



PEOPLES PULSE
an ear to the ground

**Gram Swaraj in Crisis:
A Field Study on AP
Village – Ward Secretariats-Promises,
Pitfalls and Pathways Forward**

1st December 2025 – 20th January 2026

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Introduction

The soul of India resides in its villages, proclaimed the Father of the Nation, Bapuji! He emphasized that true independence for the country would be achieved only when Gram Swaraj (village self-rule) is realized through self-reliance and self-governance. The objective of a welfare state is to ensure the economic and social upliftment of the poor and weaker sections, and overall improvement in the living standards of the people. The fundamental idea is that the full benefits of various development and welfare programs undertaken by the government should reach the last person in society seamlessly, uninterrupted, and easily. To achieve this, the Andhra Pradesh government established a special mechanism called the 'Village-Ward Secretariat' system for decentralizing governance and expanding services. As part of this, the volunteer mechanism was also created.

After YSRCP leader Shri Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy became Chief Minister, he announced this on August 15, 2019, during Independence Day celebrations, and launched the "Village-Ward Secretariats" system in October of the same year. On October 2, coinciding with the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the then Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy personally inaugurated this "Village-Ward Secretariat System" in Karapa village of the erstwhile East Godavari district.

The underlying principle behind establishing this system is to ensure that welfare schemes and programs undertaken by the government reach every doorstep in every village, town, and city, and that their benefits are delivered to the citizens. Appropriate notifications were issued, and the recruitment process for a large number of employees required for the secretariats was conducted transparently, smoothly, and in a manner beyond reproach. As a result, there were no criticisms from any quarter or section. However, for volunteers, the then ruling party YSRCP appointed individuals of their choice based on qualifications. This system has been operating with significant public expenditure in the form of employee and volunteer appointments, their salaries and allowances, and the maintenance of secretariats.

After the coalition government came to power in 2024, it abolished the volunteer system and continues to operate the remaining system with minor changes. Initially established through various special orders from the AP state government, this system has now completed six years and is running into its seventh year.

A Noble Aspiration Gone Astray

The Village-Ward Secretariat system, undertaken and still being maintained by the Andhra Pradesh state government with the goal of achieving Gram Swaraj, has deviated from its path due to various reasons. The desired objectives are not being fulfilled. Due to systemic deficiencies, it failed to take firm root from the beginning. Subsequent management failures have rendered it ineffective. There is an opinion in the public domain that a pilot project should have been conducted first and then expanded statewide. Even after its launch, periodic reviews of the situation and necessary changes should have been made. Without that, the system did not improve. What was aspired is one thing, but what is happening is another.

The policy was designed with the aim of decentralizing governance, enhancing transparency in schemes, and establishing a robust system to extend government services to every doorstep. For this, senior officials with experience in political thinking engaged in brainstorming and prepared a concept note. However, what was envisioned in the concept note did not reflect in the GOs; what was mentioned and ordered in the GOs did not take root in the system; what was embedded in the system was not implemented in practice; and thus, there was no alignment between aspiration and action. In various ways, this system has faltered. Not only has it failed to achieve the intended goals, but with a large number of employees and extraordinary expenditure, it has now become like a 'white elephant'.

The current coalition government states that it cannot continue the Village-Ward Secretariat system, which was ambitiously undertaken but defectively implemented by the previous government, in its original form. Therefore, it is currently implementing it with some changes here and there. As commented by a senior political leader and former MP, the observation that 'they say they cannot implement it in the previous form, but the coalition government lacks clarity on what to do with the entire system and how to run it' is an absolute truth! The current coalition government firmly believes that something must be done. Whatever it is, it should not be a hasty measure. Going to any extreme decision that is irrational, solely because 'it was initiated by the previous government', would be a mistake. Any change decision taken by the new government regarding an on-going government policy, program, or project should cause 'minimum loss-maximum benefit' to the citizens. Only then does the change have meaning. It should also receive majority public approval. For this to happen, a comprehensive study on the on-going Village-Ward Secretariat system is necessary. Until now, no comprehensive study on this secretariat system has been conducted, not only from the side of past and present governments but also from private individuals and organizations.

Why was the Village-Ward Secretariat system introduced? How was it implemented? What benefits were derived? Where are the deficiencies in the failed aspects? What are the reasons? What are the remedial measures? All these need to be determined through a deep, comprehensive study. Only after that should reforms, adjustments, or, if necessary, tough decisions be taken. Otherwise, a hasty decision without any study would be a betrayal of the very purpose!

In the concept note (Governance at People's Doorstep: Gram Sachivalayam) prepared by senior officials before launching the Village-Ward Secretariat system, many aspects were mentioned. It stated that the government is committed to establishing 'Gram Swaraj' by fulfilling the needs of the poor and weaker sections, transparently implementing special welfare schemes undertaken by the government, and strengthening the rural economy through integrated development. The leader heading the government, Shri Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy, mentioned in the said document that the idea of decentralizing governance was based on issues brought to his attention by the people during his padayatra while in opposition. It was also referenced that the arbitrary functioning of 'Janmabhoomi Committees' as extra-constitutional forces under the previous government's ruling party inspired this new thinking. They revealed proposals for the form and nature of the 'Secretariat' in line with the rulers' latest thinking. It was proposed that each Gram Sachivalayam should have 14 positions, including the current 11 staff members plus a school headmaster, a multipurpose development officer, and elected people's representatives (sarpanch, ward members). For some reason, these three additions were omitted, and it was limited to 11 members. It was stated that the Village-Ward Secretariat system aims to make the governance systems and administrative machinery accountable to elected people's representatives from the grassroots level and overall to the 'Gram Sabha', and thereby to the people. However, this was lacking in practice.

For an Examination

How has the performance of the Village-Ward Secretariat system been over these six and a half years? Have the intended aspirations and objectives been achieved? What are the good and bad aspects in the system's management, and what changes have occurred? What is their impact? Is the system's functioning on the right path? What do rulers, officials, employees who are part of the system, beneficiaries, and other ordinary people think about it? To find out such aspects, the 'People's Pulse' research organization conducted a comprehensive examination by touring across Andhra Pradesh. The field observations conducted by 'People's Pulse' clearly indicate, based on public opinion, that a deep, comprehensive study is the appropriate way to understand where and how this entire policy has gone astray, and what changes would bring it back on the right track.

