat level. This has speedened up the administration of engineering activities related to the Roads, MNREGS, Jal Jeevan Mission, Housing development, civil works, etc. While the new asset creation enabled through contractual process has quickened, with little added provision of on-ground resources and staff, the actual delivery of specific maintenance services has only marginally improved. The multiple unclear

reporting structure of the EA has, however, caused complexities in managing the power dynamics and prioritization of works of various departments, often leading to silo functioning, higher workload, and inefficient allocation of time.

- The induction of **Welfare Assistant** at the village level has improved the information availability about the eligibility of various welfare schemes and reduced transaction costs and lead times related to welfare scheme delivery. The WA's involvement in other supplementary welfare works such as the school and health related programmes has improved access, transparency and equity in welfare services. With the accountability to ensure welfare access to around 500 households, there is adequate workload to keep the WA occupied and sometimes overwhelmed during periods of more welfare service offerings. The removal of volunteers has increased burden of last-mile delivery of services on the WA, however, appropriate prioritization of which services to offer at the doorsteps and which of those could be delivered at the GS Office would resolve most of the painpoints in this regard.
- The introduction of **Auxiliary Nurse Midwife** at the village has experienced a positive externality in terms of improved responsiveness to Child and Mothers' health care. It has also improved the general health response in the village level through acting on the sanitation, mid-day meal, vaccination, use of toilets, etc. The data and record-keeping consumes maximum time of an ANM, leading to barely adequate flexibility to cater to other functions.

At an aggregate level, these five functionaries, the Digital Assistant, Engineering Assistant, Welfare Assistant and the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife have demonstrated adequate workload and involvement (in fact, more) and truly added value to the GP functioning. Their present allocation of one functional assistant to one GS seems appropriate. Their functions are of more uncertain nature and require mission-mode involvement. These functionaries are responsible for 24-hour service availability and immediate response. They often extend far beyond the regular working hours. As such, their availability at the local self-government level is **vital** for the sustainability and success of the system.

Category-2: Vital-Rare Functionaries: Energy Assistant:

This category contains the **Energy Assistant**, which is an extension service of a lineman, with higher empowerment to cater to specific village. The EA is responsible for all services related to lighting, electricity, electrical safety, housing and infrastructure installations and maintenance throughout the Panchayat. The service is highly uncertain, with 24-hours demand, requires utmost promptness and mission-mode response. Unlike the functionaries in the category-1 (except Engineering Assistant), the service requires physical availability in the proximity, as the emergencies cannot wait for long. This necessitates the functionary to be stationed in the specific village. The skill requirement is much higher and the precision is crucial. The service is, thus, of highly vital nature.

But due to the present inconsistencies and mismatch in the reporting structures and inadequate availability of supporting field manpower, the EA is generally observed to be unavailable and a rare occurrence in the GS. The EA is presently under the direct reporting of the Assistant Engineer of the Electricity department at the Mandal or the District level, with less control and authority with the Panchayat / GS. Therefore, the **EA should be the focus of strengthening through provision of helper support for on-field problem resolution.**

Category-3: Essential Functionaries: AA, VA, HA, Mahila Police, Surveyor:

- The introduction of **Agricultural Assistant, Veterinary Assistant, Horticultural Assistant** (and other related functionaries) have been instrumental in enhancing income generation, self-employment and improving performance of the villages in their respective fields.
- The induction of **Mahila Police** has been helpful in managing the law-and-order condition in the concerned jurisdiction, with support from the Police Department.
- The inclusion of a dedicated **Surveyor** at the village level has been helpful in conducting timely assessments of engineering and civil work proposals, data collection, upkeep of land records, resolving civil disputes, and timely issue of certificates. Their availability has facilitated speeding up of the works of Engineering Assistant, Welfare Assistant, Digital Assistant and the Panchayat.

While these services are critical for village development, these are more routine-based and operational in nature. The work has lesser degree of uncertainty and can be executed during the regular working hours. Their work is mostly of a supporting nature and as an extended workforce at the Panchayat/village level. Also, their workloads exhibit periodic patterns with lean and flush periods. Therefore, they could be considered for being placed at a broader Panchayat level with larger geographical scope.

Category-4: Desirable Functionaries: VRO

The **Village Revenue Officer** is an extension functionary, which has been regularised at GS through transfer from the Gram Panchayat. Thus, majorly it has been a transfer of administrative jurisdiction with little change in the work and responsibilities. As such, there is no incremental value being added because of this functionary in the GS. The only change in the responsibilities has been in the case of multiple GS in a single GP. Under such system, the VRO's workload has been observed to be reduced, leaving them with little occupancy.

As the work of a VRO is important for appropriate land records and survey data, as well as proper revenue monitoring, the work and the workload is mostly certain, and operational in nature. It could be beneficial if their jurisdiction is re-organised as the earlier set-up.

Category-5: Redundant Functionary: PS-Grade-V

The **Panchayat Secretary (Grade-V)** has been inducted into the GS system as a supervisor of the other functionaries, and as an enabler and coordinator of other services. However, our interactions and observations have shown that the functions are often redundant and overlap with the functions of the Panchayat Secretary (DDO) of the Gram Panchayat. The only case in which they have been observed to contribute is where a GP has multiple Grama Sachivalayams. This can't be a strong enough reason for deployment of an additional functionary, and could very well be managed with the existing setup.

As such, we posit that the PS Grade-V might not be a very value-adding position, and could be regularized at all such Panchayats where the PS have been assigned multiple in-charge positions (already started as a practice now).

Based on these understandings, we summarize the implementation gaps of the GS system in Box 5.2.

Box 5.2: Implementation gaps in the GS system

IG1: *The present GS functioning lags in creating enough coordination between the Panchayat System and the GS functionaries.*

IG2: *The present GS functioning undermines the role of Sarpanch and Elected representatives in the GS administration, rendering the GS as a parallel government body, rather than a complementary body.*

IG3: *The present GS functioning creates more functions through more functionaries but does not adequately strengthen the administrative capabilities of the local self-government.*

IG4: *The present GS functioning predominantly focuses on state government welfare service delivery, with secondary importance to developmental activities, revenue generation activities, and public goods creation.*

IG5: *The present GS functioning has inequitable work-load distribution, leading to wasteful resource deployment in some functions and Panchayats, while leaving significant resource gaps at other places.*

IG6: *The power and reporting structures in the present GS system dilute the authority of the village Panchayats, giving an opportunity for the GS functionaries to game the system, and deepening dependencies on the line departments at Mandal and District Levels.*

5.3.3 Achievement Gaps:

The achievement gaps refer to the major needs of a local self-government system and the gap in the overall outcomes. For this, we use the requisite-loophole framework of Srivastava (2002) (R1-R5 and L1-L5) adapted in the beginning of this section, along with the major mandates for Gram Panchayats as per Section 45 of AP Panchayat Raj Act (Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019) as benchmarks for what a local self-government system should have achieved. We compare the field observations and experiences with the benchmarks to highlight the achievement gaps in terms of incremental achievements / improvements. We also make use of all the expositions drawn in Sub-sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 to support the arguments, wherever required.

Table 5. 6 Identifying the Achievement Gaps of the GS System

Ref.	Description	Incremental Achievements & Achievement GAP(s)
VSMOP (2019)	<i>GP Functions:</i> 5.1 a. Reasonable provisions for construction, repair and maintenance of all infrastructure, lighting, drainage and sanitation, cremation and burial grounds, ponds, water resources, water works, cleaning services, waste	The GS has helped more functions to be initiated at the village level. The induction of Engineering Assistant and Energy Assistant at the village level has speedened up the administrative works related to such activities (though the Energy Assistant is observed not to be so responsive).

	management, cattle ponds, etc.	• Introduction of Digital Assistant has further eased the registration of complaints, frequent followups and brought transparency to such works. • However, due to the lack of ground manpower or any provision thereof, the service delivery in physical terms has not seen great improvement.
VSMOP (2019)	<i>GP Functions:</i> 5.1 a. Reasonable provisions for health, preventive and remedial health measures, registration of births and deaths, etc.	• The induction of Welfare Assistant, ANM and Surveyor at the village level has enabled faster response in these provisions.
Srivastava (2002)	<i>Requisite of LSG:</i> R2: local inhabitants electing that body and ultimately controlling that body R3: Freedom from control of higher authorities within a limited sphere to denote autonomy R4: a recognition of distinction between local and non-local services <i>Loopholes in Pre-existing LSG:</i> L2: Unintended dependency on the line departments for the maintenance works L3: Undue control of line department officials on the village-level staff bypassing the panchayats	• The GS has not been able to bring any incremental benefit in terms of the requisite R2. In fact, the control has mostly shifted away from the local self-government systems towards the higher authority, due to the persisting over-dependency on the line functionaries at the Mandal and District level (R3, L2, L3). • The GS has been reasonably able to demarcate between local and non-local services, however, with government-specific scheme delivery as the prime duty of the functionaries, the focus is mostly on delivering the non-local services, with less priority for the local works.
Srivastava (2002)	<i>Loophole in pre-existing LSG:</i> L1: Meagre staff for regulatory and maintenance work L4: Lack of power to create any post or regulate their staff's remuneration	• The GS system added more supervisors to the system, with little provision for executing manpower engagement. As a result, no incremental gain has been observed with regard to L1 & L4. • Due to the inherent on-field disconnect between the GP and GS systems, and due to limited administrative contribution of some of the GS

	L5: Disparity of posts created by state with the paying capacity of a panchayat	functionaries (refer to 5.3.2.1), the disparity of posts created by state with the actual requirements and paying capacity of the panchayats has been clearly observed.
Srivastava (2002)	<i>Requisite of LSG:</i> R5: local taxation	The GS system has not incrementally contributed to income generation and own-source revenue creation opportunities in direct manner. However, the incremental improvement in developmental and asset creation works through some functionaries (e.g., Engineering Assistant) might have dissolved barriers in this direction to some extent.

Note: Colour code legends: **Red** indicates negative achievements, whereas **Green** indicates positive achievements

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on field observations

The achievement gaps of the GS system have also to do with the intentions behind creating so many functionaries at the village level. As discussed in sub-section 5.3.2.1, not all functionaries have been observed to have contributed incrementally to the betterment of local self-government systems. Simultaneously, the administrative hurdles created by mass-mobilization of such supervisory workforce also needs to be accounted for. These, however, have been out of the scope of this research study and needs separate deliberations. We summarize the achievement gaps identified in Box 5.3.

Box 5.3: Achievement gaps in the GS system

AG1: The present GS system has only incrementally contributed in the betterment of engineering works and civil works such as water, roads, construction and sanitation projects.

AG2: The present GS system has not been successful in garnering more maintenance and regulatory resource. As such, it has offered negligible benefits in terms of maintenance service improvements at the Panchayat level.

AG3: The present GS system has been incapable of creating or fostering autonomy of the local self-government. On the contrary, it has created additional dependency on and interventionism by the line departments.

AG4: The present GS system has not been able to boost the local own-source revenue generation for the Panchayats. As such, it hasn't offered noticeable benefits to local taxation and self-sustenance of the pre-existing local self-government system.

AG5: The present GS system has not been able to demarcate the workloads of functionaries effectively, and has not been successful to drive intrinsic motivation for the GS functionaries and PRI officials.

