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Playing Hide and Seek on Employment Guarantee

Context

- The Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act (**VB-G RAM G Act**) has been presented as a major reform of rural employment policy.
- Supporters portray it as an expansion of **employment guarantee** provisions, while critics argue that it weakens the legal and moral foundations of rural job security established under **MGNREGA**.
- A closer examination of the Act and the arguments advanced in its favour reveals that the proposed changes dilute core principles, limit workers' protections, and prioritise administrative control over social rights.

The Illusion of an Expanded Employment Guarantee

- A central claim is that the **VB-GRAMG** Act enhances rural employment security by increasing the number of guaranteed workdays from 100 to 125 per household.
- This claim, however, is undermined by the discretionary clause in **Section 5(1)**, which restricts the applicability of the guarantee to areas notified by the Central government.
- Such **discretion** contradicts the idea of a universal and enforceable right to work.
- By contrast, MGNREGA establishes a non-negotiable **entitlement** to employment upon demand.
- The possibility that the guarantee may not apply uniformly defeats its purpose and converts a legal right into an administrative privilege.
- Moreover, extending workdays to 125 could have been achieved within the existing MGNREGA framework, as several States have already done. This change, therefore, does not justify replacing the earlier Act.

The Myth of Disentitlement Reform

- Another defence of the VB-G RAM G Act is the removal of a so-called **disentitlement** provision from MGNREGA.
- The original clause merely suspended unemployment allowance for individuals who refused work after applying.
- It was designed to deter frivolous applications and has never been used in any significant way.
- The removal of this redundant provision has no meaningful effect on workers' access to employment or benefits.
- Presenting it as a major pro-worker reform exaggerates its importance and distracts from more substantive concerns.

- The protection of workers was neither enhanced nor diminished in practice by this change.

Normative Funding and the Abandonment of Demand-Driven Employment

- A more consequential shift under the VB-G RAM G Act is the move from **demand-driven** financing to **normative funding**.
- Fixed allocations determined by the Centre are promoted as a way to improve fiscal discipline and ensure fairness across States.
- However, a genuine employment guarantee cannot coexist with predetermined expenditure limits.
- In reality, normative allocations are likely to operate as **budget caps**, discouraging States from meeting actual employment demand.
- The claim that MGNREGA spending favours better-off **States** lacks empirical support, as no consistent correlation exists between employment levels and **poverty**
- Poorer States would be better served by higher **wages**, not by funding ceilings and cost-sharing arrangements.

Digital Technology and the Question of Corruption

- Proponents also argue that the VB-G RAM G Act will reduce **corruption** through greater reliance on digital **technology**.
- Yet MGNREGA already incorporates extensive systems for electronic payments, monitoring, and **digitisation**.
- These mechanisms have delivered mixed outcomes, often producing delays, exclusions, and technical failures.
- Such problems have sometimes weakened **transparency** and incentivised informal arrangements that undermine accountability.
- Rather than correcting these shortcomings, the new Act reinforces faith in technological solutions without addressing their documented limitations.
- Digital systems, when poorly implemented, can erode trust and harm participation.

Repackaging Rather Than Reform

- Several provisions highlighted as innovations in the VB-G RAM G Act, such as strengthened **audits** and timely wage payments, closely resemble existing MGNREGA clauses.
- Presenting these features as novel obscures the continuity between the two Acts and suggests a strategy of policy **rebranding** rather than substantive improvement.
- The broader pattern points toward increased **centralisation** of authority, with diminished space for State initiative and community oversight.
- In this process, **workers** and their **rights** risk being subordinated to administrative convenience and political messaging.

Conclusion

- The VB-G RAM G Act does not convincingly strengthen **India's rural employment**
- By weakening the universality of the employment guarantee, imposing fiscal constraints incompatible with demand-based work provision, and overstating the benefits of digitisation, the Act departs from the foundational principles that made MGNREGA a landmark policy.
- Rather than replacing an established system, **meaningful reform** would require reinforcing existing guarantees, addressing wage inadequacies, and prioritising workers' rights over symbolic restructuring.

Playing Hide and Seek on Employment Guarantee FAQs

Q1. Why is the VB-G RAM G Act said to weaken the employment guarantee?

Ans. The Act makes the guarantee discretionary by limiting its applicability to areas notified by the Central government.

Q2. Why does the increase to 125 days of work not justify a new Act?

Ans. The extension could have been achieved under MGNREGA without replacing the existing law.

Q3. What was the purpose of the so-called disentanglement provision in MGNREGA?

Ans. It temporarily restricted unemployment allowance for individuals who refused work after applying.

Q4. Why is normative funding incompatible with an employment guarantee?

Ans. Fixed budget allocations prevent States from responding fully to actual demand for work.

Q5. How has excessive reliance on digital technology affected employment programmes?

Ans. Technical failures and exclusions have undermined trust and sometimes increased corruption.

