

# ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH WOMEN EDUCATION

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## Abstract

*Achieving sustainable community development through women education cannot be overemphasized. This is so because women,( especially the educated women) possess the potentials for development delivery at all levels. This paper highlights on community development, its principles, sustainable development and its principles and the need for women education for sustainable community development delivery in Nigeria. The paper concludes that sustainable community development could be achieved through women education and that an educated woman is a veritable force for community development delivery. Community development should always be based on the needs of community members especially their felt-needs to ensure its sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable, Community Development, Women Education.

## INTRODUCTION

Achieving sustainable community development through women education is never in doubt. This is because women as human beings created by God, just like men, possess the potentials for development especially the educated women. Their contributions an equally yield a high level of growth in community and national development.

In the past, women were seen not heard. They were taken to be weak human beings with low intelligent quotient, house wives, milk factories for babies and were rejected, neglected and abandoned by the men folk in terms of contributing to community or national development. Her rightful place was in the home and her office was the kitchen. Women were regarded as a second class citizen in developmental issues. Sending her to school meant wasting precious money on a tool which would one day be bought and taken away by the luckiest bidder.

These views concerning women provoked discussion and inspired thought in the contemporary world concerning how to Liberate women from some prejudices of culture,

religion, socioeconomic etc. to be able to contribute towards community development. Since the movement for liberation of women, there has been a conscious effort to explore the potentials of women. No community or nation can be developed effectively without women. Today, women stand out in the crowd with significant roles in different sectors (education, health, economic, political e.t.c).

Sustainable development is one of the latest concepts that emerged in literature and thinking of development policy. The concept was brought into common usage by the world commission on Environment and Development in its 1987 report/Kempe in Onyenemezu (2013). The report conceptualizes sustainable development as human progress that meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Ugwu and Ijah 2011).

In 1987 the United Nations (UN), released Brunt land commission report which offered the most widely recognized definition of sustainable development as “that which meet needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” (Wikipedia 2009) in Onyenemezu (2013). Sustainable development means conservation, reservation, usage and management of resources so that what we do to improve life and living standard today does not compromise future use of such resources and improvement in the quality of life for all the people (Oyebamiji & Adekola 2008) in Onyenemezu (2013).

Nigeria communities have a lot of women with different potentials for community development which includes social, economic, political, cultural e.t.c. Their education cannot be over-emphasized in tapping these potentials of development. The truth remains that education remains the bedrock for any development. There is need for our future generations to be secured today for the overall development of our communities. This can only be achieved through educating women and allowing them to participate actively in sustainable community development activities.

There are more Illiterates than Literate people in the world today. It was in realization of this fact that the Education for All (EFA), an international commitment was first launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to ‘every citizen in every society’. It is also general knowledge that there are more literate males than females in Nigeria and other nations of the world. This drew the attention of the nations of the world which resulted in the millennium development goals and in particular goal number 2 which seeks to achieve Universal Basic Education for all children, boys and girls alike and now sustainable development goal four which is on quality education and goal five which is on gender equality.

The concern for women in development or women progress and women participation in national activities as per the men is not only a street slogan in Nigeria but a governmental struggle and popularized programme. Highly traditional men and women in Nigeria believe that the education of women would bring marital disharmony and thus go ahead to isolate and motivate them in even taking decision that concerns community development. This is because it is assumed that education would make women proud, arrogant, independent and disobedient to their husbands. Most Nigerian parents are illiterate and are not in a position to guide their children properly.

Also, the standard of living of many families has led many parents to give up their daughters in marriage at a very tender age and the dowry has been used to educate the boys (Ifedili, 1997). The resistance of men to women’s advancement is ultimately uneconomical,

unsociable, apolitical and non-progressive and thus cripples community development initiatives. The antiquated attitude of many men including those with sound education, has affected the ability and opportunity of promising female workers who want to achieve but whose efforts are often thwarted by those in authority yet these women are known to be the heart of community development in their communities. Also, it is a known fact that no community grows beyond its educational level and thus women education if kept at the recent point will keep their immediate community development at a standstill.

