

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: MEANING; PILLARS AND COVID-19
PANDEMIC IN AFRICA: THE WAY FORWARD”.**

**PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL OF ARTS AND CONTEMPORARY STUDIES, VOL
12, NUMBER 2, 2020 FOR PROMOTION OF EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC
RESEARCH (CPESR)**

ISSN: 2277-0046 PAGES 49-68.

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Abstract

The term sustainable development is a well-used one and is probably familiar to many within and beyond academia, certainly in the more developed parts of the world. It is a term that we come across in arenas ranging from door-step recycling initiatives to media explanations of global security issues. Within human geography, it interrogates research extending from social exclusion within cities of the United Kingdom to outcomes of environmental transformations in rural Africa. Indeed, some consider that there is none so relevant a discipline as geography to contribute to the sustainable development debates given its ability to marry the science of the environment with an understanding of economic, political, and cultural change, that is, development. This paper argues that the pursuit of sustainable development is now stated as a principal policy goal of organizations and institutions across all scales of public life and the field of academic and practical enquiry around sustainable development is a diverse and expanding one. In addition the paper recommends that decision-makers need to be constantly mindful of the relationships, complementarities, and trade-offs among these pillars and ensure responsible human behaviour and actions at the international, national, community and individual levels in order to uphold and promote the tenets of this paradigm in the interest of human development. More needs to be done by the key players particularly the United Nations (UN), governments, private sector, and civil society organizations in terms of policies, education and regulation on social, economic and

environmental resource management to ensure that everyone is sustainable development aware, conscious, cultured and compliant.

Keywords: Sustainable development, economic and social stability, Covid 19 implications on sustainable development in Africa.

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2015 to end poverty and set the world on a path of peace, prosperity and opportunity for all on a healthy planet. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demand nothing short of a transformation of the financial, economic and political systems that govern our societies today to guarantee the human rights of all. They require immense political will and ambitious action by all stakeholders. But, as Member States recognized at the SDG Summit held last September, global efforts to date have been insufficient to deliver the change we need, jeopardizing the Agenda's promise to current and future generations.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 brings together the latest data to show us that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress remained uneven and we were not on track to meet the Goals by 2030. Some gains were visible: the share of children and youth out of school had fallen; the incidence of many communicable diseases was in decline; access to safely managed drinking water had improved; and women's representation in leadership roles was increasing.

At the same time, the number of people suffering from food insecurity was on the rise, the natural environment continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate, and dramatic levels of inequality persisted in all regions. Change was still not happening at the speed or scale required. Due to COVID-19, an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis is threatening lives and livelihoods, making the achievement of Goals even more challenging. As of the beginning of June (2020), the death toll had surpassed 400,000 and was continuing to climb, with almost no country spared. Health systems in many countries have been driven to the brink of collapse. The livelihood of half the global workforce has been severely affected. More than 1.6 billion students are out of school, and tens of millions of people are being pushed back into extreme poverty and hunger, erasing the modest progress made in recent years. Although the novel coronavirus affects every person and community, it does not do so equally. Instead, it has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and injustices.

In advanced economies, fatality rates have been highest among marginalized groups. In developing countries, the most vulnerable – including those employed in the informal economy, older people, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants and refugees – risk being hit even harder. Across the globe, young people are being disproportionately affected, particularly in the

world of work. Women and girls are facing new barriers and new threats, ranging from a shadow pandemic of violence to additional burdens of unpaid care work. Far from undermining the case for the SDGs, the root causes and uneven impacts of COVID-19 demonstrate precisely why Africans need the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and underscore the urgency of their implementation. Recovery packages must facilitate the shift to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and support universal access to quality public services.

Proactive leadership and support are needed to ensure statistical organizations have the tools and resources to facilitate timely and smart decision-making. To guide and support these actions, the United Nations system has mobilized at all levels, leveraging the recent reforms of the United Nations development system.

