

GENDER PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FROM THE OTI AND VOLTA REGIONS OF GHANA

Okorley NAE¹ and Enameh-Agbolosoo AD^{2*}

*¹Department of Human Resource Management, School of Business, College of Humanities
and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana*

*² Department of Integrated Development Studies, School of Social Sciences Evangelical
Presbyterian University College, Ho-Volta Region, Ghana*

Abstract: A number of conflict hotspots as old as the ages of the communities themselves, can be associated with the communities of the Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana respectively. These hotspots have conflicts that need to be sustainably managed so they do not lead to frequent violent situations. The term conflict management according to this study encompasses all activities that prevent and manage conflicts in a non-violent way. The study examined the gender perspectives of social protection measures available to these communities in times of conflict management. Data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Narrative thematic analysis was used in bringing out key issues related to the study. Perspectives on social protection measures available to communities revealed several forms in the current study. The results revealed that there has been high support for social protection received from some governmental and Non-Governmental Institutions as well as religious groups and leaders. The social protection forms came from the pockets of benevolent government workers, appropriate agencies, the Peace Council, individuals in the conflict hotspots, and international donors. Gendered perspectives of social protection revealed social protection measures with a gender focus and social protection measures without a gender focus. The study also indicated that some external organizations or institutions have disappointed the communities as they never followed up on promises they made in response to social protection requests from the communities in times of conflict.

Keywords: social protection, measures, gender perspectives, conflict management, conflict hotspots

Introduction

The current paper focuses on gender perspectives of social protection measures, specifically exploring social protection measures available for communities in instances of conflict management and their gender dimensions. Conflict management refers to various processes of resolving conflict, peacemaking, conflict transformation, and other measures that ensure individuals, families, and social groups in a given environment coexist peacefully (Bercovitch, 1983; Miall, 2004; Mckibben, 2017). The conflict management process facilitates development through the reduction of violence and hostilities (Kremenyuk, 2002; CCR, 2012; Bayer & Schernick, 2015; Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2017).

Social Protection has evolved essentially as a policy framework geared toward addressing the canker of poverty and the various forms of vulnerability associated with developing countries (Barrientos,

2010). It is a human right that is enshrined in several UN conventions including the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Also, very recent developments in social protection have basically focused on risk and vulnerability which all contribute to poverty directly and indirectly exposing poor households to risk (Barrientos & Hulme, 2016; Rosche, 2016).

Additionally, Idres (2016) also raises social support concerns about communities being supported in times of conflict through some kind of funding to support victims of conflict. Social protection contributed significantly to enhancing the quality of life of individuals and societies by developing and unleashing human potential, facilitating structural change, increasing stability, advancing social justice and cohesion, and promoting economic dynamism (Garcia & Gruat, 2003; FAO, 2016; Babajanian, 2012 in Idres, 2016; The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), 2018). Both Baafi (2018) and Jones and Doh (2009) all point out the essence of social protection to human development, especially in Ghana where about 6.8 million people are categorized as poor. Social protection is also central to human security (Darcy, 2004).

The study explored the various types of social protection measures available to communities, the gendered nature of these social protection measures, and the contribution of the social protection measures to the development of Conflict hotspots. Perspectives on social protection measures available to the communities revealed some forms in the current study. Social protection was primarily given by governmental and non-governmental institutions and was followed closely by religious groups and leaders. Individual interviewees were also of the opinion that social protection came from the pockets of benevolent government workers, appropriate agencies, the Peace Council, individuals in the conflict hotspots, and international donors. In spite of the positives of social protection programs, social protection has still been criticized for not being gendered enough in its approach (Alik-Lagrange, Dreier, Lake, and Porisky (2021). Researchers such as Luttrell and Moser (2004); Bouta, Frerks, and Bannon (2005); Babajanian (2012) in Idris (2016), all point to the non-gendered nature of social protection and the need for bridging the gap.