The problem of gender discrimination in the appointment of positions and allocation and awards of developmental projects should not only be addressed, but also stated policies should be actualized. In Nigeria, it is general knowledge among many women that qualified and able-bodied female workers, who are often neglected by those in authority, are often overwhelmed to a state of submission, defeat and despair. The society at the end of it all is the loser, Human ideas crumble.

## **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Community**

Community is defined as a group of people who live in, and? Or are traceable to a particular geographical location, which may or may not be traceable to a common ancestry, who have one ethnical culture, beliefs and traits development over a long period of time as a result of their day-to-day interactions/communication.

Anyanwu (1991) defines community as a group of people living a place (village or town) and working for the good of the community. Also, community in the words of Pottsby in Anyanwu (1991) is a population in legally established area, a traditional community, people live in the same locality and all the people can be traced to a common descent, they have strong bond of fellowship and homogenous set of standards and culture, relationships are mostly informal. In non-traditional communities (towns and cities) community members may not be traceable to a common descent. However as a result of living together for a long period of time, the people may have developed strong bonds of fellowship that bind them together and develop strong "we-feeling." They may therefore want to do things in common and solve community problems in a highly co-operative manner.

Anyanwu (1991) viewed that a community is characterized by the following:

1. The existence of a shared territory
2. The practice of same beliefs
3. The sharing of common bond of fellowship by its members
4. The existence of common sector standards among members
5. The existence of common culture; and
6. The use of common administration to run the community's affairs.

Community as a concept has been defined in different ways by different authors and writers. Some define it from the geographical point of view while others define it depending on their area of specialization. Hornby (2004) defined community as a group of persons having the same religion, race, occupation, etc, or with common interest etc.

Frankeznberg (1975) in Onyeozu (2007:2) defines the term community as a territorially bounded social system within which people live, sharing common social, economic and cultural characteristics. Oni and Ohiani in Onyenemezu (2008) defines community as a territorially

bounded social system within which people live in harmony, love, intimacy and share common social, economic and cultural characteristics.

From the above definitions, it can be deduced that a community is a social system where people live sharing common life, geographical location, common socio-economic, cultural and political characteristics, having a feeling of oneness and a sense of belonging which enable them to pursue one goal.

### **Development**

People, societies, communities, nations, phenomena, other living and non-living things etc either are growing or developing or both. It is necessary here to distinguish between 'growth' and 'development', the essence of this is that growth may occur without developing but essentially development may flow from growth. Growth connotes quantitative increase in space, number of people or objects, phenomena, etc that are so measured and described. On the other hand, development connotes quality active increase or improvements in the space of people, phenomena, etc that are being described.

Development as a concept has been defined by authors and writers from different perspectives. The economist defines it from the economic perspective, the scientist defines it from the scientific perspective, the psychologist does so from the psychological perspective, the educationist gives insights from the educational perspective etc. For the purpose of this discussion, development is perceived as improvement in the quality of socio-economic, political, cultural and environmental life of people including their life expectancy.

Todora (1979) defines development as the multi-dimensional process involving changes in structure, attitudes and institution as well as acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty. In this definition development is seen as positive alterations or changes of the quality of infrastructure, social amenities, health and educational institutions, people's welfare, attitudes and behaviours of people and general positive improvement in the quality of life of the people in a community.

Opensuru (2004) defines development in economic, social and political conditions of the whole society in terms of reduction or elimination of poverty, inequality, injustice, insecurity, ecological imbalances and unemployment within the context of growing economic development measured in terms of physical needs and self-fulfillment.