Statement of Problem and Objective of Study

The objective of the paper is to show the existing gap between the preconceived notion of development and the current Covid 19 pandemic disruption of the theories, practices and plans aimed at achieving global and regional sustainable development goals. Classical theories of development consider development within the framework of economic growth and development. According to these theories, development is a synonym for the economic growth that every state in a particular stage has to under-go, driven by the transformation of traditional agriculture into modern industrialized production of various products and services, i.e. shifting from the traditional society to the stage of maturity and high consumption.

These theories consider developing countries as countries limited by the poor allocation of the resources emerging as a result of the firm hand of government and corruption, inefficient and insufficient economic initiatives, but also political, institutional and economic austerity, whereby being captured by dependence and domination of developed wealthy states (Todaro and Smith, 2003). However, the novel corona virus (Covid 19) pandemic has inflicted havoc across the globe for lives and livelihoods. The impact of the pandemic on human lives is severe, but the effects on the global economy and on sustainable development's future are also a concern. The International Monetary Fund already declared that the world is into a recession. The full economic impact of the crisis is still difficult to predict but preliminary estimates are US\$2 trillion. COVID-19 has

created an environment of emergency. For every individual of the countries it touched, it has brought a distressing social, economic and political crisis that will leave deep scars.

A significant question to ask ourselves is that how do we prioritize our long-term goals in this humanitarian crisis? Should we be more concerned towards the threat of climate change instead? How do we ensure resource efficiency while ensuring health of nation? Though in the current situation these questions do not seem to be of utmost concern but they are equally important. The response to the pandemic cannot be de-linked from the SDGs. Indeed, achieving the SDGs will put us on a firm path to dealing with global health risks and emerging infectious diseases.

Significant of Study

The significance of this paper is to show that sustainable development goals (SDGs) still offer the best option to reduce the worst impacts of COVID-19 and to recover better globally and particularly in Africa. Countries in Africa will be better placed to recover from the human and economic devastation caused by COVID-19 by accelerating efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), according to a policy brief issued by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) recently.

While it is still unclear what the ultimate effect of the coronavirus will be, the initial assessments are sobering, with enormous losses of lives and livelihoods. The death toll, has been close to half a million though now declining globally.

Initial assessments show that there are immense risks to failing to act swiftly and in a coordinated manner. Global GDP is expected to contract by 5.2 per cent in 2020, the largest contraction in economic activity since the Great Depression, and far worse than the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. In 2020 alone, millions of people—estimates range from around 35 to 60 million—could be pushed into extreme poverty, reversing the declining global trend of the last twenty-plus years. Some 1.6 billion people working in the informal sector including the economy are estimated to be at risk of losing their livelihoods, many of whom lack access to any form of social protection.

An additional 10 million of the world's children could face acute malnutrition, and the number of people facing acute food insecurity could almost double relative to 2019, rising to 265 million. School closures have affected over 90 per cent of the world's student population—1.6 billion

children and youth. More detailed data on the world's sustainable development efforts will be announced on 7 July in the Sustainable Development Goals Progress Report 2020.

Decisions taken now on whether to return to the pre-pandemic world or to one that is more sustainable and equitable will help shape future outcomes. The policy brief warns that if coronavirus responses are ad-hoc, underfunded and without a view to long-term goals, decades of progress toward sustainable development stand to be reversed.

Alternatively, as countries begin to move towards recovery, the brief stated that “the thoughtful and targeted actions can place the world on a robust trajectory towards achieving the SDGs.”

Past progress toward achieving many of the goals is a factor in lessening the severity of impacts on lives and economies. For example, achieving SDG 6 access to clean water is necessary to enable people to wash one's hands regularly, which is one of the top virus-repelling strategies recommended by the World Health Organization. SDG 11, which calls for sustainable cities and communities, has proven critical for reducing the exposure to the virus for those living in crowded places or without access to basic services. And SDG 3 concerns the need to address pre-existing health conditions such as non-communicable diseases, which have been identified as a major factor in more severe COVID cases.

Past progress in promoting decent work (SDG 8), increasing access to quality health care (SDG 3) and ensuring internet access for school and work (SDG 9) help mitigate the severity of adverse impacts.