The prioritization of women as beneficiaries of social protection programmes is in part due to their being seen as disproportionately in need than men, or much more vulnerable to poverty from a lack of capital or discriminatory gender norms. This makes it necessary for social protection policies and programmes to be looked at through gender lenses as a matter of necessity for them to impart change and be sustainable in the long term (Newton, 2016).

A focus on social protection through a gender lens has the potential of accounting for the different risks women and men experience across their lifecycle in a systemic manner and ultimately transform their unequal social and economic circumstances. Evidence generated by a gendered approach would feed into well-equipped implementation activities that have been adequately resourced to address observed differences. Without a gender lens, social protection has the potential of reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes, increase the poverty of women, and even lead to gender-based violence (Newton, 2016).

Study Areas

The study covered two districts in the Oti region with the Nkonya community located in the Biakoye district and the Nkwanta community located in the Nkwanta South district. In the Volta region, however, the study covered three districts, namely: the Peki community in the South Dayi district, the Tsito community in the Ho West district and the Alavanyo and Hohoe communities in the Hohoe municipality as shown in Figure 1. The study therefore generally covered two regions in Ghana and five districts in the Oti and Volta regions altogether.

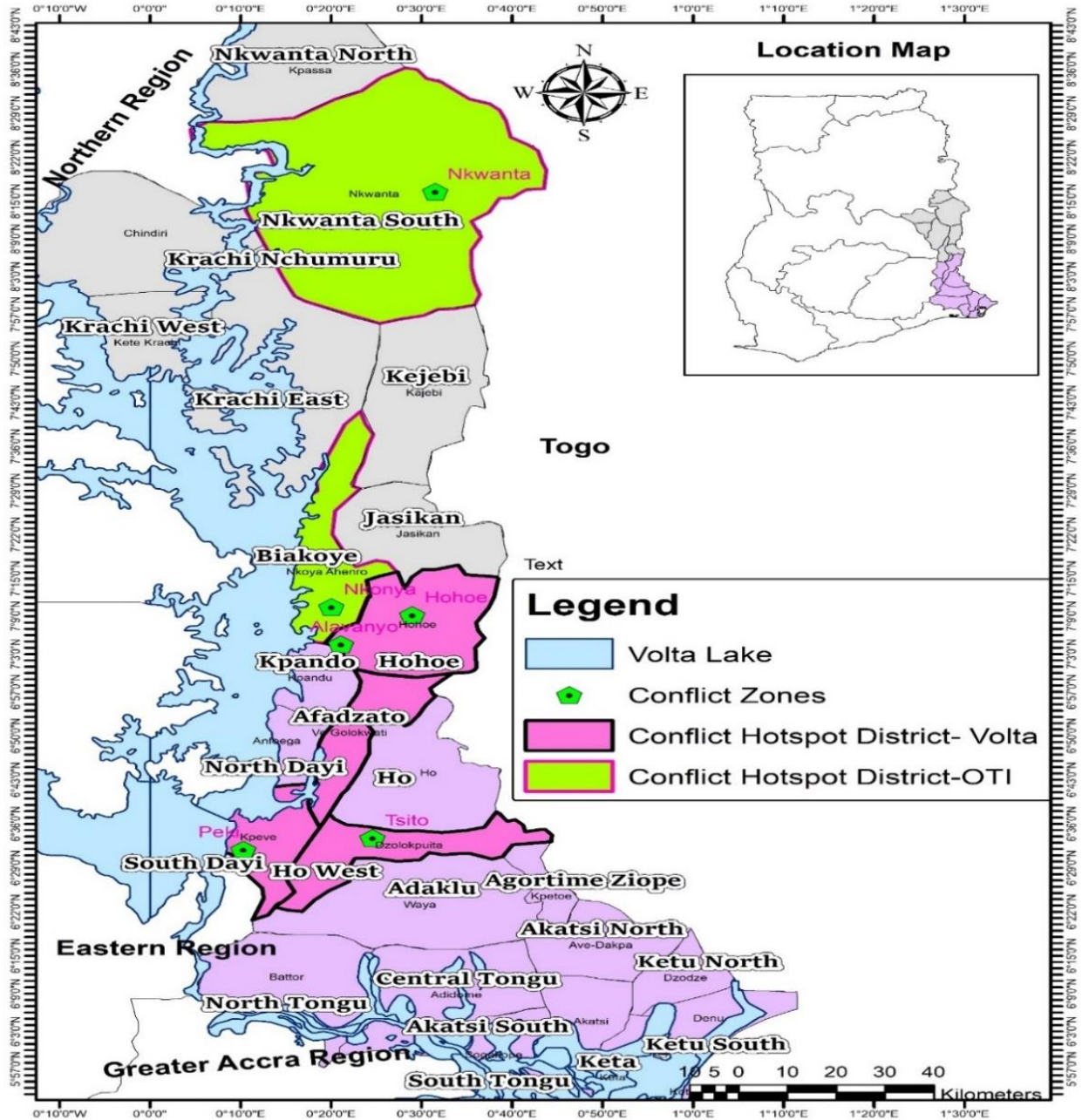


Figure 1: Map showing the location of conflict hotspots and their districts of location in the Oti and Volta Regions of Ghana.

Source: HypaSpatial (2019)

Materials and Methods

The qualitative research paradigm with a focus on interpretivism as a philosophy was used for the study. From the perspective of Chowdhury (2014), interpretivism seeks to understand the contemporary social world. Thus, it looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world. With the help of a case study design, data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. In all, a total of 84 respondents from institutions and conflict hotspots were used as key informants in the study (Table 1). This was made up of thirty-six respondents who were interviewed from 14 institutions and forty-eight participants from six conflict hotspots who were involved in the focus group discussion of the study.

Table 1: Distribution of Study Sample – Made up of Interview and Focus Group Participants Key Informant Interview Participants

Institutions	Sample	Institutions	Sample