5.4 Summarizing GS Impact: Answering Specific Questions

In this section, we attempt to collate all our observations, findings and assessments of the present GS system discussed in Chapters 4 & 5 through answering the following specific questions posed to our research team by the Ministry (MoPR) during our presentation held on 31 January 2025.

Q1. Has the system been successful in assigning more functions to PRIs?

Q2. Has there been significant improvement in the capabilities and functioning of local self-government?

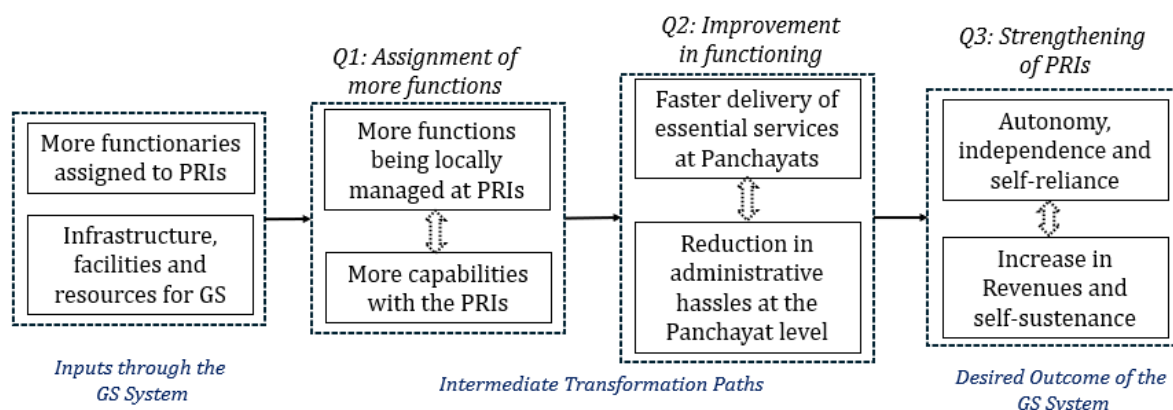
Q3. Has the GS system strengthened the PRIs?

Q4. Is the AP's GS model replicable in other states?

More importantly, the section shall focus on providing crisp answers to the first three critical questions using specific references from this report. These could be mapped to the first five research objectives discussed in Section 3.1. Subsequently, we deliberate on the fourth question about the replicability of the present model here, and come up with specific recommendations for replication through an integrated governance framework in the next chapter (Objectives 6 & 7, Section 3.1).

5.4.1 Impact on PRI Strength

To begin with, it is noteworthy that the first three questions are sequential in nature with direct connections to the very purpose of conceptualizing a new system for local self-governance (ideally). As such, there are multiple embedded and implicit hypotheses within these questions, which could be diagrammatically represented using the conceptual model in Figure 5.1. The observations about these relationships are not so straight-forward. Nevertheless, we attempt to answer these questions in Table 5.7.



Source: IRMA Research Team's Conceptualization

Figure 5. 1 Implicit Hypotheses in GS Model of change

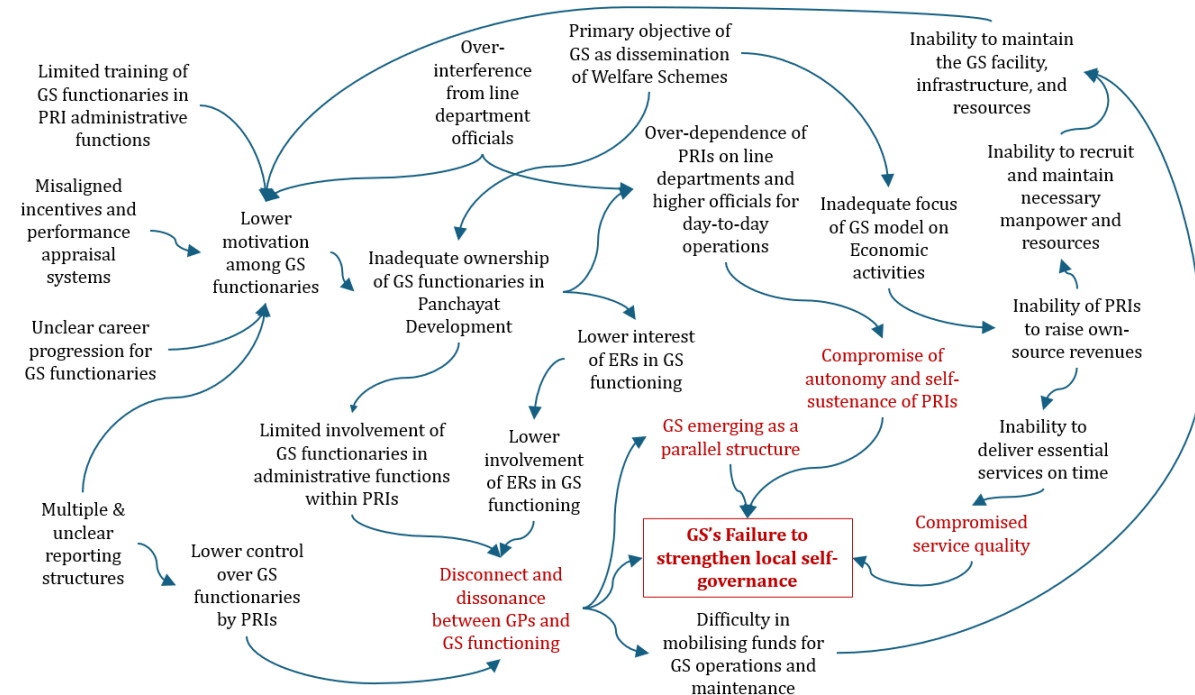
Table 5. 7 Summary of GS Impact

Question	Impact Assessment
Q1. Has the system been successful in	The GS system has been endowed with various functional assistants with added infrastructural facilities at the village level.

assigning more functions to PRIs?	- This has resulted in creating more functions at the village level. - This has also improved the functional capabilities within the PRIs.
Q2. Has there been significant improvement in the capabilities and functioning of local self-government?	This needs to be deliberated with reference to multiple dimensions: - The GS system has brought visible improvement in the effectiveness of welfare service delivery (delivery of welfare services). - The GS system has also reduced the administrative hassles and improved processing speed of infrastructure and development projects at village level. - But there has been hardly any improvement in the delivery of essential maintenance and routine services due to the shortage of on-ground manpower. - The GS system has improved the coordination within the PRIs, line departments and the Mandal/District Officials, but have emerged with internal disconnect between the ERs and GS functionaries at the village level.
Q3. Has the GS system strengthened the PRIs? (the desired ultimate outcome)	This would reflect mixed impact when viewed from multiple dimensions, as: - The present GS system has created accountability and go-to personnel for various pain points in PRI systems (VSMOP, 2019). - However, it has not been able to provide the autonomy and independence required for self-reliance of PRIs. On the contrary, they have created more interference by, conflict of interests with, and dependency on the line departments for day-to-day operations of the PRIs. - The incremental focus of the GS system has been mostly towards welfare scheme delivery, therefore developmental activities at PRIs have not picked up as is desired from any new local self-government intervention. - Due to limited focus on local own-source revenue generation activities, the present GS system could not strengthen the self-sustenance of the PRIs. - Due to misalignment in the reporting, work measurement, performance appraisal and career progression structures, the GS system emerged as parallel structures with different objectives, rather than truly strengthening PRIs.

Note: Colour code legends: **Red** indicates negative achievements, whereas **Green** indicates positive achievements

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on field observations



Source: IRMA Research Team's Conceptualization

Figure 5.2 Systems Thinking Map for the limited success of the GS model

The summary of the reasons for limited success of the present GS model can be structurally represented using a systems thinking map in Figure 5.2, which holistically captures various interacting mechanisms pertaining to the phenomenon in the cause-and-effect format. Such representation provides a clear understanding of the issue and helps in identifying all the paths contributing to the central issue (GS model's failure to strengthen the local self-governance, in this case), and guide in uncovering the root cause of the issue. From the systems map, the following issues could be identified as the core causes of the limited success of the GS model in strengthening the PRIs and the local self-governance system (Box 5.4):

Box 5.4: Core causes for limited success of the present GS model

1. *The core objective of conceptualization of the GS system deviated from the main focus of an ideal local self-government (CG2, CG3, CG4 & CG7 of Box 5.1):*
 - Primary objective of GS as dissemination of Welfare Schemes of the State Governments
 - Subsiding the focus on economic, developmental and employment generation activities,
 - Compromising the financial self-sustenance and autonomy of the PRIs,
 - Causing deepening dependency on the line functionaries and higher authorities for financial viability of the PRIs
- ➔ Ultimately compromising the service delivery capability in issues of real concern.

2. *The HR and the work-design issues of the GS functionaries (CG5 & CG6 of Box 5.1):*

- Multiple & unclear reporting structures,
 - Misaligned incentives and performance appraisal systems,
 - Unclear career progression for GS functionaries, and
 - Limited training of GS functionaries in PRI administrative functions
- ➔ Leading to lower ownership and involvement of GS functionaries in administrative functions of PRIs and Panchayat development,
- ➔ Ultimately causing a major disconnect between GP and GS functioning

It could be clearly observed that both the core causes of the limited success of the initiative are structural loopholes in the design of the model, the conceptualization gaps discussed in Section 5.3.1.

5.4.2 Replicability of AP's GS model

The discussion about the replicability of AP's GS model needs to be an exhaustive exercise mandating detailed deliberations between the consultants (IRMA Research Team), Client (MoPR), the process owner (APPRRD) and various stakeholders in the policymaking. Here, we attempt to present our viewpoint based on the understanding of the GS system so far through multi-stakeholder interactions held during the research field visits, which might not have essentially included discussions and deliberations in this specific regard⁴.

Commenting on replicability of GS model is a sequential investigation of the following questions:

- a. Is the present GS model beneficial for strengthening of local self-governments and the PRIs?
- b. If yes, should it be replicated as it is or should it be modified? If modifications are required, what should they be?
- c. If no, how should it be modified to make it replicable elsewhere?

We attempt to comment along these lines in the Box 5.5, based on the previous analysis and the systems thinking map of Figure 5.2.

Box 5.5: Replicability of the GS system

- *The present GS model has managed to improve monitoring, supervision and control over the service delivery at the village level. It has been impactful in improving the service performance of the local self-governments in delivering welfare services as well as improving the speed of execution of new developmental projects. However, it has failed to improve maintenance-related and routine responsibilities of the PRIs, such as Waste Management, Water and Sanitation,*

⁴ This study was initially conceptualized as a short case study on AP's Grama Sachivalayam system, as an appendix work to the "Evaluation of CSS scheme of Revamped RGSA". The research design for the study has not specifically considered discussions about replicability of the GS model. Therefore, much of these comments about its replicability is post-hoc analysis based on the field interactions already held with the initial research design for case study.

Roads and Repairs, Lighting and Electricity, etc., which are the core activities of a local self-government body.

- *The present GS model has not been able to reduce the dependency of the PRIs on the line departments and higher-level governments for their day-to-day operations.*
- *The present GS model has not been able to increase the capabilities of PRIs to generate more own-source revenues or create more economic activities for their autonomy, self-reliance and self-sustenance.*
- *The present GS model has not been able to complement the strength of PRIs in enabling them to become local self-governments in true sense. Rather, they have emerged as parallel governance structures at the village level.*

As such, the GS model in its present structure and implementation style doesn't offer enough value-for-money and effort. So it shouldn't be attempted for replication in other states in its present form.