Akinpelu in Onyenemezu (2013) in defining development focused on human beings whom he referred to as the target of development processes neither rather than material accumulations surrounding him nor of the economic progress and growth of any nation. He conceived dev. as: a process of changing the personality, equipping if with the necessary skills knowledge, and attitudes to conceive, design and carry out his/her own self development. It involves liberating him/her from all inhibitions (social, economic, political and cultural) that prevent him/her from realizing the best confidence, self-reliance, self-pride, and prose to face the world, and of his/her creative potentials and sense of freedom and readiness to participate in any matters involving self/or the environment (p.80).

Palam in Onyeozu (2007) defined development from the point of view of its effect on peoples' life. He conceived development as a continuous process of positive change in the quality and span of life of a person or group of persons. The definition of development by Akinpelu in Onyenemezu (2013) is more appropriate in this discourse because it focused on

human beings as the target of development process rather than material accumulations or economic progress and growth of any nation.

### **Community Development**

A cursory, look at the concept of community and development would reveal to some extent the meaning of community development. However, for a more functional definition and to provide guidance for effective understanding of this concept.

Anyanwu (1991:3) defines community development as a process of social action in which people of a giving community organize themselves for planning actions, define common and individual needs and solve their problems; execute these plans with maximum vehicle upon community resources and supplement these resources where necessary with services and materials from government and non-governmental agencies outside the community. These definition emphasizes the need for development and improvement in the quality of life of the community to emanate from the people themselves and that the people must explore and utilize community resources. It recognizes that local resources may not be enough for such development effort and therefore there is the need for supplementary assistance to communities who embark on development programmes/projects.

The Scottish Community Development centre SCDC (2006) describes community development as an activity which confronts disadvantage, poverty and exclusion, promote values of active citizenship, learning and community participation. It is about change based on empowerment, leading to a better quality of life. The definition implies that community development as an activity is directed towards disadvantaged people or communities to achieve better quality of life through poverty reduction and involving the people in programmes meant for their improvement tagged and excluded groups to make them active participants in community and national development efforts reliant and self-sufficient. Community development involves conscious acceleration of changes in social, economic, political and technological spheres as well as planned social change in both rural and urban areas.

United Nations as reported in Esenjor (1992) gives a concise definition of community development as: The process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of the government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate those communities into life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress.(p.3)

### **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). The primary objective of sustainable development is to reduce the absolute poverty of the world's poor through providing lasting and secure livelihoods that minimize resource depletion, environmental degradation, cultural disruption and social instability. The Earth Summit (UNCED), which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, recognized the pressing environment and through the adoption of action for sustainable development in the 21st century

Agenda 21 stresses the importance of partnerships in improving social, economic and environmental quality in urban areas. It suggest renewed focus on effective land use planning to include adequate environmental infrastructure, water, sanitation, drainage, transportation

and waste management, in addition to a sound social infrastructure capable of alleviating hunger. According to Afonja (1999), the Earth Summit broadened environmental issues and emphasized the synergies without social and economic policy issues.

The 1997 special session of the UN General Assembly set a target date of 2002, for the formulation and elaboration of National strategies for sustainable development (Afonja, 1999). Sustainable development is credited to the Brundtland Commission as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is generally thought to have three components; environment, society and economy. The well-being of these three areas is intertwined not separate. For examples a healthy, prosperous society relies on a healthy environment to provide food and resources, safe drinking water and clean air for its citizens. The sustainability paradigm rejects the contention that causalities in the environmental and social realms are inevitable and acceptable consequences of economic development. Thus, the authors consider sustainability to be a paradigm for thinking about a future in which environmental, societal and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of development and improved quality of life.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) in Onyenemezu (2013) perceives sustainable development to mean environment, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow. Abraham in Onyenemezu (2013) observes that sustainable development mantra enjoins current generations to take a systematic approach to growth and development and to manage natural, produced and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generations — a system that connects space, and a system that connects time. The concept of sustainable development is one of the latest concepts that emerged from the literature of development policy (Onyenemezu, 2013). It cuts across all disciplines in today's knowledge industry. World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) in Kempe (1996) conceptualizes sustainable development as human progress that meet the needs of present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Ugwu & Ijah), in (Qnyenemezu, 2013).