National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE)	3	Alavanyo Traditional Authority	3
Peace Council	3	Nkonya Traditional Authority	3
Department of Gender	1	Peki Traditional Authority	3
Department of Children	1	Tsito Traditional Authority	3
Department of Social Welfare	1	Hohoe Traditional Authority	3
House of Chiefs	3	Nkwanta Traditional Authority	3
NGO (GLOWA)	3	Security Services (Police	3
Sub-total of key informants			36
Focus Group Discussion			
Alavanyo	8	Nkwanta	8
Tsito	8	Hohoe	8
Peki	8	Nkonya	8
Sub-total of key informants			48
Total Respondents for the Study			84

Table 2 presents information on data types, population, data collection methods, and instruments used for the study. The source of data was mainly primary. Primary data was used because it is regarded as more authentic and reliable as well as objective since it has not been published yet. In addition, primary data was used because of its higher validity and unadulterated nature. Among the numerous advantages of primary data also include greater control of data and addressing the specific issues of conflict in the hotspots.

Using interviews, focus groups, and observation guides, field data was generated from key informants for the study. The in-depth interview method was employed for data collection from heads of institutions whilst the focus group discussion and observation methods collected data from gatekeepers, opinion leaders as well as infrastructure and human activities within the conflict hotspots of Oti and Volta Regions respectively (Table 2). Narrative thematic analysis was used to examine key issues in relation to the specific objectives of the study.

Table 2: Data Types, Population, Data Collection Methods, and Instruments

Type of Data/Source of Data	Study Population	Data Collection Method	Data Collection Instrument
Qualitative/Primary	Key Informants from Institutions and conflict hotspots (Mainly heads of institutions and top ranks as well as traditional authorities)	In-depth interview	Interview Guide
Qualitative/Primary	Gatekeepers and opinion leaders from conflict hotspots/ Communities (mainly Queen mothers, traditional representatives, opinion leaders, the youth, women, and men)	Focus Group Discussion	Focus Group Guide
Qualitative/Primary	Infrastructure and human activities within Conflict hotspots/ communities	Observation	Observation Guide

Results and Discussions

Social protection measures available for communities in instances of conflict management

Though not always directly related to conflicts, some governmental and non-governmental organizations have been very supportive in terms of social protection during some disasters that occurred in the communities. The statements of these key informant interviewees from Hohoe, GLOWA, and NCCE attest to this.