In light of the above, the replicability of GS system does not seem to be a go-to strategy. We comment about the required modifications in the present GS system and an integrated local self-government system as recommendations in the next chapter.

6. Recommendations

In this chapter, we attempt to integrate all the major observations and learnings from our research study to initiate a broader concept-level discussion of the local governance model of Grama Sachivalayam. We attempt to view it through the lens of broader constructs and propose recommendations for betterment of local governance systems in general. Our recommendations for the study emanate from the detailed study of the GOs and provisions of the Village Secretariat Manual of Office Procedure, 2019, field experiences and analysis of the observations (throughout Chapter 4), mechanisms of change (Section 4.4), derived relationships and GS conceptual model (section 4.5), multi-stakeholder challenge analysis (Section 5.1), thematic analysis of GS issues (Section 5.2), uncovered structural gaps in conceptualization, implementation and achievements (Section 5.3), and the insights gained while commenting on the impact of GS on PRI strength and replicability of the GS model (Section 5.4). We structure the recommendations along the identified structural gaps and the core causes of limited contribution of GS to local self-governments derived in Figure 5.2.

Our recommendations could be classified as two broad categories – Specific and General, based on the intent of the recommendations. Specific recommendations refer to the prescriptions for the betterment of the existing GS system in AP, whereas General recommendations refer to an integrated framework to strengthen local self-government systems across all states in the country.

6.1 Specific Recommendations for Betterment of the GS System

In proposing our recommendations for betterment of the GS system, we are guided by the core issues (Figure 5.2) and the structural gaps highlighted in Boxes 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. We collate our recommendations as policy design-level and implementation-level interventions, which shall enable a targeted and focused approach to maximize gains.

6.1.1 Policy Design-level Interventions

The policy-level interventions should focus on resolving the core issues responsible for limited success of the present GS model (refer to Box 5.4) in transforming AP's PRIs to self-sustaining local self-governance bodies.

a. Reconceptualizing the Core Need and Objective of the GS system:

The present conceptualization of core need and objective of the GS system is to deliver welfare schemes offered by the State Government. As it currently stands, it performs well on the service outcomes, when looked at from the context of reach, accessibility, timely delivery, and satisfaction with welfare benefits to the eligible beneficiaries. In the process, however, the primary outcomes of achieving sustainable development goals of ensuring clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), providing reliable energy supply (SDG 7), promoting economic growth activities (SDG 8), and promoting industry and innovation (SDG 9) for self-sustenance of villages seems to be overlooked (United Nations, 2015).

There is a pressing need to acknowledge the misalignment, pause and relook its purpose and reframe desired outcomes and objectives to align with the development objectives in addition to the welfare outcomes pertaining to equity, women empowerment, and education. Aligning with development objectives and strengthening self-sustenance of

PRIs requires re-aligning the governance model to integrate the administrative functions of Gram Panchayat into the administrative framework of Grama Sachivalayam. We present the specific recommendations and the pathway through the '3R' framework in Box 6.1.

Box 6.1: Redefining the Core Need and Objectives

The conceptualization needs to be realigned by amending the primary focus as Panchayat development and assistance in its core development and economic activities, even while retaining its focus on welfare services delivery.

This could be achieved by:

1. Re-calibrating the Grama Sachivalayam functions to address the administration-related issues, including active engagement in works related to Water, Sanitation, Roads, and Electricity.
2. Re-orienting the energies towards income & employment-generation programmes and public goods creation.
3. Re-thinking the model to build ecosystems and support to generate, maintain and sustain the economic and developmental activities.

These interventions could potentially resolve the major conceptualization gaps **CG2, CG3, CG4 and CG7**, highlighted in Section 5.3.1, and create a starting point for local self-governments.

b. Reforming the Work Design and the Administrative Relationships of the LSG bodies

The implementation of the reconceptualized GS model would require a stronger synergy between the presently isolated local self-government bodies - the PRI and the GS systems. It is required to design robust mechanisms to create incentive compatibility between the two groups of LSG staff.

- For the PRI Officials, it prompts re-statement and relook of some roles, control and authority.
- Simultaneously, for the GS functionaries, it necessitates restructuring of power relationships, work redesign, work-load distribution and rationalization, manpower re-allocation, reformation in the work measurement and performance review, and recreating career progression paths.

We recommend the following '8R' framework of change in Box 6.2.

Box 6.2: Reforming the Work Design and Administrative Relationships

The administrative relationships and work design of the LSG staff needs to be realigned by rationalizing the functions, reporting relationships, workload, and career progression to induce process ownership and innovation.

This could be achieved by:

1. Re-defining the GS functionaries' administrative roles, controlling and reporting relationships, workflow, and accountability to integrate them with the Gram Panchayat requirements. Appropriate controlling authority needs to be allowed for the Panchayat Secretary and the GP-level elected representatives in performance review and appraisal of the GS functional assistants.
2. Re-forming the work measurement norms of and undertaking administrative capacity building measures for the GS functionaries to encourage benchmarking with best practices, innovation and entrepreneurial culture.
3. Re-working on the career progression of the GS functionaries and bringing in policy certainty.
4. Re-vitalizing the roles of elected representatives and ward members to sensitize their importance and encouraging them to substitute the volunteers' roles. The Sarpanches and ERs should be motivated to make use of their authority.
5. Re-enforcing the PRI capabilities with authority and capacity to hire and plan requisite on-ground execution manpower and resources.
6. Re-sizing the number of functional assistants at the Panchayat level.
7. Rationalizing the workload, work allocation and recording norms, span of control of GS functionaries. A part of this authority needs to be vested with the Sarpanch and the PS.
8. Re-organizing the mode of service delivery: The GS, by virtue of its existence in village, solves the purpose of ease of governance through single point of contact - the Digital Assistant. To this effect, the 'Service to the doorsteps' role could be bundled and replaced by 'Service at Village premises' for all welfare-related benefits.

The first three 'R's in the framework shall align incentives of the GS functionaries, and drive up their process ownership, capabilities and motivation to contribute to the essential administrative functions of the PRIs. The fourth and seventh 'R's are essential to drive up the interest and involvement of the Sarpanch and the ERs in the GS functioning and creating synergies and necessary integration between the two systems. The fifth, sixth and seventh 'R's would ensure sufficient control and authority, in turn, enabling autonomy and self-sustenance of the LSGs, in addition to reducing the dependency on the line functionaries for day-to-day maintenance and operational activities. The eighth 'R' would further help rationalize the workload and make the system leaner and efficient. Together, this framework shall alleviate the conceptual gaps **CG5, CG6 & CG7**, which contribute to the HR-systems-related root cause for the limited success of the present GS model.

In terms of resizing workforce and rationalizing workload, a one-size-fits-all approach shall not be able to drive optimal performance and process ownership across functionaries. Therefore, we propose a systematic approach in Table 6.1, based on the work assessment of GS functionaries presented in Section 5.3.2.1. We centre our recommendations along the modifications required to properly rationalize work allocations for various categories of functional assistants, as categorized in 5.3.2.1.

Table 6. 1 Recommendations for Resizing and Rationalization of GS Workforce

Category and Description	Nature of Work and Workload	Workload and measurement rationalization and modification(s) recommended
Category-1&2: Vital: PS, Digital Assistant, Engineering Assistant, Energy Assistant, ANM, Welfare Assistant: <i>Adequate to overloaded workload</i>	Mission-mode works, Emergency duty, 24-hour requirement, always alert, highly uncertain works, all season-work, specialized skill requirement, can be called upon from leave as well, more region-specific, involved with multiple departments and multiple administrative levels, supervisory plus executorial	• To be retained at individual village level, with specific jurisdiction (as defined by GS scope), to be stationed in the village. • Higher level of autonomy in terms of flexible working hours, avoid stringent punching / attendance norms. • Engineering Assistant, Energy Assistant and ANM to be supported with helper-type manpower (cloud basis, hired by PRIs) and transportation support (or reimbursements) to undertake emergency works. • Direct career progression ladders within their respective line departments.
Category-3: Essential: Agricultural Assistant, Veterinary Assistant, Horticultural Assistant, Mahila Police, Surveyor: <i>Fair Workload, scope for geographical expansion</i>	Routine, relatively less uncertain, time-bound work, could be accomplished during office hours, supporting nature to category-1, periodic patterns in workloads, involved with multiple administrative levels, supervisory plus executorial	• Could be rationalized to expand the geographical scope by clubbing multiple GS and/or villages. • Regular work timings to be applied with timely attendance monitoring and provision of emergency calling and compensatory offs. • Direct career progression ladders within their respective line departments.
Category-4: Desired:	Routine, mostly certain, time-bound work, could be accomplished during office hours, supporting nature to category-1 & 2,	• Option-1: Rationalize to expand the geographical scope by clubbing multiple GS and/or villages OR

Village Revenue Officer: <i>Routine workload, scope for geographical expansion</i>	involved with multiple departments and administrative levels, well-defined career progression, supervisory	Option-2: Absorb back into the PRI role, with extended breadth of work scope. - Regular work timings to be applied with timely attendance monitoring - Create additional accountability along with Digital Assistant and Welfare Assistant, in case of Option-1.
Category-5: Redundant: Panchayat Secretary (Gr-5): <i>Little work or rationale in the presence of PS</i>	Manpower management and coordination, mostly redundant in presence of PS of the GP, career progression ladder well-defined, supervisory nature only.	- Rationalization needed: Rehabilitate in other PRI divisions or as PS in Panchayats with no Regular PS. - Would convert into Category-1 if the above recommendation is followed. Therefore, Category-1 recommendations would apply.

Source: IRMA Research Team's analysis based on field observations

Thus, a PRI LSG could be resized to comprise six regular functionaries from Category-1 – Engineering Assistant, Digital Assistant, Welfare Assistant, ANM and Energy Assistant. In order to contain the issues of gaming and shirking behaviour under dual- reporting structure, the administrative control of functionaries could be rationalized to create a unity in command. Even while the matrix structure is desirable for most project-related functionaries with direct impact on village development and infrastructure it would be desirable to vest their administrative control with the Panchayat Secretary (DDO), and create mechanisms to ensure their accountability to the line functionaries through the DDO.

The other functional areas could be shared across more than one Panchayats/GSs or could be re-distributed to the respective line departments, even while they remain housed at the GS Office. Their services, when required, could be requested through the Service Requirement Ticket - DDO - Line Department Controller - Line Department Staff route. This way, the required activities could be efficiently bundled and delivered effectively.

The funds and resources, thus spared, alongwith the discontinuation of volunteer services, could be diverted to hiring / employing more maintenance manpower for on-ground execution of Civil, Electrical and other developmental works. Appointing ground staff for execution of development works rather than supervision and last-mile delivery of welfare activities could help in managing routine activities such as Waste Management, Water Supply and Sanitation, Electricity and Street Lighting, and Road repairs.

Over and above this, the rationale of assigning 2000 population under one GS is also worth a re-look. Data-based assessments could be made with the available patterns from the last five years of functioning.

6.1.2 Implementation-level Interventions

To align the processes with the redefined objectives, a relook and alignment of inputs is crucial. While the policy-design-level interventions would help in creating enabling ecosystems and more opportunities for self-reliance of PRIs, some operational interventions are also required to supplement the positive externalities created, improve the synergies, reduce wasteful effort, and further reduce the transaction costs.