The policy brief demonstrated the key concern of the SDGs and to leave no one behind and must be central to planners and decision makers while developing COVID-19 recovery policies. These policies should be created with an eye towards protecting vulnerable groups including young people who face unemployment, children who have no access to online learning opportunities, and women, who face a disproportionate increase in the burden of care work as well as greater risk of domestic violence.

The SDGs can serve as preventive medicine against future shocks, but responses will have to deviate far from business as usual, using this pause to adopt more equitable and sustainable ways forward.

For instance, with oil prices at historic lows and employment in the sector shrinking, we can initiate a just transition for workers to the green economy while cancelling fuel subsidies and introducing carbon taxes. This could set the stage for meeting the most ambitious goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change while also achieving the SDGs.

To ward off the worst effects of COVID-19, countries should prioritize action in three areas: protecting progress already made towards the SDGs, accelerating the universal provision of quality basic services, and maintaining the environmental gains of this period to reverse trends in the degradation of nature.

Literature Review

As of 19 March 2020, approximately 176 countries and across all regions have been affected by COVID-19 with over 6.2 million confirmed cases world2019wide, and over 380,000 deaths (WHO 2019). Alternatively, China has managed to reduce the spread of the disease within its borders (WHO 2019), and the current epicenter of the problem is in Europe and in the Americas, though it is expected that the African continent will soon be affected, with South Africa having the most cases on the continent so far.

This paper also adopted a descriptive conceptual Approach, Method of Data Collection and Materials In order to better understand the unfolding economic and social impacts of COVID-19, including the impacts on the SDGs, and potential strategic responses, with evidence-based assessment performed. First, this exploratory study, employs a critical contextual approach grounded in a systems theoretic, in order to examine, and respond to, the macro impacts (economic, social and environmental) in context (Knight S.A and Cross, D. 2012), (Garcia, M.; McDowell 2010).

Impact here means the effects an event (i.e., COVID-19) has on trade and employment, social and public health and the environment. The approach combines (a) a constructed focus on impact (economic, social, environmental), (b) set in context (the contemporaneous economy as ecosystem), and (c) a critical reflection on the notion of economic development. From a systems theory perspective: first, the phenomenon under investigation, impact, always exists within a context, and the latter inherently influences the former; second, the modern industrial economy(i.e., capitalism) is arguably humanity's largest socially constructed ecosystem, and

which shapes our entire way of life (Cole, A. and Ferrarese, E 2018); and third, as an ecosystem, the global economy self-organizes through learning ,but suffers structural irreversibility and a tendency for growth to slow down, leading to the loss of continuity and uncertainty in the future (Foster, J. 2010).

Going further, critical reflection helps raise awareness of potential alternative paradigms of growth, such as one that includes equity and well-being. This critical reflection also invites engagement with an alternative paradigm, in order to better realize the achievement of SDGs. A critical awareness helps everyone, from policy makers to individuals, become more accountable and to secure the social influences and resources needed to promote positive change (i.e., achieve the SDGs) (Grant, M.J. and Booth, A. A 2009).

The data collection method involved the collection and review of both rapid and scoping of online sources between March and May 2020. In the review, a wide range of materials, including policy and media reports, and blogs, in the search for patterns on emerging economic impacts, as well as on potential policy responses to the crisis. We also reviewed published research on fundamental social themes (including collateral harm from the crisis, including the specter of rising poverty, the vulnerability of health care systems, the threat of (nationalist) patriotism to global solidarity, and calls for a new capitalism (Martin, E. 2020).

The review categorized references to COVID-19 into (a) economic, (b) social and (c) environmental. It also identified three key stakeholder groups attached to all references: concerned policy makers (e.g., UNCTAD), market share-dealing participants (e.g., S&P 500) and informed observers (e.g., Forbes).A content analysis of these published materials identified overlapping concerns and arguments, representing a convergence of thinking among stakeholders about the nature of the problem under review including amongst others;

(a) The economic impact (in particular financial size of impact and scope, sectors facing immediate collapse, including impact on international supply chains), and

(b) The social impact (including public health and public health systems, loss of employment and poverty, education, gender). These analyses were mapped to the SDGs, highlighting which SDGs would be adversely affected. The review also identified potential challenges to overcoming the

pandemic (unlikelihood of an early vaccine) and possible technological solutions (tracing using electronic surveillance).