We give them seeds, we make them advocate for their rights which they were not doing before, which is an addition to their livelihoods, and something they were never hoping for was that they could easily engage the assembly or the traditional leaders respectfully. We created a team called COMBAT, which is like a local police force with support from the police, the Chiefs, and traditional leaders to complement the efforts of the police against crime in those communities. This was done because we noticed there was only one police station in the whole of Adaklu. This organized group, which is the COMBAT, is doing so much and the people are very happy and even want us to extend it to other communities (4th September 2019).

In fact, with social protection, we embarked on such activity recently. A rainstorm recently hit Sokode and ripped off a lot of buildings. We, therefore, went to the community with NADMO to educate most of the community members to assist each other in rebuilding their houses. We told them to be united because if everybody wants to do it individually, it will not get them anywhere. Fortunately for us, we were supported with some roofing sheets by the Member of Parliament. We, therefore, encouraged them to ensure that they get back to their houses. So that was the most recent thing that we did for Sokode Ando (5th September 2019).

In a statement about the Hohoe community at a group discussion, a youth leader who was also a worker at the National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO) mentioned that his organization helped the community in difficult times. He again mentioned the community receiving some form of help from the Central Government which supports them in times of need. Muslim communities, who also called for help during the past conflict, were supplied with food items. This at least pointed to a level of social protection available for the community in difficult times and which could create some leverage for development.

Religious organizations also offered social protection

Some religious groupings and their leaders both locally and from the diaspora have been very instrumental in enhancing social protection mechanisms for our communities. A key informant from Nkwanta and a pastor of the local council of churches indicated this in the statement below.

There are times that the church contributes something in times of conflict to provide some social protection measures to the community (12th December 2019).

Discussions in Tsito indicated that pastors of the local council of churches came together to help in line with social protection issues in times of conflict. In the Peki/ Tsito conflict, for instance, the discussions revealed that all churches came together to help. The church was the main factor in calming the situation after the conflict. The church basically had been at the forefront of calming the situation throughout the conflict and after by providing money for fueling vehicles for meetings as well as giving out the vehicles of pastors for transporting committee members to meetings.

Additionally, discussions in Hohoe among the Muslim community members indicated there were forms of assistance from their Muslim brothers across the regions of the country. It was indicated that the Muslim communities from Kumasi, Accra, and the other regions were all said to have sent foodstuffs and clothing to help out after conflict situations. Finally, they also stated that they had some relief from the government.

Unfulfilled Social Protection promises by some institutions

Some external organizations/institutions have been disappointing to the community as they never followed up on promises they made in response to social protection requests from the communities. In Peki it was disclosed in a focus group discussion that they went to the castle sometime back to seek help after the conflict, but it did not yield any fruits. It was also indicated in Alavanyo that the pleas of women for help after conflict situations yielded a better response than that of the men. Additionally, it was also stated that the Alavanyo community, for instance, had never benefited from any external support. Interestingly, they added that even though organizations would most of the time come to write their names and promised to get in touch, they as a community heard nothing from them afterward.

During a discussion session in Nkonya, it was established that since the disputed land was their original farmland where they had most of their foodstuff come from, people were unable to have a means of livelihood as they could no longer go to their farms. Organizing financial support from the community to support such conflicts is, therefore, a difficult thing to do. There was therefore virtually no support in terms of health, injuries, and the like under such situations. Interestingly, the organizations that also come to support always come and promise and then if anything at all, give something little. The police, the military, and the Peace Council were part of the institutions that were noted to have provided a level of social protection services to the community.