The input alignment should focus at building the requisite capabilities in terms of human capacity building, technological capabilities, and raising working capital funds for operational expenses and maintenance resources. We recommend the following measures to address each of these pain points:

a. Re-designing Accountability Mechanisms

Streamlining processes to align with the redefined outcomes would require redesign of accountability mechanisms to ensure clearer role definition, transparent and seamless information flow, and internal coordination protocols. While most of the GS works are through digital platforms, at present, every activity and functional department follows different data storage mechanisms using different applications. This results in service delivery lapses, delays, and in many instances, re-inventing the wheel and creates unnecessary redundancies. Such individualized silo-based approach reduces, jeopardizes trust, and impacts the motivation negatively. We recommend following measures to address these concerns:

3. Develop an integrated application which brings together all the functions. This should be developed as a single application with common database management system, with provision for departmental customization.
4. Create and formalize clear workflow structures with specific predefined paths. However, this should be made flexible enough to incorporate specific modifications on field, with modification power vested with the individual functionary, and approved through the immediate higher controlling officer.

b. Human Capacity Building

Human capacity is the most important resource for effective local governance. At present, there have been inadequacies in providing requisite training due to multiple reasons, including unavailability of schedules, unavailability of trainers, etc. Additionally, the newly suggested governance model would require relook at the capabilities required of the GS functionaries. In this context, we recommend the following actionable measures:

1. Redefine capacity and training requirements to incorporate administrative acumen, alongside the functional expertise. The training should encompass comprehensive modules on general administration, rural administration, along with special focus on soft skills such as personality and leadership training, manpower and fund management, conflict resolution, etc. For this purpose, the GS functionaries could be brought under the purview of Revamped RGSA, whose general training modules are designed for the purpose.
2. Organize refreshers to reinforce the skills over time, ensuring that the entire GS team remains equipped to serve their communities effectively.

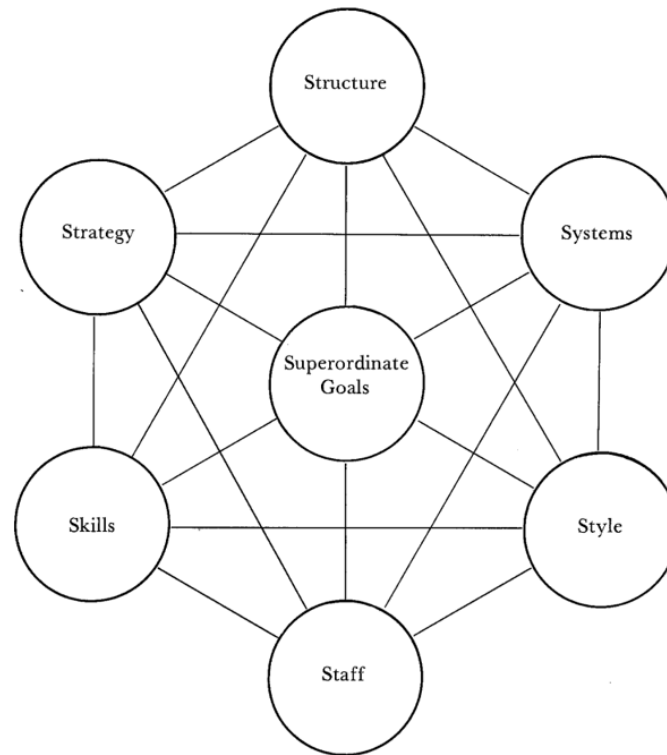
c. Financial and Operational Capabilities

While the GSs are self-sufficient with infrastructure, they face severe constraints with relation to maintenance and day-to-day operational funding. We recommend the following measures to address the concern:

4. The revised governance model ensures integration of Grama Sachivalayam into the administrative structure of the Gram Panchayat. This integration would allow greater access to Panchayat funds through direct access to the 15th Finance Grants and Own- source Revenues of the Panchayat. These synergies are the byproduct of the win-win offered to the Panchayat Presidents, as against the erstwhile model which alienates the Sarpanches and Elected Representatives, constraining free fund flow.
5. Freeing the GS of the liabilities of Volunteer honourarium and bundling of multiple services would directly translate to the surplus funds, provided those funds are not held back by the upper governments. In this respect, the state government should take a long-term and rational perspective towards fund allocation and diversion.
6. As the suggested model is geared up to incentivise development activities, the virtuous cycle thus generated offers huge scope for generating own-source revenues. Till the time, the state government should fund the working capital requirements and operational expenses for certain time, say one year, followed by partial withdrawal of support to incentivize early promotion of revenue generation activities and innovations.

6.2 General Recommendations: Towards an Integrated Local Self-Governance Model

As a response to the query of the Ministry during the meeting on 31 January 2025, regarding the replicability of GS model for other states, we have argued in [Section 5.4.2](#) that in its existing setup, the GS model is not ready to be replicated elsewhere. We continue building on that argument to derive an integrated local self-governance model for strengthening the local self-governments. We envisage any local self-government model to be able to cater to all the requisites of an LSG (R1 to R5), and to mitigate and alleviate all the loopholes ailing the PRIs presently (L1 to L5) corroborated by Srivastava (2002), as we have discussed in detail in [Section 5.3](#).



Source: Adapted from Waterman et al. (1980)

Figure 6. 1 McKinsey 7S Framework

To develop the integrated model, we build up on the specific recommendations made in the previous section and propose a complete implementation strategy using the popular McKinsey's 7S framework developed by Peters and Waterman in early 1980s. The McKinsey 7S Framework is a model designed for organizations to assess and organize internal elements to increase effectiveness and achieve strategic alignment. The framework posits that there are seven interdependent components within any organization: Strategy, Structure, Systems, Shared Values, Style, Staff, and Skills, as demonstrated in Figure 6.1 (Waterman et al., 1980)⁵. Over the years, the framework has successfully demonstrated its effectiveness in understanding how different facets of an organization work together to bring about high performance and success. While this has been designed to support organizations in formulating world-class strategies and implementing change seamlessly, the same could be adapted to the governments and policymaking with relevant modifications. We provide a brief description about the meanings of different Ss, and the use and application of 7S framework in Table 6.2.

Table 6. 2 Application of 7S framework

7S Element	Description	Key Questions to Consider	Application in the Local Self-Governance design
Strategy	The policymakers' long-term goals and how they plan to achieve them.	- What is the scheme/programme's overall vision? - What are its key objectives?	Comprehensive development plan addressing all the requisites

⁵ Waterman Jr, R. H., Peters, T. J., & Phillips, J. R. (1980). Structure is not organization. *Business Horizons*, 23(3), 14-26.

		What problem does it aim to solve / innovation does it want to bring?	and loopholes to be resolved (R1-R5 & L1-L5).
Shared Values	The core values and beliefs that guide the LSG's culture and behaviour	- What are the LSG's core values shared by all relevant stakeholders? - What beliefs guide its actions? - What is the overall work ethic?	Transparency, accountability, integrity, community participation, equity, sustainability, process ownership, etc (O1-O5).
Structure	The administrative chart; reporting relationships; departmentalization; delegation of authority.	- How is the organization structured? - What are the reporting relationships? - How is decision-making distributed?	Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for PRI representatives and GS functionaries, and line-department officials; efficient communication channels.
Staff	The people who work for the systems; their skills, knowledge, and experience.	- What are the key skills and competencies of the staff? - How well-trained are they? - What is their morale and motivation level?	Skilled staff trained in digital literacy, financial management, and community engagement; fair compensation and career progression opportunities.
Skills	The capabilities of the LSG and its workforce.	- What skills and competencies does the LSG need to succeed? - Are these skills present in the workforce?	Technical skills (data management, IT), administrative skills (resource management, project management), soft skills (communication, conflict resolution, community engagement).
Systems	The processes and procedures used to accomplish work; workflows; IT systems; internal coordination and integration	- What are the key processes and procedures? - How does information flow? - How efficient and effective are the systems?	Integrated IT systems for service delivery, grievance redressal, and resource management; simplified application processes.
Style	The governance style and management approach; decision-making process; communication style.	- What is the leadership style? - How are decisions made? - How do the authorities communicate?	Participatory leadership; collaborative decision-making; transparent communication.

Source: Adapted from Waterman et al. (1980) by IRMA Research team for the specific context

We derive the integrated local self-governance model by contrasting the current weaknesses of the general PRI systems and the GS model along all elements of the 7S framework, as summarized in Table 6.3. The right-most column provides the key performance indicators (KPIs)

Table 6. 3 Integrated Self-Governance Model

7S Element	Current GS System / PRI Weaknesses	Proposed Integrated Self-Governance Model	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Strategy	• Overemphasis on welfare schemes; • neglects broader development; • lacks long-term vision for sustainable local self-governance.	• Holistic strategy encompassing economic development, infrastructure, community empowerment, enhanced service delivery; • incorporate SDG achievements as the goal • Special focus on financial self-sustenance	• Economic growth indicators; • infrastructure improvements; • community participation rates; • SDG achievement; • citizen satisfaction with overall development.
Shared Values	• Risk-averse; • Silo operation of departments; • Insufficient emphasis on local ownership and community engagement.	• Collaborative decision-making; • Participatory leadership; • Transparency; accountability; • Local and process ownership; • Community engagement	• Citizen trust in local government; • Staff commitment to innovation and responsiveness.
Structure	• Weak GS-Gram Panchayat link: parallel systems • Unclear reporting lines; • Dual reporting; • Interference from higher governments and line department officials	• Unified governance system: Dissolution of parallel structure, integration of capabilities into the PRIs. • Reporting, performance review and controlling authority with the PS and Sarpanch	• Decision-making speed; • Clarity of roles and responsibilities; • Effectiveness of inter-departmental collaboration; • Citizen engagement in decision-making.
Staff	• Unclear career progression; • Inadequate motivation • Less entrepreneurial • Inadequate maintenance and execution manpower	• Rationalization of supervisory versus execution manpower • Clear work measurement and Career paths; • Aligned reporting and performance review structures • Rationalized workload and alignment of work measurement with category of work	• Staff satisfaction levels; • Staff training completion rates; • Staff empowerment

		(VED analysis: Section 5.3.2.1) • Staff empowerment and autonomy (in a limited sphere) • Performance-based incentives and job enrichment opportunities	
Skills	• Insufficiently trained in LSG administration – overly involved with line functions; • Infrequent updation and capacity building of both ERs and functionaries • Unskilled in entrepreneurial and own-source revenue generation opportunities	• Comprehensive and ongoing training support; • Customized training modules; • Focus on all SDG and holistic administration and project planning & management skills • Frequent technology upgradation Judicious investment in continuous capacity building and skilling (maybe through mass level programmes like revamped RGSA)	• Community engagement effectiveness; • Problem-solving skills of both ERs and functionaries; • Citizen satisfaction with staff interaction.
Systems	• Disintegrated IT systems through plethora of apps;	• Single-window service access through Digital Assistant. • Integrated IT systems through single application with multiple modules; • equitable resource allocation; • Transparent grievance redressal system • Prompt conflict resolution systems among staff	• Timeliness and efficiency of service delivery; • Ease of data keeping and management • Citizen satisfaction with service access; • Transparency and accountability of service delivery; • Grievance redressal time; • Resource utilization rate.
Style	• Top-down work devolution; • Centralized with little autonomy for lower functionaries	• Entrepreneurial and process ownership-based • Participatory - involvement of all staff in decision-making; • Community involvement in decision-making; • Empowered local leaders.	• Levels of citizen participation in decision-making; • Responsiveness to community needs; • Frequency of community consultations; • Satisfaction of the staff with leadership style.