Also, Oyebamiji & Adekola (2008) views that sustainable development means conservation, reservation, usage and management of resources so that what we do to improve life and living standard today does not compromise future use of such resources and improvement in the quality of life for all the people.

### **Principles of Sustainable Development**

Many government(s) and individuals have pondered what sustainable development means beyond a simple one-sentence definition.

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development flushes out the definition by listing 18 principles of sustainability.

1. People are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.
2. Development today may not undermine the development and environment needs of present and future generations.
3. Nations have the sovereign right to exploit their own resources, but without causing environmental damage beyond their bodies.

**4.** Nation shall use the precautionary approach to protect the environment. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, scientific uncertainty shall not be used to postpone cost effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

**5.** In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and can not be considered in isolation from it. Eradicating poverty and reducing disparities in living standards in different parts of the world are essential to achieve sustainable development and meet the needs of the majority of people.

**6.** Nations shall develop international laws to provide compensation for damage that activities under their control cause to areas beyond their borders.

**7.** Nations shall co-operate to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the earth's ecosystem. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.

**8.** Nations should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.

**9.** Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens. Nations shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making environmental information widely available.

**10.** Nations shall enact effective environmental laws, and develop national laws regarding liability for the victims of pollution and other environmental damage. Where they have authority, nations shall assess the environmental impact of proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse.

**11.** Nations should cooperate to promote an open international economic system that will lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries.

**12.** The polluter should, in principle bear the cost of pollution.

**13.** Nations shall warn one another to natural disasters or activities that may have harmful trans boundary impact.

**14.** Sustainable development requires better scientific understanding of the problems nations should share knowledge and innovate technologies to achieve their goal of sustainability.

**15.** The full participation of women is essential to achieve sustainable development. The creativity, ideas and courage of youth and the knowledge of indigenous people are needed too. Nations should recognize and support the identity, culture and interest of indigenous people.

**16.** Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development and nations shall respect international laws protecting the environment in times of armed conflict and shall co-operate in their further establishment.

**17.** Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.

The "Rio Principles" gave us parameters for envisioning locally relevant and culturally appropriate sustainable development for our own nations, regions and communities. These principles help us to grasp the abstract concept of sustainable development and begin to implement it.

Corroborating the above, Abraham in Onyenemezu & Okanezi (2013) outlined the following as some principles of sustainable development

- **Equity:** Equity is essential for a sustainable development. This concept promotes equity between ages, genders, classes, races, countries and continents.
- **Social Development:** The concept of sustainable development emphasis on not only economic development, but also on social development and the need to conserve our environment and natural resources too.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Sustainable development has to be inclusive. It is based on the improved quality of life for everyone mainly the deprived and the poor of the world.
- **Human Environment Harmony:** This understands that the needs of human beings and the requirements of the environment are interdependent and acknowledges this fact.
- **Co-operation:** Sustainable development is possible only if the developed world and the developing countries co-operate and the former supports the later in their endeavour whenever they can through subsidies, for instance looking at these principles, it becomes obvious that sustainable development does not mean only a future related concept but also requires a lot of understanding and appreciation which adult education offers for national development to be attained (Onyenemezu & Okenezi, 2013).

### **Sustainable Community Development**

There are basic principles that guide planning and implementation of community towards sustainable development Oduaran (1994) identified these five (5) principles to include the following:

1. Creating a conducive environment for development
2. Cultivating friendly and trustful relations with the people.
3. Agreeing with the people on the type of change or project to be executed.
4. Convincing the people that change to be introduced is safe or the project is realizable.
5. There is the need to work with groups rather than individuals.