The expected global recession is expected to be worse than the 2007–2009 financial crisis, while the longer-run effects depend on when the virus peaks (UN News 2020). The UN Trade and Development Agency (UNCTAD) estimates the cost of the pandemic to the global economy in 2020 will be around USD 1 trillion.

However, this may be optimistic due to the uncertainty of the length of the epidemic, its spread and impact and differing government policy responses. In the first quarter of 2020, global financial markets collapsed, due to or accelerated by a global economic shutdown, fear and uncertainty about the future. During February 2020, the USAS&P 500 fell over 30% Li, Y (2020). Contributing factors include: interruptions to international supply chains and reduced trade due to business closures in China, Europe and elsewhere as the virus spreads; and disruption to economic activity through removal of the labor force (infection, mortality, social distancing, lockdown), aimed at interrupting the transmission of the virus.

This “forced jump” to remote working conditions may herald positive and permanent change for some, but not all work can be done remotely, e.g., in travel, agriculture and manufacturing. International travel has enabled the rapid spread of the epidemic, highlighting the interconnectedness of economies. Travel restrictions have grown significantly, with many governments imposing either a total or partial border closure, while airlines are grounding flights, further reducing international trade and tourism. Indeed, many airlines may face bankruptcy (Leigh, G 2020).

Unprecedented levels of unemployment loom, and the need for government support may force governments to take on uncomfortably high levels of debt, as many sectors in the economy require support. Pandemics causes huge uncertainty, and makes the vulnerabilities and fragilities of the current economic system fragile. The high uncertainty makes it difficult to predict what the long-term effects of the pandemic will be (Platje, J.; Harvey. J. and Bacchus L.R 2020), Van Dam, Y. and (Webbink, J 2020). Since the emergence of the virus approximately several months ago, the economic impacts of COVID-19 have received by far the greatest concentration of attention to date (to June 2020). An online search for “COVID-19 and impact” returned 4,280,000,000 hits.

Among the first 100 hits. (68%) referred to impacts on the economy and business, with some sources focused on sector impacts, including aviation, tourism and retail, among others (Table 1). Of the first ten hits, eight were economic/business/financial. From a systems theoretical perspective, this concentration of attention to economic and business concerns in relation to other factors confirms the centrality of the economy as the ecosystem of everyday life, and the context for any assessment of impact thereon. Further noteworthy is the complete absence of the ecological environment from the top 100 hits.

Table 1. Top 100 online hits for “COVID-19 and impact”: non-economic impacts.

Top 100 Online Hits for “COVID-19 and Impact”: Non-economic Impacts (Google), 9 June 2020				
		1-50	51-100	
Economic + Business	Economy	0.5, 0.5		
	Business		0.5	
	Labor/work	1		
Social	Health/medical	1,1	1, 1, 1, 1	
	Education	1		
	Individual mobility	0.5		
	Gender	Women	0.5, 1	0.5
		Children		1, 1
Environmental				
Administrative and Other	Air traffic (Europe)	1		
	Legal services	1		1
	EU projects admin	1		
	Weather forecast infrastructure	1		
Info + Research	Aggregator (Wiki)	1		1
	Mass media	1		
	Socio-econ	Socio-econ	1, 1	1, 1, 1
		Social	1	
		Global poverty	1	
TOTAL (1-50 + 51-100)				
Non-econ: 32% (14 + 18)/100		14/50		18/50
Econ only: 68% (36 + 32)/100		36/50		32/50

Note: A score of 0.5 means a particular hit straddles two categories: impact on women in small fishing businesses; econ impact on women; econ impact on individual mobility; econ impact on women entrepreneurs.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive, qualitative and analytical approach for gathering information for this paper by relying on wellsprings of newspaper publications, researches, government records, policy formulation articles that are identified with the topic under review.