Source: IRMA Research team's analysis and conceptualization

A parallel system of local governance such as GS system might not be an ideal way to proceed if the major objective is to develop self-sustaining, autonomous local self-governments.

Rather than creating a parallel structure, the existing PRIs could be strengthened for local self-governance as recommended in the third column of Table 6.3. While the framework in the table is self-explanatory, we would like to focus the structure of and the staff part of the recommended governance structure in Box 6.3. We propose the following integrated structure by clubbing the PRI staff with the GS functionaries (without the name Grama Sachivalayam). We term it with a common name “LSG”.

Box 6.3: The administrative structure and staff at LSGs

Permanent Staff:

Sarpanch: Elected Representative – President and Financial Head

Dy-Sarpanch: Elected Representative – Second-in-command

Ward Members: Elected Representatives – local last-mile delivery staff

Panchayat Secretary: Government Official – Administrative Head – PRI Official

Digital Assistant: Government Official – PRI Functionary: Reporting to PS

Engineering Assistant: Government Official – PRI Functionary: Reporting to Sarpanch and PS, Interface with Block-level Engineering Department

Energy Assistant: Government Official – PRI Functionary: Reporting to Sarpanch and PS, Interface with Block-level Electricity Department

Welfare Assistant: Government Official – PRI Functionary: Reporting to Sarpanch and PS, Interface with Block-level Welfare Department

Auxiliary Nurse Midwife: Government Official – PRI Functionary: Reporting to Sarpanch and PS, Interface with Block-level / Regional Medicine Department

Bill Collector / Manager: Government Official – PRI Functionary: Reporting to Sarpanch and PS, Interface with Block-level / Regional Finance Department

Maintenance Manpower: Contractual / Consolidated / Government employees: Field executors

On-Demand Service: to be availed through service tickets

Revenue Officer: Government Official – Revenue Head – Representative of Revenue Department: Could be clubbed across villages/Panchayats

Surveyor: Government Official – Representative of Block-level Survey Department: Could be clubbed across villages/Panchayats

Mahila Police: Government Official – Women Security & Safety Head – Representative of Police Department: Could be clubbed across villages/Panchayats

Agricultural Assistant / Veterinary Assistant / Horticultural Assistant / Related: Government Officials – Representatives of Respective Departments at the Block level: Could be clubbed across villages/Panchayats

Miscellaneous services: to be hired from Block-level/ District-level/ contracted / outsourced.



The recommended LSG model is generic and would require specific customization, based on state level Panchayat Acts and province-level requirements.

7. Conclusion

This brief study on Grama Sachivalayam system of Andhra Pradesh has attempted towards investigation of various dimensions of the GS framework, its implementation, and the nitty-gritty of the system's practical aspects, providing a pragmatic reflection about the decentralized local governance systems. The major outcomes and contributions of the study are as follows:

- a. General Assessment of GS framework: Objective 1: [Section 4.1](#)
- b. Detailed Assessment of GS service delivery process and mechanisms: Objective 2: [Section 4.2](#)
- c. Examination of the perceived benefits and facilitators of the GS system: Objective 3: [Section 4.3](#)
- d. Uncovering the mechanisms of change brought about by the GS system: Objective 4: [Section 4.4](#)
- e. Deriving the GS conceptual model of service delivery: [Section 4.5](#)
- f. Critical assessment of challenges of GS system and perceived gaps of GS system: [Section 5.1](#)
- g. Thematic analysis of GS challenges and loopholes: [Section 5.2](#)
- h. Unravelling the Structural gaps in the GS model: [Section 5.3](#)
- i. Assessing whether the GS system has strengthened the PRIs: Objective 5: [Section 5.4](#)
- j. Assessment of the overall impact of the GS system: [Section 5.4](#)
- k. Assessment of the sustainability of the GS system: [Section 5.4](#)
- l. Examination of the replicability of the GS model: [Section 5.4.2](#)
- m. Recommendations for the betterment of the GS model: [Section 6.1](#)

Finally, we derive and provide an integrated model for local self-governance ([Section 6.2](#)) along with a better administrative structure for self-sustained local governance which has been derived through the integration of relationships observed and insights drawn through rigorous analysis of quantitative and qualitative field data. The conceptual model, and the recommendations suggested thereof, opens doors to multiple dialogues about how to better local governance systems. It is expected that the dialogues, thus initiated, benefit the larger masses of disadvantaged rural communities and help in achieving the larger good.

7.1 Limitations of the Study

This evaluation study has several limitations. First, the study began and was designed as a short case study and an extension to the main exhaustive study conducted at Pan-India level – “Evaluation of CSS of Revamped RGSA of MoPR”. As such, the initial design was sufficient to undertake a basic study of the GS model. However, as the study unfolded and many insights emerged during the field discussions and the request of the Ministry to

assess the overall impact of the GS model and examine its replicability across other states, a more detailed analysis was undertaken on the data collected through earlier research design. As a result, the critical assessment of the GS model and the replicability have been conducted as a post-hoc analysis, which have not necessarily been captured in the survey instruments.

Second, the analysis is based only on the interactions with the key informants we had conceptualized initially and those we could get access to in the limited period of two months duration of the study. We couldn't interact with the functional heads of various departments, due to which we could have missed some important perspectives and an opportunity to present a more unbiased assessment of the GS model.

Third, this has been conducted mainly as a perception-based study, thus not capturing specific hard and directly measurable metrics. This aspect needs to be considered while interpreting the results and recommendations based thereon.

Finally, being an appendix study, it was limited to a small number of aspects. We couldn't conduct a comprehensive study of individual functions and functionaries based on specific KPIs and success metrics. of GPDP not measured or captured.

7.2 Future Opportunities

While we have been mostly limited with the scope awarded and the duration of the study, this evaluation study, which finds limited success of the GS model, sets open various dialogues and research areas. It would be worthwhile conducting complete structural audit of the system and its implementation to revalidate the causes of low success. A thorough Cost-benefit analysis of the incremental value added through the introduction of this new system of local self-governance merits a deep dive. Finally, the recommendations provided could be contrasted and benchmarked with various other local self-government models and refine the proposed integrated framework for standardized implementation in all states.

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Appendix A. Quantitative Survey Instruments for Grama Sachivalayam Survey

A.1. Quantitative Survey Instrument for GS Panchayat Secretary

Informed consent form

Hello, my name is [Name], and I am conducting a survey on behalf of [Organization Name] to understand how the Village Secretariat (Grama Sachivalayam) has impacted the delivery of public services in your jurisdiction. This survey will take about 15-20 minutes. Your responses will remain confidential, and participation is entirely voluntary. You can skip any question or stop responding to the survey at any time.

Do I have your consent to proceed with this interview?

- Yes
- No

(If No, thank the respondent for their time and politely end the interview)

A. Demographic Details:

1. Name of the respondent
2. Designation: (Panchayat Secretary; Panchayat Secretary Grade III (Village Secretariat))
3. Mobile No. _____ (numbers only)
4. Email id, if any: _____
5. Name of the district (Dropdown)
6. Name of the block (Dropdown)
7. Name of the Gram Panchayat (Dropdown)
8. Name of the Grama Sachivalayam (Dropdown)

B. Specific Questions:

1. How long have you been working as a Panchayat Secretary?
 - Less than 1 year, 1–3 years, 3–5 years, More than 5 years
2. How many households are under your jurisdiction (of Grama Sachivalayam)?
 - Less than 500, 500–1,000, 1,001–2,000, More than 2,000, Other
3. What are the most frequent services or schemes you help implement in your Panchayat?
 - Pensions, Housing, Health services, Education, Employment schemes, Other
4. How do you process beneficiaries' requests for services or government schemes?
 - Manual tracking, Digital tracking, Mixed approach, I don't track requests directly
5. How often do you interact with other Village Secretariat functionaries?
 - Daily, Weekly, Monthly, As needed
6. How effective is the coordination between different functionaries in the Village

Secretariat?

- Very effective, Somewhat effective, Neither effective nor ineffective, Ineffective
7. Please comment on the quality of support you receive from Village Secretariat officials.
 - Adequate support, Minimal support, No support, Not applicable
 8. How often do you submit reports to higher authorities regarding ongoing projects at the village secretariat?
 - Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Annually, Don't submit / Need not submit, Other
 9. How clear and actionable are the directives you receive from higher authorities about village secretariat?
 - Very clear, Somewhat clear, Not clear, Vague
 10. Do you feel you have adequate resources (staff, budget, technology) to perform your duties at the village secretariat?
 - Yes, mostly adequate, Partially adequate, Not adequate, I lack critical resources
 - a. Please provide your comments on the availability and adequacy of resources (such as staff, budget, and technology) needed to perform your duties effectively at the village secretariat.
 - (Open-ended)
 11. How often do you experience delays in service delivery of Village Secretariat?
 - Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, Never
 12. What are the main reasons for delays in service delivery of village secretariat?
 - Coordination issues, Document issues, Approvals from higher authorities, Lack of staff, Other
 13. What kinds of logistical challenges do you face in delivering services to remote or marginalized communities through the village secretariat?
 - Transportation, Lack of digital access, Communication gaps, Other
 14. How do you ensure that services reach all sections of the community, including marginalized groups?
 - By regular visits, Through volunteers, Via community meetings, More than one ways shown above, Not systematically done, Other
 15. How often do you collect feedback from beneficiaries regarding the services they receive through village secretariat?
 - Weekly, Monthly, Occasionally, Rarely
 16. How do you handle grievances or complaints from beneficiaries at the village secretariat?
 - In-person meetings, Written reports, Digital platforms, More than one ways shown above, No formal process, Other
 17. Please comment about how your transition from the old system to the Village Secretariat system impacted your role.
 - Much easier, Somewhat easier, No change, Made it more difficult
 18. Do you think the Village Secretariat system has made service delivery faster?
 - Yes, significantly faster, Yes, but only slightly, No change, It's slower now
 19. Do you think the Village Secretariat system has made your job easier or more difficult?