Source: **The Hindu**

India's Biggest Climate Gap Could Be Language

Context

- One of the most persistent gaps in science outreach lies in **Language**
- Scientific knowledge, no matter how advanced, loses impact when conveyed through dense **jargon** disconnected from everyday realities.
- In climate policy, this failure of **communication** has serious consequences. Words shape how problems are understood and acted upon; when language narrows meaning, it weakens **governance** and limits the scope of possible responses.
- The evolving use of the term **Loss** and **Damage** in climate discourse demonstrates how linguistic slippage can undermine climate action.

The Semantic Collapse of Loss and Damage

- At international climate negotiations, Loss and Damage refers to climate impacts that exceed the limits of **adaptation**.

- These include not only physical destruction, but also irreversible losses: cultural **identity**, ancestral lands, biodiversity, and **ecosystems** that cannot be restored.
- The term is intended to capture what is permanently lost, not merely what can be repaired.
- As this language moves into national and local administrative systems, its meaning narrows. Through bureaucratic **translation**, loss becomes a post-disaster assessment exercise, while damage is reduced to **compensation** determined by fixed norms.
- Climate impacts are absorbed into disaster management categories designed for short-term events rather than slow, cumulative change.
- As a result, international discussions of Loss and Damage finance are often understood locally as routine relief funding, stripping the concept of its broader ethical and political intent.
- This semantic contraction is not trivial.
- When language collapses into what can be quantified and closed, policy responses follow the same logic.
- Irreversible climate harms remain unaddressed, and ambitious global commitments risk becoming abstract promises rather than transformative interventions.

The Data-Decision Paradox in Climate Science

- Climate science capacity has expanded rapidly, producing unprecedented volumes of **data** on heat, floods, crops, and extreme events.
- Yet this growth has not translated into better **decisions**. Instead, a paradox has emerged: more information exists, but less clarity about how to act on it.
- Technical assessments often rely on indices and probabilistic models that remain distant from real-world decision-making.
- Local administrators may receive complex reports yet struggle to apply them under time pressure.
- Communities encounter fragmented climate messages that lack consistency or **relevance**.
- Information alone does not drive behaviour; people act when knowledge aligns with lived experience and practical constraints.
- This gap reveals a fundamental flaw in climate policy practice: science is prioritised as output rather than as a usable input into everyday governance.

Communication as Infrastructure, Not an Add-On

- Climate communication is frequently treated as secondary to technology and policy. In practice, it functions as essential **infrastructure**.
- Heat advisories that ignore informal labour realities, or flood alerts that assume universal access to smartphones, fail because they overlook social context.
- Sophisticated dashboards often go unused because they are not designed around how choices are made in moments of crisis.
- Where communication succeeds, outcomes improve dramatically. Long-term investment in credibility builds **trust**, enabling warnings to trigger timely action.
- In such cases, communication becomes as critical to **preparedness** as physical shelters or sensors.

- Clear messaging also strengthens responses to **heat** and **floods** by translating abstract risk into tangible consequences: health emergencies, school disruptions, water scarcity, and income loss.
- This framing helps justify public investment and enables **communities** to respond proactively rather than reactively.

Towards a Use-Oriented Climate Communication Framework

- Effective climate communication begins with use. It links projections directly to choices: changes in work schedules, public health planning, transport routes, and service delivery.
- This requires **localisation** across languages and contexts, and the **humanising** of climate science through everyday experience.
- Co-creation with frontline workers, local leaders, farmers, fishers, teachers, and journalists ensures that information fits decision-making realities.
- To sustain this approach, communication capacity must be embedded within **institutions**, supported by strong partnerships with the **media** so climate risks are consistently understood and acted upon.

Conclusion

- When communication fails, science remains trapped in reports and policies struggle to reach practice.
- When it succeeds, **resilience** becomes a shared social and political outcome. Language is not neutral: it determines which losses are recognised and which actions are considered possible.
- Turning climate knowledge into collective **action** therefore requires treating communication not as an afterthought, but as a central pillar of climate governance.

India's Biggest Climate Gap Could Be Language FAQs

Q1. Why does language matter in climate governance?

Ans. Language shapes how climate risks are understood, which directly influences policy priorities and governance responses.

Q2. What does “Loss and Damage” mean in climate negotiations?

Ans. It refers to irreversible climate impacts that go beyond adaptation, including cultural, ecological, and social losses.

Q3. How does the meaning of Loss and Damage change at the local level?

Ans. It is often reduced to disaster assessment and compensation within existing administrative frameworks.

Q4. Why does more climate data not always lead to better decisions?

Ans. Data fails to drive action when it is not communicated in ways that are relevant, usable, and aligned with lived realities.

Q5. Why is climate communication considered infrastructure?

Ans. Effective communication builds trust and preparedness, enabling timely action just like physical systems and technology.

Source: **The Hindu**