Sometimes, some of these traditions make such people resist changes. Sustainable community development implies a change from status quo. For a change to take place, or be accepted by members of a community, the people must be convinced that the change will not have negative effects on their lives. They need to be convinced that whatever they invest in the project will yield good dividends and that the project will not fail.

The change agent must realize that most people are influenced by group opinions and behaviours. It is therefore better to try-to- work with women, groups, group leaders who, if convinced will in turn encourage their members to participate actively in the project.

## **Need for Women Education**

Sustainable community development can only be achieved through women empowerment, and women empowerment can only be achieved through the provision of adequate and functional education to the women folk. This is crucial because no matter how rich or vast a nation is without an effective, efficient, adequate and functional education for all its citizens (men and women) education which is relevant to its immediate needs, goals and objectives, such nation would find it difficult to stand on its own. The brand of education being advocated is the type of education which is embedded the spirit of self-realization and all that are needed for the country's overall development like mass literacy, economic empowerment etc (Eseve, 2001).

The need for women education is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education. This, has been noted is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women struggle to improve their status. The empowerment suggested is such that entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over source of power. This however, cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of change in the positive direction.

In the spirit of Universal Basic Education (UBE) provision of formal and functional education is needed for the women folk, because:

- i)** It would empower them to know and ask for their rights to education, health, shelter, food, clothing etc.
- ii)** It would empower them to fight against every form of discrimination against their folk, assert themselves about their right to equal treatment with their male counterpart as bonafide citizens of this nation.
- iii)** It would enable the women take decisions and accept responsibilities of taking such decisions concerning themselves.
- iv)** It would give economic power to the women and thereby enable them to contribute their quota to the economic growth of the nation.
- v)** It would empower the women scientifically through exposure to science and technological age and information computer technology breakthrough unfolding worldwide.
- vi)** It would help women to reduce material and infant mortality through improved nutrition, improved child rearing practice, health care and prevention against killer disease.
- vii)** It would avail women with the opportunity of participating keenly in the world of sophisticated politics and governance as enlightened citizens.

Three fundamental barriers have been identified by Awe, (2008) to be responsible for low level of development and enhancement of women especially for educational advancement. These barriers are:

- i)** Restricted access to education,
- ii)** Reluctance to aspire and
- iii)** Resistance to women advancement within a patriarchal system.

Restricted access to education by women in this country is profoundly rooted in history, religion, culture, the psychology of self, law, political institution and social attitudes which interact in several ways to limit women's access to formal education when compared with their male counterparts. For example, it has been observed that Nigerian women are lagging behind their counterpart in developed and some developing nations due to the late start in educating them. This is caused by our traditions and culture which are hostile to women. This tradition reduces them to kitchen managers and producers of babies. Thus, their education ideally is expected to end in a kitchen, a condition which ironically is detested by many parents thereby discouraging their investment in girl-child education.

Reluctance to aspire is another major problem against women education. This is the main manifestation of African wrong socialization which tends to impress upon the women folk the belief that certain subjects and professions are the exclusive preserve of men. Our socialization at the same time confines women to certain roles e.g cooking, baby making, baby nursing, home keeping, etc. This state of affair is definitely a negation of the scientific discovery that women are not intellectually inferior to men. This is because of the fact that both males and females have 42 chromosomes in their genes. Furthermore, science has revealed that there are no innate biological or psychological reasons why girls should not do as well as boys if given the opportunity and if provided with adequate motivation (Onyeinye, 2000).

Resistance to women advancement within a patriarchal system is a further manifestation of our cultural practices which overtly and covertly interact to hinder women advancement especially from educational view point. This resistance is further engendered by her traditional assigned roles of housewife, mother, baby sitter, member of inferior sex, stereotyped gender victim, among others. Thus, it is stated that the problem of resistance to women advancement are culture based and they include those brought about by homework conflict; ignorance on the part of many parents, erroneous belief that religion is against the provision of sound formal education to the girl child, gender stereotyping and stigmatization, socio-economic constraints and poor attitude of some parents (NCCE, 1998).