While 'People's Pulse' was touring the public domain and speaking to all those related to this, information emerged that the AP state government's cabinet had taken a decision. The essence of the news was that the cabinet decided to approve an ordinance first, in the process of bringing a law to change the names of Village-Ward Secretariats to 'Swarna Gramam' and 'Swarna Ward'! When asked about the public response to the government's idea of changing the name, they were clear. 'They changed the colors of the offices earlier, what came of it? Changing wall colors like this, changing the names of Village Ward-Secretariats won't bring anything; the system's performance needs to be ensured properly, defects in implementation need to be corrected to yield better results' – this was the majority public opinion. "Whatever it is, the Village-Ward Secretariat system has derailed, it's not like before" is the general opinion among the people. It is not good for the government to make policy decisions without a comprehensive study on the overall performance of the Village-Ward system.

The People's Pulse research team conducted field tours from December 1, 2025, to January 20, 2026. Under the leadership of People's Pulse organization Director, former RTI Commissioner, and senior journalist Shri R. Dileep Reddy, the team including researchers G. Murali Krishna, Jampala Praveen, Nikhil and S.Pradeep others worked. From the northern tip of Andhra Pradesh at Ichchapuram to the southern edge at Tada, from the villages along the long eastern coastal belt to the border villages adjacent to western neighbouring states... extensively touring, interacting with everyone, discussing in depth, inspecting records, and based on collected primary and secondary information, this report has been prepared. In addition to examining aspects from various angles on the system's performance, practical and specific recommendations have been incorporated in it.

System Structure...

The YSRCP government formed in 2019 under the leadership of Shri Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy quickly initiated the process of implementing its election promises. In that process, it undertook changes in local self-governance to implement the election promise of 'Navaratnalu'. To transparently, decentralize, and corruption-free implement various welfare and development programs undertaken by the government for improving citizens' living standards, it decided to establish 'Village-Ward Secretariats' in villages and 'Ward Secretariats' in towns and cities. In favor of the decision, it initiated the official process for establishing the system with appropriate orders. Broadly, there should be one secretariat per average 2000 population, and villages and outskirts with less population should be brought under one secretariat's jurisdiction.

Where population exceeds that, additional teams should operate in the same secretariat proportionally, as per orders. In line with the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments to strengthen local self-governance as provided by the 11th and 12th Schedules of the Constitution, and utilizing the powers under Article 243 G/W of the Constitution available to the state government, several orders were issued for establishing this "Village Ward Secretariat System". The process of establishment and implementation was initiated.

All Services Under One Umbrella

Services from about a dozen departments directly linked to people's daily lives were brought under its purview through appropriate GOs. Along with ensuring cash benefits under various schemes, including old age, women, widow, disabled pensions, etc., reach beneficiaries, major civic facilities were also brought under this secretariat system. Drinking water supply, sewage management, sanitation and waste, education, public health, electricity supply and street lights, forests - environment, crematoriums, women's safety, socio-economic progress of weaker sections, roads, agriculture, animal husbandry, etc., were identified as 14 main services, and appropriate staff were appointed in each secretariat. It was directed that 500 services from 35 government departments should be provided through the secretariat, and any petition/problem submitted by a citizen should be resolved within a maximum of 72 hours from the time of application.

Declaring the grassroots minimum offices of Panchayati - Rural Development and Urban Development departments as secretariats, eleven sectors with public service, facilities, and control affiliated to them were declared as 'assistant departments'.

In Gram Sachivalayams, the 'Panchayati Secretary' was declared as convenor, and the remaining staff (assistants from various departments) should work under his supervision. In addition to existing Panchayati secretaries, new secretaries were appointed as needed. In urban and town Ward Sachivalayams, an administrative secretary (admin) was appointed, and the remaining staff should work under his supervision. Besides the Panchayati secretary, VRO, Survey Assistant (Revenue), ANM (Health), Veterinary/Fishery Assistant (Animal Husbandry), Women Police (Home), Engineering Assistant (Panchayati Raj Rural Development), Energy Assistant (Energy), Agriculture/Horticulture Assistant (Agriculture - Horticulture), Digital Assistant (Panchayati Raj Rural Development), Welfare/Education Assistant (Welfare - Tribal Development) are present as assistant staff in each secretariat. The duties of administrative assistants working in Ward Sachivalayams are similar, but there are slight differences in job names and designations. Along with the Ward Administrative Secretary, sequentially Ward Amenities Secretary, Ward Sanitation-Environment Secretary, Ward Planning Regulation Secretary, Ward Welfare-Development Secretary, Ward Energy Secretary (Urban Development), Ward Health Secretary (Health), Ward Revenue Secretary (Revenue), Ward Women and Weaker Sections Protection Secretary (Home) are present with job designations.

Initially, the government ordered that the respective departments should provide appropriate training, direct guidance, and cooperation to the newly appointed secretariat staff by departments. Statewide, 15,004 secretariats were established, and the government appointed 1,34,694 secretariat staff and 2,52,389 volunteers. Due to various reasons, this number has gradually decreased. Initially, the staff worked on a consolidated pay of fifteen thousand rupees per month, and as announced, after two years, their services were regularized with appropriate pay scales. Thus, the employees' anxiety about whether they would be regularized was resolved.

Currently, the remaining approximately one lakh secretariat employees statewide receive an average net salary of 30 to 35 thousand rupees per month after deductions. Volunteers received an honorarium of five thousand rupees per month for as long as they worked.

What Was Intended Is One Thing, What Happened Is Another

There are deficiencies in the rooting of the Village-Ward Secretariat system, undertaken with the spirit of Gram Swaraj as proclaimed by Mahatma Gandhi and the goal of decentralizing governance. The secretariat system was constructed without clarity on coordination, supervision, responsibility, and accountability. Like the proverb 'Intending to make a god, it became a monkey', this system turned out that way. Though the aspiration was good, the practice faltered. The target being in one place and the rulers' aim in another could be one reason. When the political idea of decentralized governance and service expansion came for the foolproof implementation of YSRCP's election promise 'Navaratnalu', there was brainstorming that there should be coordination and mutual benefit between elected people's representatives and administrative machinery up to the village level. The effective Kerala Panchayati Raj grassroots governance model was mentioned in this context. However, it did not happen in practice. Rather than focusing on the process of transparently delivering schemes and easily providing services to the people, the then YSRCP government concentrated on 'Navaratnalu', while the current coalition government is clearly focusing on 'Super Six'. As a result, the performance of the 'Village-Ward Secretariat System' has become defective.

In the three-tier local self-governance, just as there is a Zilla Parishad at the district level and Mandal Parishad at the mandal level, it was initially thought that there should be a Gram Sachivalayam at the village level.