- Much easier, Slightly easier, No change, Made my job more difficult
20. What is your level of satisfaction with the support you receive from the Village Secretariat staff?
- 1 - Highly Dissatisfied, 2 - Dissatisfied, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Satisfied, 5 - Highly Satisfied
21. How do you perceive the availability and adequacy of the available infrastructure at the Village Secretariat in terms of physical assets such as Buildings, Furniture, etc.
- Inadequate / Unavailable, Available, but need lot of improvement, Adequate
22. How do you perceive the availability and adequacy of the maintenance resources available at the Village Secretariat for maintaining the infrastructure of Village Secretariat?
- Inadequate / Unavailable, Available, but need revisions, Adequate
23. Could you please provide further comments on the availability and adequacy of infrastructure and maintenance resources?
- (open - ended)
24. How has digitization impacted your ability to deliver services at the village secretariat?
- Significantly improved, Somewhat improved, No change, Made it more difficult, Other
25. How often have you received training on using digital tools for service delivery at the village secretariat?
- Monthly, Quarterly, Annually, I haven't received any
26. Do you think digital platforms have made the service delivery process more efficient at the village secretariat?
- Yes, very efficient; Somewhat efficient; No change; Slowed down the process, Other
27. Please rate your collaboration with Village Volunteers in ensuring timely service delivery to beneficiaries.
- 1 - Highly inadequate collaboration, Inadequate collaboration, Neutral, Effective collaboration, Highly effective collaboration
28. What are the main challenges you face in coordinating with other Village Secretariat functionaries?
- Coordination gaps, Lack of communication, Lack of resources, None, Other
29. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the Village Secretariat system compared to the previous system?
- Much more effective, Slightly more effective, No change, Less effective
30. What improvements or changes would you suggest to make the Village Secretariat system more effective?
- (Open - ended)
31. How has the Grama Sachivalayam system evolved in the last five months? Please provide your opinion on this.
- (Open - ended)

A.2. Quantitative Survey Instrument for GS Volunteers

Demographic Details:

1. Name of the respondent
2. Designation and the Ward:
3. Mobile No. _____ (numbers only)
4. Email id, if any: _____
5. Name of the district (Dropdown)
6. Name of the block (Dropdown)
7. Name of the Gram Panchayat (Dropdown)
8. Name of the Grama Sachivalayam (Dropdown)
9. How often do you participate in the Grama Sabha meetings / meetings of the Village Secretariat?
 - (Very often; Sometimes; Rarely)

Section : A

1. How long have you been working as a Village Volunteer?
 - Less than 6 months, 6 months to 1 year, 1–2 years, More than 2 years
2. How many households are you responsible for?
 - Upto 50 households, 51–100 households, More than 100 households
3. What is your highest educational qualification?
4. How frequently do you visit the households assigned to you?
 - Weekly, Bi-weekly, Monthly, Less frequently, Only when called for
5. Which of the following services do you most frequently assist with in your role as a volunteer?
 - Pension schemes, Housing schemes, Healthcare services, Education assistance, Employment assistance, Crop insurance, Other
6. How often do you update the profiles of households in your assigned area?
 - Every month, Every 3 months, Every 6 months, Only when new information is needed, Do not update
7. How do you ensure that marginalized groups (e.g., women, elderly, disabled) receive fair access to services?
 - Regular follow-up with these groups, Prioritize their applications for government schemes, Conduct additional outreach to ensure awareness, More than one of above, No specific process, Other
8. How would you rate the quality of communication between you and the households you serve?
 - Very poor, Poor, Neutral, Good, Very good
9. How do households typically communicate their needs to you?
 - In-person visits, Phone calls, Text messages, Village meetings, Other
10. How often do you report issues or needs of households to the Gram Panchayat or relevant line departments?
 - Weekly, Bi-weekly, Monthly, Only when issues arise, Other
11. How frequently do you attend meetings or receive instructions from the Gram Panchayat?

- Weekly, Bi-weekly, Monthly, Rarely/Only when necessary
12. How would you describe the feedback you receive from Gram Panchayat officials or line departments on the issues you report?
 - Always timely and helpful, Sometimes timely but not always helpful, Delayed feedback but helpful, Rarely receive feedback
 13. How would you compare the efficiency of the current Village Secretariat system to the system in place before its establishment?
 - Much more efficient, Slightly more efficient, No change, Less efficient, Don't know/Can't Say
 14. How quickly do households typically receive services after applying through the Village Secretariat (on an average)?
 - Within 48 hours, Within 1 week, 1–2 weeks, 2–4 weeks, More than a month
 15. Compared to previous systems, do you think the Village Secretariat has improved access to government services for marginalized groups?
 - Yes, significantly; Yes, somewhat; No, not really; No, it has worsened access
 16. How would you rate the overall coverage of services in your area?
 - All households receive services, Most households receive services, Some households receive services, Very few households receive services
 17. What are the biggest challenges you face as a Village Volunteer?
 - Lack of training, Insufficient resources, Difficulty coordinating with line departments/functionaries, Resistance from households, Time constraints
 18. How often do you face delays when trying to resolve issues or grievances on behalf of households?
 - Never, Occasionally, Frequently, Always
 19. How would you describe the support you receive from the Gram Panchayat or Village Secretariat functionaries in addressing the challenges you face?
 - Very good, Good, Average, Poor, Very poor
 20. Do you feel that the training you received before starting your role as a volunteer was sufficient for you to perform your duties?
 - Yes, completely sufficient; Somewhat sufficient; No, not sufficient; I did not receive any formal training
 21. What additional support or resources would help you perform your duties more effectively?
 - More training opportunities, Better access to technology, Improved communication with officials, More volunteers, Transportation for visiting remote households, Increased Honorarium
 22. How effective are your existing technological tools in managing beneficiary data and reporting information?
 - Very effective, Somewhat effective, Not effective, I do not use any technological tools
 23. How easy do you find the technological tools (e.g., mobile apps) to use in your day-to-day work?
 - Very easy, Somewhat easy, Difficult, I do not use any technological tools

24. How has the Village Secretariat system changed your community's access to government services?
- Significantly improved, Somewhat improved, No change, Worsened access
25. How confident are you that the Village Secretariat system is transparent?
- Very confident, Somewhat confident, Not confident, I am unsure
26. Do you think the Village Secretariat system has helped improve the livelihoods of households in your area?
- Yes, significantly; Yes, somewhat; No, not at all
27. Would you recommend the Village Secretariat system be expanded to other regions / states?
- Yes, definitely; Yes, with improvements; No, it needs significant changes first; No, it should not be expanded; Other
28. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your role as a Village Volunteer?
- (1 - Very Dissatisfied, 2 - Dissatisfied, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Satisfied, 5 - Very Satisfied)
29. Please mention some of your pain points as a Village Secretariat Volunteer
- (Open-ended)
30. Please suggest some of the ways to improve the functioning of the Village Secretariat System
- (Open-ended)
31. How has the Grama Sachivalayam system evolved in the last five months? Please provide your opinion on this.
- (Open-ended)

A.3. Quantitative Survey Instrument for GS Beneficiaries

A. Demographics

1. Name of the respondent
2. Name of the district
3. Name of the block
4. Name of the Gram Panchayat
5. Name of the Grama Sachivalayam
6. Name of the village
7. Gender of the respondent
8. What is your age?
9. What is your primary occupation?
10. What is your highest level of education?

B. Awareness of Village Secretariat and Government Schemes

1. How informed do you feel about the various government schemes available through the Village Secretariat?
 - Very Informed, Somewhat Informed, Not Informed
2. Did you receive any specific information or communication from the Village Secretariat regarding government schemes?
 - Yes, Regularly; Yes, Occasionally; No, Never
3. Is there any scheme that you have missed because you didn't know about it on time?
 - Yes, Many; Yes, A Few; No

C. Time Efficiency of Service Delivery

4. How long does it take for you to receive the service or benefit after applying through the Village Secretariat?
 - Within 24 hours, Within 2 - 3 days, Within 1 week, 1 - 2 weeks, 2 - 4 weeks, More than a month, Still awaiting
5. Has the time taken to receive services improved since the introduction of the Village Secretariat?
 - Significantly improved, Somewhat improved, No change, Worsened
6. How many times did you have to visit the Village Secretariat for follow-up on your service request?
 - None, 1 time, 2 - 3 times, More than 3 times
7. How promptly do Village Secretariat officials / Volunteers respond to your queries or complaints?
 - Within a day, 1-2 days, 3 - 5 days, More than a week, No response

D. Quality of Service Delivery

8. How would you rate the quality of services provided by the Village Secretariat?
 - Very Poor, Poor, Neutral, Good, Excellent

9. Are you treated respectfully and fairly by the Village Secretariat officials?
- Yes, Always, Yes, Mostly, Sometimes, No

E. Transparency of the System

10. Do you feel that the processes of the Village Secretariat are more transparent compared to previous systems?
- Much more transparent, Slightly more transparent, Same as before, Less transparent, Other
11. Are you given clear information about the services and eligibility criteria?
- Yes, Very Clear; Yes, Somewhat Clear; No, Unclear
12. Do you believe the Village Secretariat has reduced the need for middlemen (except Volunteers) in service delivery?
- Yes, Completely; Yes, Mostly, No, Still Required, No, Increased

F. Issue Resolution

13. If there was a delay in receiving services, was the reason for the delay communicated to you?
- Yes, Clearly; Yes, But Not Clearly; No, very rarely; Other

G. Digital System Efficiency

14. Are you aware of digital platforms (e.g., mobile apps, online portals) used by the Village Secretariat for service delivery?
- Yes, Very Familiar; Yes, Somewhat Familiar; No, Unfamiliar
15. Do you feel that the introduction of digital systems has improved service efficiency?
- Yes, Greatly Improved; Yes, Slightly Improved; No Change, Worsened, I am not aware

H. Accessibility and Inclusivity

16. Are the services from the Village Secretariat easily accessible to marginalized groups (e.g., women, elderly, disabled)?
- Yes, Very Accessible; Yes, Somewhat Accessible; No, Not Accessible; Don't Know
17. Has the Village Secretariat improved access to government services in your village compared to earlier systems?
- Yes, Significantly; Yes, Slightly; No Change; No, Worsened
18. Do you feel more connected to the government with the establishment of a village secretariat?
- Yes, Somewhat, No, Other

I. Overall Satisfaction with Grama Sachivalayam services

19. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with the overall services provided by the Village Secretariat?
- (1 - Very Dissatisfied, 2 - Dissatisfied, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Satisfied, 5 - Very Satisfied)
20. Do you have any other suggestions to improve the village secretariat system?
- (Open-ended)
21. How has the Grama Sachivalayam system evolved in the last five months? Please provide your opinion on this.
- (Open-ended)

Appendix-B: Qualitative Survey Instruments for Grama Sachivalayam Survey

B.1 GS Panchayat Secretary Interview Guide

Demographics

1. Name of the District, Block and Panchayat:
2. Name of the Village Secretariat:
3. Name of the respondent:
4. Gender of the respondent:
5. Mobile No. (if they provide):
6. Designation:

Background Information (keep these discussions very brief)

1. Could you tell me a bit about your background and how long you've been working as a Panchayat Secretary?
(Probe: What were your previous roles? How long have you been in this position?)
2. What is the size and composition of the population you serve?
(Probe: How many households are under your jurisdiction? What is the demographic makeup of your area?)
3. What are your key responsibilities as a Panchayat Secretary?
(Probe: What specific services do you oversee? What are your daily tasks?)

Transition to the Village Secretariat System

4. How has the Village Secretariat system evolved during the last few years (and months)?
5. How did the transition from the old system to the current Village Secretariat system affect your role?
(Probe: Was the transition smooth or challenging? What changed in terms of your duties?)
6. What are the biggest differences between the previous system and the Village Secretariat system?
(Probe: Is the new system more organized or efficient? Are there areas where the old system worked better?)
7. How has the new system impacted service delivery in your Panchayat?
(Probe: Does the Village Secretariat help residents receive better services from the Gram Panchayat office? Has the process become faster or more accessible? Are there improvements in coordination?)
8. Do you think the new system has made your job easier or more difficult? Why?
(Probe: Have there been specific improvements or new challenges?)