It is pertinent to note at this juncture that the greater access of men in Nigeria to education more than their women counterparts have very negative consequences on the latter. Infact, it has been observed that this unwholesome situation is the preponderance of women in lower positions in work organization and less paid jobs.

For instance, it has been noted by Oladunni (1999) that Nigerian women are found predominantly in such occupations as teaching, nursing services, agriculture, small scale food processing, secretarial duties, clerical duties, not counting in banks, cleaners and middle level professional occupations. Consequently, it has been opined that majority of them are therefore poor, impoverished and susceptible to attack by a number of debilitating diseases such as vesto virginal fistuala (VVF) etc other problems against women education include the familiar problems in Nigerians education like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations, government policies and lack of political will to implement the entire educational program.

The inferiority complex observable in Nigerian women can be attributed to the influence of environmental manipulation. For example, through the traditional socialization process of the typical African society, women are made to accept negative self-fulfilling prophesy,

stereotyping and stigmatization that they are members of a weaker sex. At present, the forces which combine to hamper women education and development in Nigeria could be viewed broadly to include denial of access to education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on them, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husband (Onyinye, 2000).

### **The Role of Adult Education in Educating Women for Community Development**

Nyerere (1979) rightly pointed out that development is for man by man and of man. The same is true of education. A woman has to develop herself through functional education if she has to develop her environment, community and nation. According to Paulo Freire (1976) a Brazilian adult educator and an educationist, functional literacy plays the role of awakening consciousness and enabling the women to critically analyze their world and thus attain freedom and also become aware of their own dignity as women.

The relevance of adult education in the education of women is not in any doubt. Many countries, scholars, national and international organizations have recognized the indispensable role of adult education in educating women for sustainable community development. Many societies at one time or the other have realized that the greatest obstacle for their sustainable community development is lack of well educated women in the society.

According to Gaper (1974) argue that the manner in which we can use and change the environment in order to improve ourselves, demands that adult education/facilitators, facilitating this process of learning must be properly educated. According to Poston (1954) for the community members to adequately define their problems, collect and analyze the data relevant to it, examine various possible solutions, choose one, put it into effect the subsequently evaluate their progress, they require adequate enlightenment/awareness of adult education. Odojirin in improving the life of individuals and that of the society is inherent in its aim which is to maintain an adult population up to the standard of competence in knowledge, wisdom and skills which the society requires are serious problems which interrupt the solution of these problems.

The immediate relevance of adult education is that it deals with those who are already members of labour force, who are more ready to apply their newly acquired skills to the productive process and to their lives in general. Kassarn (1989) observed that many developed countries are trapped in cruel cycles of community poverty and dispense and psychological liberation. According to Meire (1979) educational system reflects on the essential characteristics of the society and can influence the future shape and direction of such society.

Sustainable community development is geared towards improving the socio-economic, cultural, political, spiritual and moral living conditions of the people. It involves the education of women; though these programme women are been taught how to control their birth which in turn has a positive affect on the growing population of the community, and it also equips the women with knowledge on how to train their children, to become useful citizens that will bring about the change the community needs, and finally on how to utilize the community resources.

According to James Aggrey (1998) if you educate a woman, you educate a family, community, nation etc.

## CONCLUSION

Sustainable community development can be achieved through women education. Educated women can contribute to achieving sustainable community development. Educated women perform certain roles like improving the educational sector, the health sector, political sector etc. of communities which in turn brought about sustainable community development. Educated women in trying to achieve sustainable community development were faced with such problems as gender inequality, illiteracy, lack of finance, lack of infrastructure etc. Illiterate women should be encouraged to get themselves literate because we cannot achieve sustainable community development where majority of the women are illiterates. Community development projects embarked on should be based on the needs of the community members for them to be sustainable. Funds should be made available both by the government, and private individuals that are well to do in their communities.

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