The security forces focused more on vulnerable populations during most conflicts

Though the Security Forces take their overall social protection responsibilities to the community seriously and in a non-discriminatory fashion, there are instances that they focus more on vulnerable women and children as these bear the brunt of most conflict situations. This was what key informants from the police and military had to say.

Yes, there are instances where the conflict is going on, we can conduct maybe an evacuation measure where we may evacuate maybe the women and children to a particularly safe place – be it a school, a school compound, or a football field. Because attacks sometimes come directly at people in their houses, we have to get them out of their community. And in most cases, the majority of them end up running towards our camp to seek refuge in our detachment locations. So, those are some of the social protection measures that we put in place to help out (10th September 2019).

When I am moving to any conflict-prone area, like the day that we were going to Alavanyo, we first informed the two divisional commanders in Kpando and Hohoe, for them to go in there. Though the Chiefs were here and invited us, we still sent people in advance to the place to go and see them. And when we were going, we made sure that we were prepared. It will not be a story if maybe any civilian goes to Alavanyo and is ambushed but if the Police are ambushed, it will be a story (9th September 2019).

It's not my institution that established that, but the government of Ghana has given them that security by establishing a military zone in both communities. So, there is a military

zone at both Nkonya and Alavanyo. This is to help them go about their livelihood activities with ease (3rd September 2019)

Institutions that were not mandated on social protection served as referral portals

Some institutions such as the Department of Social Welfare and the National Commission for Civic Education admitted that social protection is not their mandate and where necessary, they refer communities to the appropriate agencies and institutions.

That is government – the government has to go in. The government is having social welfare schemes and they have a unit, social welfare unit that deals with such issues. We cannot apply for a budget with this. They will say that they've given it to the social welfare unit. They will not give it to us. Can't think about a gender dimension (9th September 2019).

No, we rather refer them. When there is an issue of that nature, we rather refer them to the appropriate areas, or we even call those agencies or departments for their help. So, in fact, the commission as an entity giving social protection of that nature, no, but what we do is we rather refer or bring those people in for them to take over (5th September 2019).

A focus group discussion disclosed that the social protection the community had enjoyed so far was the presence of the security personnel in the community to stop the escalation of the Nkonya-Alavanyo conflict. Asides from that, it was also stated that the National Peace Council comes around to talk to people in the community.

Local communities and individuals did provide social protection

There are instances when the community and individuals rally around providing some form of social protection to those in need. A key respondent from the Department of children, Ho, had this to say as an attestation to their help.

There is no budgetary allocation for that so we sometimes in rare cases do that from our own pockets (7th September 2019).

In a focus group discussion in Nkonya, a youth leader observed that when someone is injured, the community is able to help in financial terms so that the person gets sent to the hospital.

Donor agencies occasionally provided social protection contrary to their mandate

International donor agencies usually do not direct their resources into social protection, however, based on community needs there are occasions such provisions are made. A typical example of such a situation is evident in the statement of a key respondent for the NCCE.

We educate, but sometimes the sponsors give us the resources to go out there and educate people. Sponsors like the European Union have been doing that for some time now. So, I will say that is the only thing they do for us. But sometimes in certain areas like Nkonya, I remember we gave them something small (money) (5th September 2019).

Social protection measures and their gender dimensions

Social Protection measures with a gender focus or without a gender focus were the two main themes that evolved under this section. The measures with a gender focus either paid attention to women or men in the execution of programmes in the communities, whereas the measures without a gender focus had no person in mind in the execution of programmes, and these were from the majority of respondents.

Some social protection measures by some organizations were targeted at the female gender or can be said to be gender-focused

This is very relevant to helping manage conflicts successfully. In any case, the gender focus whether on males or females should be a means of bridging an inequality gap in society. Luttrell and Moser (2004) state that conflicts by nature has their impacts on shocks affecting men and women differently. It is useful therefore to think of men and women (as well as boys and girls) as different constituents in any analysis. They were therefore of the opinion that social protection needs to be tailored accordingly in the process of conflict management. They noted that erosion of social capital is one of the legacies of violent and prolonged intrastate conflict. They suggested that if other forms of capital (human, financial, or physical) can be replenished even after conflict situations, sustainable development will be constrained unless positive social capital can also be rebuilt (Luttrell and Moser, 2004). The statements below from the NCCE, GLOWA and the house of chiefs were indicative of social protection measures targeted at gender to help solve a social problem.