It is known that after the Constitutional amendment related to local self-governance, the Gram Sabha gained utmost importance! Until now, there was no specific mechanism for implementing Gram Sabha decisions. Only the Gram Panchayati Secretary existed. In addition, Village Development Officer (VDO), Revenue Inspector (RI) was present here and there. For government various schemes' implementation, village collective issues, and individual needs, dependence was on the administrative machinery of various departments at the village level.

It was assumed that the Gram Sachivalayam machinery would implement welfare-development schemes and programs at the field level, as well as execute decisions taken by the Gram Sabha under the sarpanch's leadership. Similarly, urban-town secretariats would take field-level responsibilities in implementing decisions of corporations and municipal councils. This was incorporated in the related GOs (GO MS No. 110 dated 19.7.2019, GO MS No. 217 dated 20.07.2019). It was mentioned in the GOs that secretariat staff should participate in Gram Panchayati and Gram Sabha meetings, and similarly in municipal meetings, and work according to local people's aspirations and expectations.

The responsibility of preparing annual and five-year village development and urban development plans was entrusted to the secretariat. However, no supervision over the secretariat or staff was prescribed for the elected governing body. Although the GO mentioned that the sarpanch has the authority to grant leaves to secretariat staff, it never happened in practice.

Without direct supervisory authority for sarpanch and municipal chairpersons, the sense of accountability to the Gram Panchayati or municipality disappeared among the Gram/Ward Secretariat staff. Department-wise technical supervision (including leaves, promotions, service matters) over secretariat staff was prescribed in the GO. Additionally, direct supervisory authority was provided to the concerned MPDO over Gram Sachivalayams and to municipal/corporation commissioners over Ward Sachivalayams.

It was mentioned in the orders that secretariat staff should perform their assigned duties collectively and unifiedly as per business rules, office regulations, and job procedures, and dutifully handle any other tasks directed by the government based on time and context.

Management - A Case of Neglect

The enthusiasm displayed by the government in establishing the Village-Ward Secretariats was notably absent when it came to systematizing their operations, ensuring effective supervision and coordination, and finalizing procedural guidelines. This perception is widely echoed across various stakeholders. There was minimal attention paid to comprehensively assigning duties and responsibilities to the secretariats, defining oversight mechanisms, and devising plans to efficiently extract services from the employees. Furthermore, the ratio of village-ward population to employees lacked rationality. Some ambiguities were inherent in the government orders themselves, which hindered proper rooting of implementation. Additionally, certain provisions outlined in those orders were not adequately enforced. As a result, confusion prevailed from the outset, and the failure to identify and rectify issues promptly exacerbated the situation over time.

At the village level, rather than serving as an auxiliary or coordinating entity to the elected sarpanch and ward members' governance, the 'secretariat' evolved in practice into a parallel administrative structure. This divergence widened progressively. A similar pattern emerged in urban and town wards. Ward members, sarpanches, corporators, chairpersons, and mayors were left without any direct supervisory authority over the secretariat system.

This led to a scenario where each operated in isolation. Particularly after the 2024 assembly elections, with the change in government and the discontinuation of the volunteer system, the performance of Village-Ward Secretariats became even more disorganized. The view that the presence of volunteers would have been beneficial is expressed not only by a majority of the public but also by a significant number of secretariat employees. Higher officials have shifted their focus away from citizen services that should be delivered through secretariats, toward surveys, deputations, and miscellaneous tasks. This has heightened the risk of growing public dissatisfaction with the entire secretariat system. If the current operational approach continues without necessary reforms, there is an imminent danger that the Village-Ward Secretariat system could collapse soon.

Strategic in Design!

From the manner in which it was introduced, it is evident that the then YSRCP government in Andhra Pradesh launched the Village-Ward Secretariat system with multiple political and administrative objectives in mind. Through this initiative, the ruling authorities derived satisfaction from directly creating employment for 3.5 to 4 lakh people within five to six months. To some extent, it appeared to address the unemployment issue. The establishment of this system also generated indirect employment opportunities for many more, which benefited their propaganda efforts. It provided the machinery needed to implement the 'Navaratnalu' promised by YSRCP in the 2019 elections. On the other hand, features such as decentralizing administration, enhancing transparency in schemes, and extending government services closer to citizens made it supportive for the public.

Particularly in rural and backward areas, this system proved highly useful for those with limited education, low social influence, and no habit of relying on political systems to get work done. It facilitated easy access to government services without delays. Consequently, a majority of the populace welcomed it, and the secretariat system quickly gained public approval. Volunteers directly delivered various pension amounts to beneficiaries' homes. Obtaining certificates for caste, income, birth, marriage, death, and similar documents became simpler, as did applying for or renewing rice cards, Aarogyasri cards, job cards, ration cards, house pattas, Aadhaar, and others. Public awareness of various schemes, ease of accessing them, payment of taxes, land surveys, and many other matters were facilitated through volunteers' assistance, enabling widespread utilization of secretariat services. Citizens no longer needed to chase political leaders or circle government offices for every requirement. This created a new environment and ushered in a fresh culture.

In each Gram Secretariat, there were 11 staff members, and in villages, volunteers were appointed at the rate of one per 50 families, ranging from 10 to 15 per village. At one point, criticisms arose that their numbers were excessive and that, except for the first week of the month, they had insufficient work. However, their services consistently received praise from the public. Prior to its abolition, the volunteer system was surrounded by political aspirations and misconceptions. Nonetheless, overall, the volunteer component, integral to the secretariats, has now been eliminated. In the special political context leading up to the elections, a majority of volunteers voluntarily stepped down at the suggestion of YSRCP leaders. Nearly 2.5 lakh volunteers, who were receiving a monthly honorarium of five thousand rupees, fully withdrew from duties as the current coalition government chose not to continue their services. Thus, the system has effectively ceased to exist.

Volunteers: More Aspirations and Misconceptions!

The idealistic Kerala Panchayati model is often cited as an inspiration for Andhra Pradesh's Village-Ward Secretariat system. Though not replicated exactly, elements such as decentralizing governance, extending government services to citizens' doorsteps, and handling all tasks at the village-ward secretariat level were adopted from Kerala's local self-governance model. While similar to Telangana's 'Multipurpose Worker', the distinction lies in the higher number of volunteers per village/ward. In fact, the then Chief Minister Shri Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy initially envisioned one volunteer per 10 families in the secretariat system, which was later finalized as one per 50 families in subsequent deliberations. Even now, there is an argument that one volunteer per 100 families would have been more rational. With only 50 families under their purview, volunteers could maintain familiarity, comprehensive understanding, and strong oversight over those households. In turn, the families would develop rapport and affinity with the volunteer.