Findings and Discussion

In addition to the aforementioned economic impacts of COVID-19, the pandemic poses a threat to sustainable development in Nigeria. In particular, it may endanger the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are set to be achieved by 2030. Such impacts are already negative to rich countries, so they are likely to be felt more strongly across developing nations, which do not have the capacity or the resources to cope with the many economic and social challenges inflicted by the disease. It is estimated that the COVID-19 economic shut down will push 420–580 million people into poverty, causing global poverty to rise for the first time since 1990 (Oxfam International 2020). There can be little doubt that this “poverty tsunami...in developing countries” (Shipp, T 2020) is intimately bound up with other social ills, including health, conflict, loss of livelihood and inequality. Nevertheless, the first direct reference to (global) poverty in the top100 hits was at number 97. Some of the potential impacts of COVID-19 on the SDGs are summarized in Figure 1.

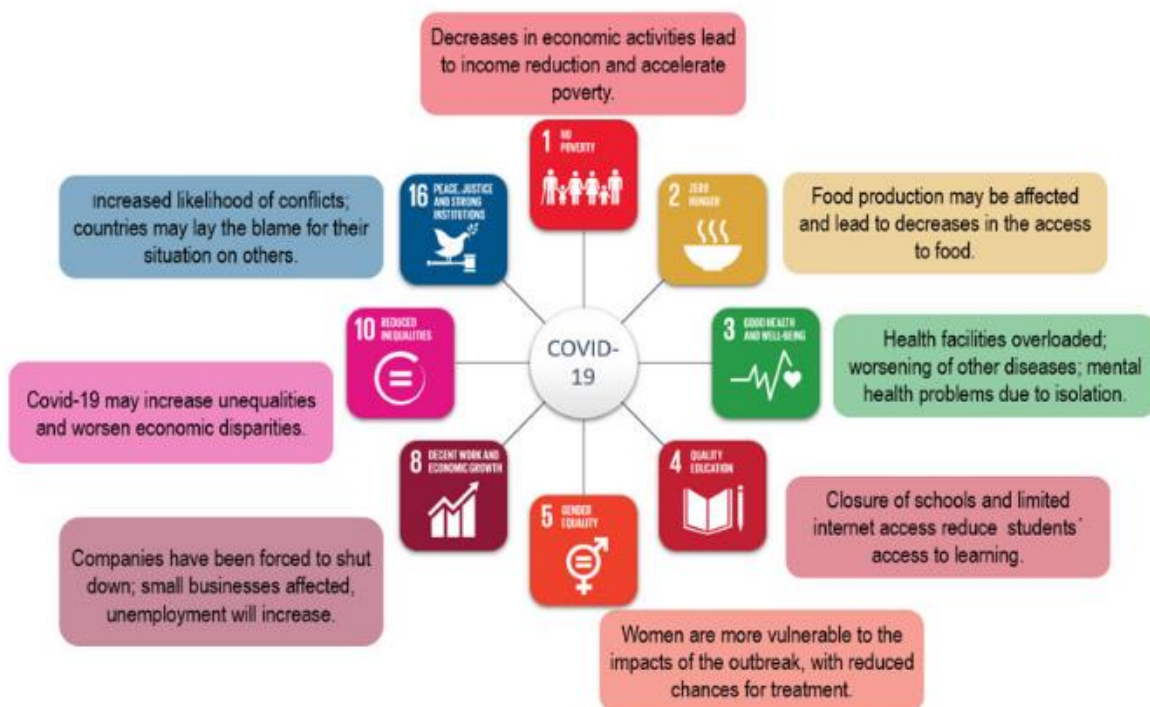


Figure 1. Some of the main impacts of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals.

The impacts of the coronavirus disease on the social aspects of sustainability are not only limited to SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero hunger). Moreover, pandemics in the past teach us they can leave a significant psychological impact, which is undoubtedly amplified by embedded socio-economic inequalities and uncertainty of the future. Millions of people around the world have no income security, no unemployment insurance or sick pay (ILO 2020) and often very limited savings, whose living conditions will be worsened by the pandemic. The lockdown in many countries has been preventing people from going to work, and this will persist for an unknown length of time, potentially the rest of 2020 and beyond.