Our focus is mainly on women, not on men (4th September 2019).

They do have a gender focus. LEAP is an example of that though it does not directly fall under our jurisdiction though (7th September 2019).

Because the house is a purely male affair, we can say “NO” to the female gender (8th September 2019).

Some social protection measures did not have a specific gender focus and could be said to be for all

There are instances where some social protection measures do not come with any gender in mind but are however expected to solve a problem that benefits everybody in the community. The aim here is to basically solve a problem without reference to any group of people but for society’s benefit. These can be evinced through the ensuing key informant statements from GLOWA, Ghana police, and the department of children.

Under the anti-corruption project, there is an aspect known as the JESI project which seeks to find out how other socially excluded groups can be captured, and how we will be able to make sure that they also benefit from the project, whether they are men, women, boys, and girls, etc. Therefore, an eligible person, benefits, without using any gender dimensions (4th September 2019).

I once met a war situation that was somewhere in the Eastern region, where there were two factions that were having that problem. What I did was to bring in the necessary people, but then I was even asked to come and make a statement over some of the things I witnessed. At the end of the day when I engaged in these activities, I just felt it was a social protection act I was engaged in and never thought about it in terms of gender. We go to solve problems in society, so the solution to the problem is our basic aim (5th September 2019).

So far, I have not seen any such dimension (3rd September 2019).

To some respondents, it would be a bit difficult to start thinking about gender rather than solve an existing problem that would make life comfortable for members of a community. However, institutions like Ho NGO name GLOWA, the Department of Women and Children, and the Department of Social Welfare identifying certain problems could come in with specially designed programmes to tackle poverty levels among the various communities and conflict hotspots in society possibly bringing in some gender dimensions, so nobody is left out in times of need. In Alavanyo and Nkonya, Peki/Tsito, and Nkwanta or Hohoe conflicts, for instance, there are a number of victims of the age-old conflicts who have totally been deprived of their means of livelihood, but interestingly have not benefitted from any form of social protection. This has made especially the females who lost their husbands who were breadwinners to conflicts, find life very difficult to lead.

Due to gender differences within the household as well as in society, women and men experience poverty differently. A gender equality approach to social protection policies, strategies, and programs is therefore paramount to enable equal access to protection from extreme poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion. Social protection contributes to challenging gender roles through increased income for women, decreased intimate partner violence, and increased school attendance for girls. In spite of the positives of social protection programs, social protection has still been criticized for not being gendered enough in its approach (SIDA, 2019).

Limitation

As a result of the purposive selection of study participants in the various study areas, their views expressed may not be exactly the views of the larger community members.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Further studies could focus on how the Oti and Volta regions in Ghana would draw up or push for more gendered policies and programs in conflict management in relation to social protection

Conclusion

The current study had several forms of social protection measures evolving as perspectives from various communities and conflict management institutions. Evident was social protection from governmental or non-governmental Institutions followed closely by those from religious groups and leaders. Social protection also came from the pockets of benevolent government workers, appropriate agencies, the Peace Council, individuals in the conflict hotspots, and international donors. Some external organizations/institutions were seen to be disappointing to the communities as they never followed up on promises they made in response to social protection requests from the communities. Social protection measures for communities were observed to be inadequate as well as not gendered.

Recommendations

The study recommended that social protection measures should be factored into conflict management processes to ameliorate the distress of populations in conflict settings. Privileged institutions in conflict management should work hard in providing social protection measures to communities as well as ensure community development. Additionally, attention was to be paid to social protection policies and programmes through a gender lens as a matter of necessity, to help ensure the sustainability of such programmes.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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