Responsibilities and Service Delivery

8. What are the most frequent services or schemes you help implement in your Panchayat?
(Probe: Are there specific services, like pensions, housing, health, or education, that you handle most often?)

9. How do you process beneficiaries' requests for services or government schemes?
(Probe: What is the step-by-step process from application to service delivery?)
10. How do you track the progress of applications or grievances raised by beneficiaries?
(Probe: Is there a system for monitoring applications? How are delays addressed?)
11. How do you handle grievances or complaints from beneficiaries?
(Probe: Is there a formal process for handling complaints? How often do beneficiaries raise grievances?)

Coordination and Interaction with Other Officials

12. Composition of the Village Secretariat System: How many functionaries are there in your office.
 - Sanctioned posts?
 - Vacant posts?
12. How often do you interact with the Village Secretariat functionaries?
(Probe: Are these interactions formal or informal? Do you have regular meetings?)
13. How effective is the coordination among different functionaries (e.g., line department officials, volunteers) works in the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Are there any gaps in communication or teamwork?)
14. How do you communicate with the Gram Panchayat and higher authorities regarding ongoing projects and issues?
(Probe: Do you submit formal reports, attend meetings, or use digital platforms?)
15. Could you provide an example where coordination between functionaries led to better or successful service delivery?
(Probe: What was the service? How did collaboration contribute to success?)
16. What are the main challenges you face in coordinating with the Village Secretariat functionaries?
(Probe: Are there delays, communication breakdowns, or logistical issues?)
17. How do you collaborate with Village Volunteers to ensure that services reach beneficiaries?
(Probe: How frequently do you communicate with them? How do they assist in the process?)

Support from the Village Secretariat and Higher Authorities

18. What kind of support do you receive from the officials in the Village Secretariat (e.g., Panchayat members, volunteers, line department staff)?
(Probe: Do you feel that the support is sufficient? Are there areas where you need more assistance?)
19. How often do you receive guidance or directives from higher authorities regarding service delivery or project implementation?
(Probe: Are the directives clear and actionable? How often do you receive new instructions?)
20. Do you feel that you have adequate resources (e.g., staff, budget, technology) to perform your duties efficiently?
(Probe: Are there any specific areas where more resources are needed?)
21. What kind of training or capacity-building programs have you participated in as part of the Village Secretariat system?
(Probe: How useful were these programs in helping you perform your duties?)

Challenges in Service Delivery and Coordination

(to be asked to the PS, as the overseeing authority of the Village Secretariat System)

22. What are the main challenges you face in delivering services to the community?
(Probe: Are there specific issues related to logistics, delays, or lack of resources?)
23. How often do you experience delays in service delivery, and what are the main reasons for these delays?
(Probe: Are delays caused by coordination issues, beneficiary documents, or approval processes?)
24. What kinds of logistical challenges (e.g., transportation, communication) do you face when delivering services to remote or marginalized communities?
(Probe: How do you overcome these challenges?)
25. How do you manage the workload of delivering services while ensuring transparency and accountability?
(Probe: Are there processes in place to ensure records are kept accurately and that beneficiaries are informed of their application status?)

Digitalization and Infrastructure

26. Could you describe the infrastructure available for the Village Secretariat, including the building, office space, computers, and any maintenance resources?
 - Is the building and office space sufficient for staff and service delivery? What challenges do you face?
 - How is the maintenance of the building and equipment handled? Are there any gaps in resources?
 - Are there any improvements needed in terms of infrastructure to make your work more efficient?
27. How has digitalization impacted your work in the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: What digital platforms do you use for tracking applications, monitoring progress, or communication? Do you find that technology supports or complicates service delivery?)
28. Do you feel that digital platforms have made the service delivery process more efficient? Why or why not?
(Probe: Are there areas where technology has improved communication, speed, or accuracy?)
29. Have you received training on using digital tools for service delivery and monitoring? Was this training sufficient?
(Probe: Are there areas where more training is needed?)
30. What are the main challenges you face in using digital tools for your work?
(Probe: Are there technical difficulties, lack of access, or lack of training?)

Community Engagement and Feedback

30. How do you engage with the community to understand their needs and expectations from the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Do you hold community meetings, consult with village leaders, or collect feedback through surveys?)
31. How do you ensure that the services provided by the Village Secretariat reach all sections of the community, especially marginalized groups?

(Probe: What strategies are in place to ensure inclusivity? How do you reach out to women, the elderly, and disabled individuals?)

32. How often do you collect feedback from beneficiaries regarding the services they receive?

(Probe: How is this feedback used to improve service delivery?)

33. Could you share an example where community feedback led to an improvement in service delivery?

(Probe: What changes were made based on the feedback?)

34. Could you describe your interactions with Village Volunteers and how effective they are in supporting service delivery? What are the strengths they bring, and what challenges or pain points do you face when working with them?

(Probe: How often do you communicate with them, and in what ways do they assist in your work? What aspects of their support do you find most effective? What challenges arise in coordinating with them, and how do these challenges affect service delivery?)

34. How do you see the Village Secretariat system evolving over the next few years?

(Probe: Are there areas where you expect further improvements? Do you foresee challenges in scaling or sustaining the system?)

35. What improvements or changes would you suggest to make the Village Secretariat system more efficient and effective?

(Probe: Are there areas where more support, resources, or better coordination is needed? How can we improve better coordination and synergy between the VS office and GP office?)

36. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a Panchayat Secretary?

Thank you for your time and valuable insights. Your feedback will help improve the functioning of the Village Secretariat system and enhance service delivery in the community.

B.2 GS Staff FGD Guide

Introduction and Consent

Hello, everyone. Thank you for participating in today's discussion. My name is [Name], and I will be guiding our conversation. We're here to understand your experiences working within the Village Secretariat system, the challenges you face, and your suggestions for improvement.

Your responses are confidential, and this FGD/interview will last about 90 minutes. Feel free to share your thoughts openly. There are no right or wrong answers, just your experiences.

Demographics

1. Name of the Village Secretariat:
2. Name of the District, Block and Panchayat:
3. Names and Designations of the respondents / FGD participants:

S.No.	Name	Designation

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Can each of you briefly describe your role in the Village Secretariat and the main responsibilities you manage?
(Probe: What services or schemes do you oversee? How do you support the community?)
2. What is your day-to-day routine like in the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: What tasks take up most of your time? How do you prioritize your work?)
3. Have you received the requisite training to undertake the roles, responsibilities and functions you are supposed to perform?

(Probe: Have you received specific training on your respective functions? Have you received specific training on technology platforms such as PFMS, e-Gramswaraj, IT training, etc.?)

Interaction and Coordination

3. How often do you interact with other staff in the Village Secretariat and Panchayats (e.g., Panchayat Secretary, Volunteers, line department officials, panchayat members)?
(Probe: Daily, weekly, or only as needed? Are these formal or informal interactions? Do you receive adequate support from the Line Departments? Describe the process more clearly)
4. What is the typical mode of communication when coordinating with other Village Secretariat staff?
(Probe: Do you prefer phone calls, digital platforms, in-person meetings? Which method is most effective?)
5. How do you work together with Volunteers to deliver services to the community?
(Probe: How do they assist you in service delivery? Do you face any coordination challenges?)
6. Could you provide an example of successful coordination among Village Secretariat staff that led to better service delivery?
(Probe: What was the service, and how did the coordination help?)

Challenges and Barriers

7. What are the main challenges you face in your role within the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Is it resource constraints, staffing issues, delays in services, or other factors?)
8. Have you encountered difficulties in coordinating with other Village Secretariat staff or line department officials? If yes, can you share some examples? (Note two to three examples from different staff members)
(Probe: How are these issues usually addressed?)
9. Are there any specific resources or support that you feel are lacking for your work in the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Do you have access to adequate financial, technical, or human resources?)
10. How do you manage the workload in your role? Has your workload increased or decreased since the introduction of the Village Secretariat system?
(Probe: Do you feel more organized, or are there additional burdens?)

Service Delivery and Impact

11. How has the Village Secretariat system improved or impacted service delivery in your Panchayat?
(Probe: Has the system made services faster or more accessible? Are there fewer delays?)
12. What types of services tend to take the most time to deliver, and what causes these delays?
(Probe: Is it processing applications, resolving grievances, or managing records? Are there external factors causing delays?)

13. How do you track the progress of service applications or grievances raised by beneficiaries?
(Probe: Is there a formal tracking system? Are digital tools used for this?)
14. How do you handle grievances or complaints from the community?
(Probe: Is there a formal process, and how effective is it in resolving issues?)

Monitoring and Reporting

15. How is your work monitored and evaluated within the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Are there regular performance reviews or audits? Who conducts these evaluations, and how often?)
16. How often do you submit reports on your work or the progress of services to higher authorities?
(Probe: Weekly, monthly, quarterly? What kind of data do you typically include in these reports?)
17. How do you ensure transparency in the services you deliver?
(Probe: Are there accountability checks or documentation processes in place?)

Digitalization and Technology

18. What role does digitalization play in your work with the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Do you use digital platforms for tracking applications or communicating with other staff? How effective are these tools?)
19. Have you received training on using digital tools for service delivery? Was the training sufficient for your needs?
(Probe: Are there areas where you need more training or support?)
20. How has digitization impacted the efficiency of service delivery?
(Probe: Has it made processes faster, or are there challenges like technical issues or lack of access?)

Infrastructure and Resources

21. What kind of infrastructure and resources (e.g., office space, equipment) are available to you in the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Are the office facilities adequate for service delivery? Do you have the necessary tools to do your job effectively?)
22. How is the maintenance of the Village Secretariat building and equipment handled?
(Probe: Is there a regular maintenance schedule? Are there delays or challenges in keeping the infrastructure in good condition?)

Suggestions

23. What improvements or changes would you suggest to make the Village Secretariat system more efficient?
(Probe: Should there be improvements in communication, additional resources, or better training?)
24. Do you think the Village Secretariat system can evolve further? How do you see its role growing in the future?
(Probe: Are there areas where it can take on more responsibility or streamline operations further?)



25. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience working in the Village Secretariat or suggestions for improvement?

(Open-ended question to capture additional thoughts or ideas.)

Thank you all for your time and valuable insights. Your feedback will be helpful in understanding the strengths and challenges of the Village Secretariat system and will contribute to improving service delivery in the future.

B.3 GS Volunteer FGD Guide

Demographic

1. Name of the Village Secretariat:
2. Name of the District, Block and Panchayat:
3. Names and Designations of the respondents / FGD participants:

S.No.	Name	Designation	Mobile No.

Background Information

1. Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your role as a Village Volunteer?
(Probe: How long have you been a volunteer? What motivated you to take up this role? Nature of job: Permanent or regular?)
2. How many households are you responsible for, and how is the demography?
(Probe: Do these households come from a variety of social, economic, or cultural backgrounds?)
3. Could you walk me through a typical day in your role as a Village Volunteer?
(Probe: What kind of tasks do you perform daily? What is your main focus?)

Roles and Responsibilities

4. What are your main responsibilities when it comes to interacting with households in your area?
(Probe: What services do you provide most often? What specific tasks are part of your job?)
5. How do you conduct the baseline surveys and maintain profiles for your allocated households?
(Probe: What challenges do you face in gathering or updating information from these families?)
6. How do you ensure that the needs of every household, especially marginalized groups, are addressed in your area?
(Probe: Are there specific approaches you use to identify and address the needs of women, the elderly, or people with disabilities?)