From a political perspective, the then YCP rulers aspired to use the volunteer system to cultivate those families as supporters or sympathizers, a criticism leveled by political opponents (coalition parties). This escalated to allegations that, while outwardly claiming inspiration from Kerala's Panchayati decentralization ideal, the underlying intent was to run parallel governance through the volunteer system, akin to West Bengal, where ruling party control over government functions is alleged. YSRCP leaders played a key role in volunteer appointments. When a senior ruling party leader stated, 'Yes, we appoint our people as volunteers?', another official representative and cabinet member bluntly argued, 'If they don't work as we expect, we'll replace them with someone we prefer; that's our prerogative.' However, at the field level, there was no direct connection or supervision between the ruling party and volunteers' duty performance. Thus, volunteers were not under the ruling party's control.

What Came... And Went

Previously, before the 2024 elections, when People's Pulse representatives toured Andhra Pradesh's public domain and inquired about volunteers' performance, the information confirmed this. When volunteers were asked, 'Since the ruling party placed you in the job, will you mobilize votes in their favor?', or citizens were queried, 'Since they provide such helpful services, will you vote for whomever the volunteer suggests?', both groups responded, 'No, why would we do that? We'll act according to our own preference.' Moreover, ruling party (YSRCP) leaders harbored resentment toward volunteers. They alleged that since all citizen tasks at the village and ward levels were handled through volunteers and secretariat employees, people no longer depended on them or even glanced their way.

Before the advent of the Village-Ward Secretariat system, rural and ward residents often looked expectantly toward political leaders and officials for many needs. Due to volunteers and secretariat facilities, citizens' disregard for them was causing political loss, complained lower-level YSRCP leaders to the party high command. Not just ward members, sarpanches, corporators, and mayors, but some MLAs, MLCs, and other leaders at that level also lodged similar complaints with the leadership. While there were criticisms that the ruling party used the volunteer system to distribute money to voters during by-elections, another claim was that the same would occur in the upcoming general (2024) elections. This plunged the volunteer system into controversy.

During the 2024 election period, to avoid criticism of misusing the system and prevent potential intervention by the Election Commission, the ruling party itself ensured that volunteers voluntarily stepped down in many places. There were instances where they were told, 'We'll adjust your remaining honorarium from our own funds; step aside.' Nearly 90 percent of volunteers voluntarily withdrew before the elections.

Opposition parties (coalition) alleged this was a drama, with ruling party candidates paying the honorarium personally instead of through the government to gain undue advantage via volunteers in the elections. In this context, strong propaganda emerged that if Telugu Desam came to power, it would abolish the volunteer system. Refuting this, the Telugu Desam leadership announced that they would not abolish the volunteer system upon coming to power and would increase the monthly honorarium from five thousand to ten thousand rupees. After the TDP-led coalition assumed power in 2024, the remaining approximately 10 percent of volunteers' terms ended. Although the coalition government did not officially abolish the volunteer system, by not extending their services, it naturally lapsed.

Employee Commitment is Key

Regarding the size of secretariats, number of employees, and their ratio to population, some ambiguity exists in the government orders issued while establishing the secretariats. Orders specified one Gram (Panchayati) Secretariat per 2000 population, and for lower populations, affiliated villages, hamlets, or outskirts could be included in the jurisdiction. A Panchayati Secretary, as convenor, is supported by a team of assistants (ten others from various departments). For populations from 2000 to 4000, one unit; beyond that, additional teams could be formed proportionally to population growth. From the beginning, there has been criticism that, except for welfare, health, energy, agriculture, and digital assistants under the Panchayati Secretary, other support staff lacks substantial work. Suggestions were frequent that, instead of one secretariat per village, the same staff could serve a cluster of five to six villages. In various developments since the secretariats' formation, staff numbers have become uneven in some areas.

For example, at one stage, in Anakapalli district, out of 3831 posts across 522 secretariats, 2433 were vacant. Similarly, Satya Sai district had a shortage of 2005 staff, Srikakulam 800, and Kakinada 1035. In some districts, due to numerous small gram panchayats, surplus staff may not be apparent, but excess employees are on duty. This overall scenario appears incoherent.

Rationalization of Numbers is Essential

In 2019, nearly 2.5 lakh volunteers were appointed for all secretariats statewide. Similarly, notifications for 1.34 lakh employee recruitments were issued, with 1.24 lakh joining. Many among them were highly educated. Within a short period, 10-15 thousand left for abroad or other jobs, and among the remaining 1.10 lakh, several are on deputation for miscellaneous duties.

As part of 'Swarna Andhra Vision 2047', the current AP coalition government is identifying surplus employees in secretariats and notifying the numbers. For instance, it was determined that Gram Surveyors (Grade-3) are the most excess at 4722. Clarity is still lacking on how to adjust those in excess across departments. However, with the aim of comprehensively utilizing secretariat employees' services, the government has initiated a 'regrouping process'. The rationalization of employee numbers has thus begun. Based on population, gram panchayats are categorized as 'A' (up to 2500 population), 'B' (2500 to 3500), 'C' (above 3500), and it was decided that 6, 7, or 8 staff per secretariat would suffice. Depending on local conditions, identifying where certain services are less needed, the government declares that post as 'no post' in the secretariat and assigns additional responsibility to the corresponding department employee in a nearby secretariat. Similar adjustments are being made across all departments. This approach is being followed in current transfers. Although initiated, this rationalization has not yet reached full scale.

Operational Drift and the Imperative for Course Correction

Broadly speaking, while the Village-Ward Secretariat system receives widespread praise in principle, dissatisfaction with it has been steadily increasing over time. Despite its impressive name, interactions with various stakeholders—such as the officials overseeing the staff, the leaders responsible for supervision, and the citizens who are the intended beneficiaries—reveal varying degrees of discontent among all groups. Negative aspects are mentioned more frequently than positive ones. A majority express the view that the system started well but has deteriorated progressively. Some, albeit fewer, maintain that "the system remains largely the same now as it was then, with only minor differences." Overall, a sense of dissatisfaction is evident across the board. Particularly, the level of discontent among the employees tasked with running the Village-Ward Secretariats and the citizens meant to benefit from them is on the rise. The primary reasons for this situation lie in the system's failure to establish firm roots from the outset, coupled with inadequate arrangements for coordination and oversight. As a senior IAS officer aptly noted, "When establishing any new system, its effective functioning—or lack thereof—depends on considering the span of control for supervision and regulation from day one." This critical element was precisely what was missing here.