As any other disease, the first effects are felt in the health systems, posing a threat to SDG 3 (Good health and well-being): hospitals and other health facilities in many countries are overloaded and people may not seek medical care (in case of real need) for being afraid of getting infected in these places. Sumner, (A. Hoy, C. and *Ortiz-Juarez, E* 2020). The lack of equipment and infra-structure in weak health systems means that the level of mortality may be high. Further, while COVID-19 has become a priority to many health systems in developing nations, they still need to attend to many other existing diseases such as malaria, yellow fever and others. Indeed, there is strong concern that dealing with COVID-19 is disrupting other disease prevention programs.

The healthcare systems of most developing countries particularly in Africa are ill-equipped to cope with an array of public health problems, due to lack of funding, equipment and qualified personnel. Mental health problems are also likely to be overlooked, since the isolation of social distancing may mask or lead to an increase in the percentage of sufferers. Companies around the world have been forced to shut down and suspend activities. Even though examples from countries which already experienced the worst phase (as China) show that activities progressively return to normality, many small businesses may not survive this difficult period. Additionally, employees may be furloughed (temporarily suspended) while the economy recovers, or be made unemployed (Oxford 2020).

The current pandemic not only depresses the economy (and consequently the scope of SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth)) but also increases the likelihood of conflicts (within and across borders) and therefore jeopardizes the goal of global peace and justice (SDG 16: Peace, Justice and strong institutions). According to (McCloskey, B. Zumla, A.; Ippolito, G. Blumberg,

L. Arbon, P. Cicero, A. Endericks, T 2020), more than 130 countries have implemented nationwide closures of schools and universities, impacting over 80% of the world's student population (i.e., schools and universities). Many educational institutions are attempting to maintain programs through online education. However, equity is a major constraint on access to distance learning. In developing countries, many students do not have access to the internet, or do not possess personal computers or tablets, or a safe and supportive learning environment appropriate for e-learning.

The pandemic will therefore harm education in all spheres (SDG 4 Quality education), driving up the need for childcare, and causing higher economic costs, increased pressure on schools and a rise of dropout rates.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The manifold damages posed by the COVID-19 epidemic to the world economy, and the social well-being of millions of people, implies that it will take many years to recover. Even so, it may only reach 80% of the pre-COVID-19 levels (Scott Gottlieb 2020), due to the uncertainty ahead. Without an effective vaccine in place, economic activity will continue to be hampered. It is thus important that further efforts in the field of public health are pursued. In particular, investments should be directed towards the measures aimed at reducing exposure to SARS-COV-2, the virus behind the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be acknowledged that, even though some countries have managed to curb the spread of the virus, the COVID-19 pandemic still currently poses a major threat to the well-being of people and nations worldwide. Indeed, the fact that health security capacities in the context of the outbreak are rather fragile means that many countries are not able to handle it effectively.

Against this background, it is not possible to generalize about national strategies for restarting economic activity, as these are likely to be as varied as the responses to COVID-19. Moreover, there is overall a danger that the developed economies will turn their attention inwards and overlook the fact that there is not only an economic interdependence but that they also share public health challenges with the developing world. In the latter, the COVID-19 crisis poses a burden to already stretched health systems, which struggle to cope with many diseases such as malaria, AIDS or tuberculosis, among others.

Critically, there needs to be more international solidarity, in the form of a greater political commitment across all nations, towards ensuring an even access to equipment and materials, so that developing countries are not disadvantaged. Current trends suggest that the process of the implementation of the SDGs might be delayed: the many socio-economic pressures and set-backs are lowering the level of priority given to the SDGs. Further, the potentials and opportunities offered by the SDGs, such as fighting poverty or eradicating hunger, may be at least partly undermined by COVID-19.

It is thus wise to issue a note of caution, warning about the need to continue to put an emphasis on the implementation of the SDGs, so that the progress achieved to date is not endangered. Indeed, the global crises triggered by COVID-19 mean that pursuing and implementing the SDGs are more important now than they were before, since they represent some of the means via which quality of life can be restored and the many problems associated with the lack of water, food or poor health conditions may be addressed. In doing so, the momentum created by the pandemic may lead to a transformation from what currently is regarded as a global threat, to a global opportunity, providing anew impulse leading to the realization of the UN Agenda 2030 as a whole, and of the SDGs in particular.

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