7. Who do you report to or closely work with in the village secretariat? Could you explain a bit more on how you work with the secretariat? Have you gone through any training? If yes, can you share your experience?
8. Have you been provided proper training on your roles, responsibilities and functions? Please provide details.

Service Delivery and Impact

9. Could you describe the process you follow to help people access government schemes, from identification to service delivery?
(Probe: How do you follow up on applications or grievances?)
10. How do you ensure services reach households efficiently and on time? What kind of timelines do you aim for?
(Probe: Are there specific challenges in delivering services within the expected timelines? Are timelines pre-defined for you?)
11. How many days does it take to provide a service such as issuing a birth/death certificate or ration card?
12. Could you share any examples of how the Gram Sachivalayam has positively impacted a household or community?
(Probe: What was the situation before, and how did the intervention through the Gram Sachivalayam help?)

Challenges and Support

13. Are there adequate volunteers to look after the villages/households in your VS?
14. What are the main challenges you face while performing your role as a Village Volunteer?
(Probe: Are there any particular barriers like lack of resources, training, or support from departments?)
15. How do you manage these challenges or overcome barriers to effectively deliver services?
(Probe: Have there been any cases where you couldn't deliver a service? What happened?)
16. What support do you receive from the Gram Panchayat or line departments? Is it sufficient?
(Probe: Do you have enough resources, supervision, or access to officials when you need guidance?)
17. How do you handle logistical challenges, such as serving remote areas or communities with limited infrastructure?
(Probe: Are there strategies in place to make sure remote or isolated households receive services?)

Technology and Tools

18. Do you use any technological tools (e.g., smartphones, apps) in your work? How effective are they?

(Probe: Do you find these tools easy to use? Have they improved how quickly you can deliver services?)

19. Have you encountered difficulties using technology to manage household data or deliver services?

(Probe: What challenges have you faced in collecting, updating, or reporting data?)

20. Did you receive any training in this regard?

Governance and Transparency

21. What measures are in place to ensure transparency and accountability in your work?

(Probe: How do you ensure all households receive fair access to services? What happens if there is a complaint or grievance?)

22. Have you ever faced any ethical dilemmas or situations where transparency was a concern? How did you handle them?

(Probe: Have there been any instances where you encountered pressure or witnessed unfair practices?)

Suggestions for Improvement and Future Vision

23. What changes or improvements would you suggest to make the Gram Sachivalayam system more effective?

(Probe: Do you think additional services should be introduced? How could the system better support volunteers?)

24. How do you see your role evolving in the future? Do you think more volunteers will be needed, or do you think the system will change?

(Probe: Do you think the Village Secretariat model can be expanded to other regions? What challenges or opportunities do you see in this regard?)

Thank you for your time and valuable insights. We are confident that your feedback will help improve the Village Secretariat system.

B.4 GS Beneficiaries Interview Guide

Consent Statement (To be read before beginning the interview)

Hello, my name is [Name], and I am conducting an interview on behalf of [Organization Name] to understand how the Village Secretariat (Gram Sachivalayam) has impacted the delivery of public services in your community. This interview will take about 30 minutes. Your responses will remain confidential, and participation is entirely voluntary. You can skip any question or stop the interview at any time.

Do I have your consent to proceed with this interview?

- Yes
- No

(If No, thank the respondent for their time and politely end the interview.)

Note to interviewers:

The aim of this interview is to understand:

- How efficiently the Village Secretariat delivers services,
- Improvements in service quality and transparency compared to previous systems, and
- The overall impact on beneficiaries' lives.

The respondent beneficiaries would be the ones who have attended the Gram Sabha meetings at least once during the last year.

- Be patient and actively listen to the respondent's stories.
- Ensure you ask follow-up questions to encourage more detailed responses.
- Capture examples wherever possible to help illustrate the respondents' experiences with the system.
- Keep in mind the four key areas: service efficiency, service quality, transparency, and impact on beneficiaries' lives.

Be conversational, respectful, and patient. Encourage the respondent to provide detailed answers by asking follow-up questions where needed. Listen actively, and use non-judgmental, open-ended prompts like "Could you give me an example?" or "How did that impact you?".

Demographic

1. Name of the District:
2. Name of the Block Panchayat:
3. Name of the Gram Panchayat:
4. Name of the Village Secretariat:
5. Name of the respondent:
6. Gender of the respondent:
7. Mobile No. (if they provide):

Specific Questions

1. Could you tell me a bit about your experience with the Village Secretariat?
(Probes:
 - *When did you first hear about the Village Secretariat? And how?*
 - *What was your first interaction with them like?*
 - *What services did you first approach them for?*
2. What types of government services have you or your family accessed through the Village Secretariat?
(Probes:
 - *Could you list the specific services or schemes (e.g., pensions, healthcare, housing)?*
 - *How often do you use these services? Is it a regular or occasional need?*
 - *Were there any services that you applied for but did not receive? If so, why do you think that happened?*
3. How has the process been for you when applying for these services?
(Probes:
 - *Was the application process clear, or did you need assistance?*
 - *Did you find the requirements easy to meet, such as the documents needed?*
 - *Were there any delays? If yes, how long did it take for you to receive the service or benefit?*
 - *Do you know about the process of how your complaint was addressed?*
4. Since the Village Secretariat system was introduced, have you noticed any differences in the way services are provided compared to earlier?
(Probes:
 - *How were services provided in your village before the Village Secretariat?*
 - *Have you noticed improvements in terms of speed or ease of access?*
 - *Could you give an example of a time when the new system helped you or your family more effectively than before?*
5. If you need any service, whom do you approach in the Village Secretariat? Is there any point of contact to avail the services?
6. If you require any service, how much time does the Village Secretariat take to deliver it?
7. Have you encountered any challenges or difficulties when accessing services through the Village Secretariat?
(Probes:
 - *What were the specific challenges (e.g., delays, repeated visits, unclear information)?*
 - *How did these challenges affect you or your family?*
 - *How were these issues resolved? Were they resolved in a timely manner?*
8. How transparent do you think the Village Secretariat's processes are? Do you feel the system is fair and free from any malpractices?
(Probes:
 - *Do you feel informed about how decisions are made regarding services?*
 - *Have you ever felt the need to pay a middleman to get things done?*
 - *Can you share an example of a time when you felt the system was either*

transparent or unclear?)

9. Since the Village Secretariat was introduced, what changes have you seen in your village?

(Probes:

- *Are there any specific improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, or social services?*
- *Do you think marginalized groups, like women or the elderly, have better access to services now?*
- *Can you share a success story or an example of someone whose life has improved because of the Village Secretariat?)*

10. What would you suggest to improve the Village Secretariat system?

(Probes:

- *Are there any services that should be added or made easier to access?*
- *Do you think the officials and volunteers could improve how they engage with the community?*
- *If you could change one thing about the system, what would it be?)*

B.5 GS Sarpanch/ER Interview Guide

Demographic Information

1. Name of the District, Block and Panchayat:
2. Name of the Village Secretariat:
3. Name of the respondent:
4. Gender of the respondent:
5. Mobile No. (if they provide):
6. Designation:

Awareness and Understanding of the Village Secretariat System

1. When was this Village Secretariat System introduced in your Panchayat?
2. How would you explain the Village Secretariat system to someone unfamiliar with it?
(Probe: What are the key services it delivers? How does it differ from previous systems?)
3. How do you think the Village Secretariat system is different from the older system[11] that existed before it?
(Probe: Are there specific areas where it has improved service delivery or governance? What challenges did you face under the older system?)
4. How well do you think the general population understands the role of the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Are villagers aware of the services available through the Secretariat? How have you helped raise awareness?)
5. What are the major benefits of this Village Secretariat System?

Roles and Responsibilities in the Village Secretariat System

5. What are your primary responsibilities in ensuring the effective functioning of the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: How do you supervise the activities of the Village Secretariat office and ensure that all services are delivered efficiently?)
6. Have you received any formal training regarding the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: Have you received training about the demarcation of roles, responsibilities and functions of the VS)
7. How do you handle your role in managing Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha meetings, and the planning of Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs)? How does the Village Secretariat help with this?
(Probe: How often do these meetings occur? How do you ensure participation from the community, and how are decisions communicated and implemented?)
8. Please describe how you monitor the officers and staff of the Village Secretariat?
(Probe: How often do you review their performance? Have you ever had to address issues of underperformance? Can you share an example?)

Impact of the Village Secretariat on Governance and Service Delivery

9. Has the Village Secretariat system had any impact on the governance and service delivery at the village?
(Probe: How has the introduction of the Village Secretariat enhanced the efficiency of the GP and improved service delivery to citizens in your village?)
Has communication between departments (e.g., healthcare, education, public works) improved?
How has this helped the community?
Are services delivered more quickly or efficiently? Can you share specific examples of improvements?)
10. Could you provide an example of how the Village Secretariat system has helped resolve a major issue or grievance in your community?
(Probe: What was the issue, and how did the Secretariat assist in resolving it? Was the resolution quicker compared to the previous system?)
11. Do you feel the Village Secretariat system has improved access to government services for marginalized groups (e.g., women, elderly, disabled)? If yes, how?
(Probe: Are there specific strategies in place to ensure inclusivity? Can you provide an example of how the system benefited these groups?)
12. Do you think the Village Secretariat system has improved community participation in local governance?
(Probe: How are more people involved in Gram Sabha meetings or consultations? Are more community members aware of and involved in decisions that affect them?)

Challenges and Support in the Village Secretariat System

13. How often do you interact with higher government authorities or line departments for guidance or support?
(Probe: How responsive are they when you request assistance or resources? Are there areas where you feel more support is needed?)
14. How would you describe the support you receive from the Panchayat Secretary and other Village Secretariat staff?
(Probe: Are they helpful and efficient in carrying out their duties? Have you faced any issues with staff performance?)
15. How do you manage conflicts or misunderstandings between the Village Secretariat staff and the community?
(Probe: Can you provide an example of a conflict that was resolved through your intervention?)
16. How do you manage conflicts or misunderstandings between the Village Secretariat staff and GP office?

Shift from the Old System to the Village Secretariat System

17. How has the efficiency of the current Village Secretariat system improved over the older system of governance?
(Probe: How have things changed in terms of service delivery, response times, and citizen engagement? What were the key weaknesses of the old system?)
18. What were the biggest challenges during the transition from the old system to the Village Secretariat system?
(Probe: Were there any operational issues or resistance from staff or the community? How were these challenges overcome?)
19. Has the Village Secretariat system improved your ability to supervise and manage local governance?
(Probe: How does the current system help you ensure that tasks are completed on time and that staff are held accountable?)

Future of the Village Secretariat and Recommendations

20. What improvements would you suggest to make the Village Secretariat system more effective in the future?
(Probe: Are there specific areas, such as staffing, resources, or processes, that need improvement? What would you change?)
21. How do you see the Village Secretariat evolving in the next few years?
(Probe: Do you think it will continue to improve governance and service delivery? What would you like to see in terms of long-term impact?)
22. Do you believe the Village Secretariat system can be expanded or replicated in other regions? Why or why not?
(Probe: What factors would make the system successful in other areas? Are there any specific challenges in scaling up the system?)
23. Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding your experience as a Sarpanch?