Government's Failure in Effective Utilization...

Furthermore, the government's arbitrary addition of tasks to the secretariats—whenever an idea strikes, without rational basis—has pushed aside the core citizen-support functions, instead keeping staff occupied with various field-level surveys. Even after six years of operation, there has been no review or study to assess whether the system is progressing toward its intended goals. These factors appear to be the main reasons for the Village-Ward Secretariat system's deviation from its path.

While some local citizen groups and research organizations have conducted limited studies on how the grassroots-level secretariat system is functioning in specific areas, no comprehensive evaluation has been undertaken from the government's side to date. It represents a failure of successive governments to overlook the strengths and weaknesses of such an expansive system, established to transparently and decentralize the implementation of development and welfare programs worth thousands of crores at the grassroots level. A system that annually expends crores of public funds on salaries, allowances, and maintenance for over a lakh employees is gradually losing its efficacy, yet this goes unnoticed in Andhra Pradesh. Neglecting to address this could lead to the entire system's collapse. The sooner the government awakens to implement reforms, the better it will be for the Village and Ward Secretariat system.

Challenges Abound

The irrational allocation of staff numbers, irrespective of the workload under various panchayats and wards or population size, is not the only issue here. It would be misguided to assume that merely rationalizing staff based on population and making adjustments will resolve the problem. The issues are multifaceted. When volunteers were part of the secretariat system, they handled certain types of responsibilities, such as delivering pension amounts in cash to beneficiaries, collecting citizens' applications for various needs, and informing people about the benefits, procedures, and guidelines of different schemes. Volunteers also assisted citizens in obtaining online certificates for caste, income, birth, marriage, death, and related cards.

They served as direct facilitators in implementing government schemes targeted at various groups, including the elderly, women, youth, children, and the poor. During crisis situations like COVID, volunteers and staff provided services without taking leaves, earning praise from diverse sections.

Overall, volunteers conducted all government department surveys in the field, building direct relationships with people, verifying facts using OTPs (One-Time Passwords) sent to their mobiles, and collecting required information. They acted as intermediaries between the multi-departmental secretariats and citizens. With the volunteer system's withdrawal, all these tasks now fall on the secretariat staff. Consequently, while the system's framework remains intact, citizens complain that services are not being delivered properly without volunteers, and staff express dissatisfaction that essential information from citizens is not easily forthcoming. From the perspectives of both citizens and employees, the absence of volunteers clearly emerges as a significant shortcoming.

All-Encompassing Surveys

A glance at the list of surveys mandated by the government—both previously and currently—evokes surprise. These include the United Family Card survey, mandated biometric updates, collection of details for children without Aadhaar, eKYC updates, P4 survey, Kaushalam (work-from-home), leather artisan survey, family migration survey, mobile number update data collection, WhatsApp Manamitra (awareness), Aadhaar seeding for Vahan data, rice card, daily yoga attendance, household details edit, and more—up to about fifteen such surveys. Additionally, as part of election duties, secretariat staff must serve as Booth Level Officers (BLOs). Almost all these require meeting citizens, collecting data online based on OTPs sent to their mobiles. However, citizens do not always cooperate. Especially in an era where cybercrimes involving OTPs lead to financial losses, people are confused about whom to trust.

When volunteers were present, with one per 50 families, they had close rapport. Now, villagers often fail to recognize or trust the employees, a problem exacerbated post-transfers.

A majority of employees report that citizens either refuse to cooperate during visits, servers fail to respond, or people evade by saying they will provide data at the office. Particularly, ordinary citizens who are not beneficiaries of any government scheme refuse to share information with secretariat staff. Moreover, despite daily fieldwork, the government provides no reimbursement (like TA and DA) for travel expenses, as staff point out. They also highlight the difficulty of marking attendance via app by 10 AM daily, especially in remote tribal areas where servers and networks are unreliable.

Adverse Impact in Agency Areas

While the declining standards of secretariat performance are broadly similar across the state, local political and social conditions introduce some variations in places. In the northern coastal districts, employees' dissatisfaction is intense, citing lack of recognition for their services, indifference from others, and a mismatch between their assigned roles and actual tasks. In Rayalaseema districts, staff report being caught between political pressures and official directives. Central coastal districts exhibit a mix of both sentiments.

The negative impact of the thinning secretariat system is more pronounced in tribal agency areas. With small habitations and low awareness among people, the slowdown in the system's performance is starkly visible. Even in Peddalabudu, a tribal village adopted by AP Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, the situation is no different. In this village, a stone's throw from the famous tourist center Araku, the secretariat appears lackluster in the changed environment. Employee attendance is irregular. When inquired, some claim to be in the field, others say they are handling in-charge duties in another village, and yet others are at their departmental mandal-level office. The village sarpanch also shows little interest in the secretariat's functioning. A library building constructed in the village for Rs. 15 lakhs has lain unused for years, with no one paying attention.

Zero Budget:

Another major flaw in the systematization of secretariats is operating the offices on a zero-budget basis. Despite appointing 11 employees and 10 to 25 volunteers per office, no provision was made for a sweeper post or drinking water facilities. Not a single rupee was allocated for these. In some places, employees contribute Rs. 100 or 200 each monthly to hire a sweeper for cleaning the office rooms. They bring their own drinking water. When citizens visit and stay for hours, there is no arrangement to offer them even water. In Andhra Pradesh's Village and Ward Secretariat system, some offices have accumulated dust for months without cleaning.

Voices of Discontent: Employees, Officials, and Citizens Speak

The Village-Ward Secretariat system was established with ambitious goals and noble aspirations, focusing on decentralizing governance, ensuring transparency in schemes, and expanding services. Initially, this attracted widespread attention and fostered positive perceptions. The system launched amid praise from various sections, with beneficiaries particularly expressing satisfaction and contentment in the early stages. Over time, however, changes in the system's performance have led to growing dissatisfaction among many. Each Village-Ward Secretariat employs 11 staff members from diverse departments, yet none appear fully content. Key issues include the failure to assign tasks according to designated job charts, lack of promotions, inadequate recognition and respect, mismatched duties relative to qualifications, harassment from superiors, excessive surveys, and insufficient training. These factors contribute to profound discontent, stemming from numerous underlying causes.

Staff Challenges and Grievances

In Andhra Pradesh, the Village and Ward Secretariat system, conceived as a revolutionary initiative to bring governance directly to the people's doorstep, is now grappling with a severe mental health crisis. The rising trend of suicides among thousands of young employees in this system is not merely a series of personal tragedies but a stark indicator of the deep-seated internal pressures within a massive government machinery. Studies reveal high levels of mental health issues, such as depression and insomnia, among secretariat employees. Extended working hours—often exceeding 48 hours per week—are a primary driver of mental stress and suicidal ideation.

Technical Factors Exacerbating Work Pressure

A major contributor to the increased workload for secretariat employees is the requirement to digitize every task. Facial recognition-based attendance (APFRS) and continuous field-level surveys are leaving staff with little breathing room. Introduced in 2023, the APFRS system records approximately one crore facial data points daily across the state. In areas with poor internet connectivity or app glitches, failure to register attendance raises fears of salary deductions, heightening anxiety among employees.

Surveys and door-to-door campaigns have become an additional burden. Tasks previously handled by volunteers now fall entirely on the reduced staff of fewer than 10 per secretariat. Citizens' reluctance to share personal data and delays in real-time OTP verification processes are fueling intense frustration. Constant directives from higher officials and political interference are eroding employees' autonomy.

Key Demands from Secretariat Employees

During field interactions by the People's Pulse research team with Village-Ward Secretariat staff, several legitimate and critical concerns were raised. A significant majority feel harassed under the guise of IVRS surveys, believing that while disciplinary action for errors is fair, subjecting them to mental pressure is unjust. These issues warrant thorough examination. In line with international health standards, work hours should be limited to 8 per day, with relaxations for overtime.

Technical glitches preventing biometric attendance should be addressed humanely by manually recording presence. Previously, exemptions from biometric attendance were granted during field surveys and other programs, but this has been revoked, as staff reported. To reduce facial recognition stress, flexible working hours should be introduced. Employee Assistance Programs, including confidential counselling, should be established in every district for secretariat staff. Strict action must be taken against officials engaging in mental harassment.

Simultaneously conducting multiple surveys is making it increasingly difficult for staff to monitor the implementation and quality of flagship government projects (such as PR&RD, RWS, Housing, R&B, and Irrigation). Many engineering assistants are already under severe strain from multi-departmental workloads, facing suspensions, show-cause notices, and memos affecting both quality and quantity of output, as shared with the People's Pulse research team.

There is also a demand to treat Village-Ward Secretariat employees on par with other government staff. Staff criticizes the assignment of unrelated tasks, from photographing bathrooms to geo-tagging wine shops. They question the rationale of making highly qualified individuals perform duties akin to those of volunteers, viewing it as treating them like subordinates. Surveyors in these secretariats face multiple challenges, including pressure to follow standard operating procedures while also handling Village Revenue Officer duties.

The lack of new equipment has made surveying more arduous.

Women police personnel demand a structured, planned system to utilize their services effectively, with a primary call to consider all staff under a single parent organization. Many women police are capable of technical work and suggest deploying them in cybercrime and online services, while exempting them from bandobast and night duties. Appointed as Women Police Grade 3, they seek a promotion channel similar to other departments, with Junior Assistant pay scales applied.

Welfare secretaries, many holding Master's in Social Work and some with PhDs, feel their expertise is underutilized by the government. They are proficient in implementing schemes and addressing deficiencies, yet assignments to surveys and unrelated tasks delay welfare delivery to the public. The People's Pulse survey highlights that government policies are responsible for this.

The recruitment process for panchayati secretaries/administrative secretaries (as coordinators) and the ten types of assistants was conducted on a large scale across the state. Amid prevailing unemployment, competition for these positions was intense. Despite being grassroots-level jobs with an initial consolidated pay of Rs. 15,000 per month, many highly educated individuals joined as secretariat assistants. However, the system continues to fail in effectively leveraging their services. After several protests and agitations, their positions were regularized with pay scales as announced. Yet, over six and a half years, no promotions have been granted, and service reckoning remains inadequate, fostering deep dissatisfaction.

Following the abolition of the volunteer system, the government directed secretariat staff to take over those duties. This includes educating citizens on government schemes, delivering pension cash to beneficiaries' homes promptly on the first of the month, accepting applications, assisting with other needs, and providing doorstep services where possible. Staff views this as a major source of discontent, though it aligns with their job charts and might not have been as burdensome otherwise.

Having witnessed volunteers perform these tasks for over four years, most staff struggle to accept the transfer of responsibilities. As highly educated individuals, they believe their services should be used more productively rather than for unskilled work. Even more pressing is dissatisfaction with on-going surveys.

Government-mandated surveys require fieldwork to collect data from individuals and families, often verifying via OTPs. This necessitates leaving the office, leading to frequent unavailability for citizens seeking welfare, agriculture, education, cards, certificates, or documents. Staff laments this as highly inconvenient.

Additionally, staffs are tasked with visiting schools in their jurisdiction to assess student educational standards and upload toilet photos. Women staff find photographing boys' school toilets awkward, while men face similar issues at girls' schools. Female agriculture assistants report safety concerns when visiting fields or remote tribal habitations. Balancing fieldwork like volunteers while facing criticism for office absence is burdensome, they note. Despite a committee under Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, the lack of progress on promotions fuels discontent. Overall, frustration among secretariat employees is rising due to these factors. In some areas, pressures from officials and political leaders lead to stress, with around ten suicides or sudden deaths among staff in 2025 causing alarm.

Confusion among Officials:

Clarity remains elusive on who is responsible for effectively extracting work from Village-Ward staff. The government designated panchayati secretaries for villages and administrative secretaries for wards as coordinators. However, a majority of staff view them not as superiors but as equals. Regulations require all support staff to work collectively under the village secretary's leadership. Yet, in many matters, secretariat employees operate directly under their respective mandal-level line officers. Orders specify this for attendance and service-related technicalities only.

When citizens seek department-specific services, staff must proceed through relevant line officers. Leveraging this, line officers attempt oversight over secretariat staff. In some departments, they demand staff presence at their offices for required tasks. Citizens report evasive responses: staff claims to be at the main office when queried at the secretariat, and vice versa; or in the field when asked without specifying location. This evasive environment draws public criticism.

The government assigned monitoring, periodic evaluation, and reporting responsibilities to Mandal Parishad Development Officers (MPDOs) for village secretariats and municipal/corporation commissioners forward ones. In reality, no such reviews occur. Due to other primary duties, MPDOs and commissioners lack time, prompting the current government to establish an alternative oversight mechanism. While the district collector is the ultimate authority, a special officer was appointed at the district level for GSWS supervision. Similarly, Divisional Development Officers (DDOs) at the division level, managers in corporations/municipalities, and Deputy Mandal Development Officers at the mandal level serve as nodal officers. However, no clear, comprehensive job charts have been formulated for them. Staffs complain: "Many officers oversee and command us, but none provide proper guidance or take responsibility when issues arise." As one MPDO or municipal commissioner told People's Pulse: "We pay their salaries, yet the electricity employee sits at the DISCOM office, women police at the CI or SI office, agriculture assistants at the extension office. We don't know their duties, they don't report to us, but we're held accountable—how?"

Political Apathy:

Intended to support elected representatives in local self-governance, the Village-Ward Secretariat system operates in practice as a parallel entity, which political leaders resent. They feel excluded, with no direct role, involvement, or oversight in secretariat operations. Consequently, mayors of corporations, municipal chairpersons, village sarpanches, and lower-level ward/division representatives appear indifferent to declining performance standards. When asked, they retort: "Where do we fit in this system?" Government orders mandate secretariat staff attendance at panchayati meetings and gram sabhas to formulate and implement five-year and annual development plans, working per citizens' aspirations. However, with little practical adherence, apathy toward secretariats has permeated the political system. Only through collaboration and coordination between secretariats and elected representatives can local self-governance be strengthened. Despite specific government orders, this situation needs rectification. Staff should operate under the direct supervision of sarpanches, municipal chairpersons, and mayors, not in parallel. They must share accountability in public offices. Given that coordinators and other staff are well-educated and qualified, they should contribute to preparing annual and five-year village/ward development reports and their effective implementation, with accountability enforced. To ensure transparency, responsibility, and accountability, the Right to Information Act (RTI) must be rigorously implemented everywhere.

Citizens Bearing the Brunt:

Like the proverb "**When buffaloes fight, the calves' legs break,**" ordinary citizens suffer amid systemic conflicts. Welfare extends beyond pensions, and development beyond spending public funds on roads. Every citizen must live with dignity at average living standards. Constitutional facilities and rights must securely reach all eligible.

Public governance must reach people's doorsteps. Decentralization, transparency in schemes and programs, and corruption-free service expansion are essential. The Village-Ward Secretariat system must function toward these goals. Its faltering harms the average citizen most. While pensions are disbursed and certificates issued, delays plague many other tasks, citizens complain. Rural folk report frequent responses like: "We've forwarded it upstairs; they'll handle it and inform you." Secretariats should not merely accept applications like post offices. As per orders, services or resolutions must occur within a maximum of 72 hours from application receipt. The entire system must be accountable. For this, the secretariat should serve as an accessible 'single window' for citizens. This is what the average citizen aspires in the pursuit of Gram Swaraj!

Institutional Review & Strategic Reorientation of Grassroots Governance

The underperformance of Village-Ward Secretariats can be attributed primarily to the failure to resolve issues at the local village or ward level. Consequently, citizens are compelled to escalate their concerns to district collectorates, ministers, and MLAs, forming long queues for redressal. Observations from public grievance sessions conducted by Chief Minister Shri Nara Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister Shri Pawan Kalyan, and Minister Shri Nara Lokesh reveal that a majority of these issues fall squarely within the purview of Village-Ward Secretariats and should ideally be addressed there. The fact that such problems are reaching the state capital underscores systemic deficiencies in these institutions. The government is expending thousands of crores in public funds on salaries and maintenance for this system. To prevent wastage of these resources, it is imperative to strengthen the framework and rectify its shortcomings without delay.

In any domain, reforms must be preceded by a thorough evaluation of the existing system and its operations. This principle holds equally for the Village-Ward Secretariat system. To facilitate this, the government should promptly constitute a 'Study Committee'. This body should include appropriate representation from elected officials across assembly, council, zilla parishad, urban-town governing bodies, and mandal levels, alongside members from employee unions, relevant senior officials, prominent civil society figures, university researchers, and representatives from research institutions that have already studied or are examining this topic.

The government must formally establish this high-level study committee expeditiously. It should define terms and conditions, impose a time limit for submission, and request a detailed report. If necessary, a dedicated assembly session (budget or special) should be convened to discuss the matter extensively. This would pave the way for informed decisions to establish an effective system for decentralizing governance, enhancing transparency in schemes, and expanding government services in a corruption-free manner. Any subsequent decision on the Village-Ward Secretariat system would then be appropriate and garner public approval.

It is one thing for leaders elected for mere five-year terms to draft plans spanning two or three decades, unveiling visions like 2047 and promising ladders to heaven. But those who, upon assuming power, abruptly cancel or shelve previous government schemes without even a minimal review-how can they credibly pursue their own long-term plans? Are they deluded into believing they will rule for the next twenty-five years? Or blindly assuming that future governments will not dismantle their initiatives as they have done to others? History teaches that no single party holds power eternally. Parties come and go, but the government endures perpetually. Its accountability to the people must remain uninterrupted.

Regardless of who governs, long-term plans and projects should be designed with the enduring governmental responsibility to citizens in mind. Opponents must respond with the same spirit to schemes and projects initiated by predecessors. This requires periodic reviews of prevailing conditions, weighing pros and cons, and making reasoned policy decisions accordingly.

Recommendations:

Based on the comprehensive observations and verifications from People's Pulse fieldwork on the on-going Village-Ward Secretariat system in Andhra Pradesh, the following specific recommendations outline immediate actions the government should undertake for appropriateness and necessity. These aim to address identified gaps while incorporating additional insights from broader research on governance improvements, such as leveraging technology for transparency, performance monitoring, and citizen engagement. Drawing from detailed staff grievances highlighted in prior analyses—such as mental health crises, excessive workloads, mismatched duties, lack of promotions, and safety concerns—the recommendations explicitly tackle employee problems and demands. Furthermore, rationalization strategies are informed by government orders (e.g., GO No. 3) and practices, emphasizing population-based categorization, surplus identification, and redeployment to other departments to optimize resources without layoffs.

- Immediately form a study committee chaired by a retired Chief Secretary-level officer to examine required changes and reforms in the Village-Ward Secretariat system and submit a report to the government. Impose a strict timeline for the committee's submission.
- To enhance the performance of Village-Ward Secretariats, the Chief Minister should write to all political parties, intellectuals, and employee unions soliciting suggestions and advice, with a specified deadline for responses.
- Convene an all-party meeting without delay to discuss and strategize improvements in the functioning of Village-Ward Secretariats.
- Appoint a retired Chief Secretary-level officer to regularly monitor and oversee the performance of Village-Ward Secretariats.

- Avoid hasty decisions on renaming Village-Ward Secretariats; instead, implement changes and additions in consultation with all parties, intellectuals, and aligned with public opinion.
- Conduct a deep, comprehensive study of the current Village-Ward Secretariat system. Establish a high-level committee with defined terms and conditions, mandating report submission within a fixed timeframe. Only after extensive discussion of its recommendations should reforms or decisions be pursued.
- Integrate the secretariat and its machinery with the functions of elected representatives' governing bodies. Make both accountable to the gram sabha and, thereby, to the people. The same applies to wards where Ward Secretariats operate.
- Clarify reporting lines and daily operations: Who reports to whom? Under whose supervision and control does each work? Regardless of departmental hierarchies, a clear 'span of control/supervision' must be established for secretariat operations. This will enable proper delegation of responsibilities and demand accountability from staff.
- Appoint a dedicated education assistant to oversee schools, monitor quality standards, and handle education-related public issues resolution.
- Provide appropriate, uniform dedicated office spaces for Village-Ward Secretariats, equipped with computers, basic infrastructure, maintenance systems, waiting areas, and minimum facilities for visiting citizens.
- Ensure secretariat staff remain at the secretariat premises unless on field visits, which must be logged in a register. This logbook should be accessible to citizens, noting the employee's return time for availability.
- Adopt an integrated approach to surveys. Pre-assess information needs across departments and devise a plan for comprehensive data collection in a single survey round. Share and utilize this data as per departmental requirements and contexts. Collect family-wide information from the household head, verified via OTP on their mobile.

- Rationalize staff numbers in secretariats based on village/ward size, population, needs, and priorities. Categorize panchayats/wards into A (population >3500, up to 8 staff), B (2500-3500, up to 7 staff), and C (<2500, up to 6 staff) to optimize allocation. For clusters of multiple villages under one secretariat, consider a multi-purpose assistant per village to reduce citizens' travel for minor tasks. Identify surplus staff (e.g., excess surveyors or underutilized roles) through district-level assessments, relaxing transfer bans as per GO No. 3, and complete rationalization by specified deadlines (e.g., June 30 for transfers after 5-year tenures).
- To accommodate surplus employees in other state government departments, conduct skill audits mapping qualifications (e.g., engineering assistants to PWD/R&B, welfare secretaries to social welfare, surveyors to revenue) against vacancies. Prioritize internal redeployment with training programs for role transitions, avoiding voluntary retirement schemes (VRS) or terminations. Draw from successful models like inter-departmental absorptions in AP's past reforms, ensuring seamless integration while maintaining pay scales and service continuity.
- Address staff problems such as mental health crises (e.g., depression, suicides linked to overwork), excessive hours (>48/week), technical glitches (e.g., APFRS failures leading to salary fears), and mismatched duties (e.g., highly qualified staff performing volunteer-level tasks). Implement flexible working hours, confidential counselling via Employee Assistance Programs in every district, and strict action against harassing officials.
- Fulfil staff demands for promotions (e.g., create channels for women police to Junior Assistant scales, regularize service reckoning), equal treatment with other government employees, updated equipment (e.g., for surveyors), and safety measures (e.g., no night duties for women police, structured plans for utilizing technical skills in cybercrime/online services). For welfare secretaries (many with MSW/PhDs), focus duties on scheme implementation and gap-filling rather than surveys.

- In tribal areas, adapt the secretariat system to local conditions, as they differ from general regions, to ensure better suitability and effectiveness.
- Additional Recommendations (Based on Research Insights):
- Integrate advanced digital tools such as Digi Verify for beneficiary authentication, Data Lens for analytics, and satellite-based monitoring to enhance efficiency, transparency, and real-time oversight of schemes and infrastructure projects.
- Implement performance management systems, including key performance indicators (KPIs) for staff and periodic audits, to track progress and ensure accountability, drawing from successful models in Andhra Pradesh's governance reforms.
- Incorporate social audits, similar to those in NREGA, to promote transparency and community involvement in monitoring welfare and development programs.
- Establish robust Management Information Systems (MIS) for granular, public-accessible data on projects, enabling citizens to track expenditures and outcomes.
- Enhance grievance redressal through technology, such as mobile apps or portals for real-time tracking of complaints, ensuring resolution within stipulated timelines.
- Provide regular capacity-building training for staff on digital tools, mental health support, and scheme implementation to reduce burnout and improve service delivery.
- Foster citizen engagement mechanisms, like feedback surveys and community forums, to align services with local needs and build trust.
- Strengthen integration with the three-tier local governance structure (gram panchayat, mandal parishad, zilla parishad) for better coordination and resource allocation.

Revitalizing Grassroots Governance for Sustainable Development

This field study on Andhra Pradesh's Village-Ward Secretariat system reveals a well-intentioned initiative that has strayed from its foundational goals of decentralizing governance, ensuring transparent scheme implementation, and delivering seamless services to the last mile. Launched in 2019 amid high aspirations for Gram Swaraj, the system initially garnered praise for bringing government closer to citizens, creating employment, and facilitating doorstep services through staff and volunteers. However, systemic flaws—ranging from inadequate rooting and coordination to operational drift, excessive surveys, and resource mismanagement—have led to widespread dissatisfaction among employees, officials, elected representatives, and the public.

Employees face burnout from mismatched duties, lack of promotions, and mental health strains, while officials grapple with unclear oversight hierarchies. Political leaders feel side lined, perceiving the system as a parallel entity, and citizens endure delays and inefficiencies, undermining the promise of prompt, corruption-free service. The absence of volunteers has exacerbated these issues, highlighting the need for balanced human resources and technological integration.

Despite these challenges, the system's potential remains evident. With comprehensive evaluation, rational reforms, and enhanced accountability—as outlined in the recommendations—the secretariats can evolve into robust pillars of local self-governance. By prioritizing transparency through tools like MIS and social audits, fostering collaboration across tiers, and addressing human elements like training and welfare, Andhra Pradesh can realign this framework toward equitable, efficient development. Ultimately, revitalizing the system is not just about administrative efficiency but about empowering communities, ensuring inclusive growth, and fulfilling the constitutional vision of people-centric governance. The government must act decisively to prevent further erosion and secure lasting benefits for all citizens.







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