

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA: WHAT ROLE(S) FOR NIGERIA'S INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES?

Olagoke Alamu
Ekiti State University
Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

This paper takes a critical look at the roles of Nigeria's indigenous languages in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the Global Goals (GGs) is a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) policy guideline and funding programme which should be implemented by all member countries between 2016, when it came into effect, and 2030. An assessment of the level of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria, which serves as a springboard for the SDGs, and which was to be implemented between 2000-2015 reveals that Nigeria has not met twenty five percent of the MDGs. The great challenges of the country have not been met with great action by government. Our observation has shown that the high level of illiteracy has been responsible for underdevelopment and poverty in Nigeria. Information to provide guidance by government to majority of the people on sustainable development can only come from the use of indigenous languages if only 79 million Nigerians out of a population of 156 million can speak and understand English.

Keywords: Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, Indigenous languages, Literacy, Language Planning.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development, according to the United Nations (UN), is the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystems services upon which the economy and society depends. The desirable end result of this is a state of society where living conditions and resource use continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural systems. Sustainable development is that development that meets our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

According to the United Nations, the components that work together, to produce sustainable development are economic development, social development and environmental protection (UN General Assembly, 2005). These three must be conceptualized together, planned together and implemented together by a government to achieve the desired results. So, sustainable development in a way has a moral dimension that demands a great sense of responsibility from the leader (government) and the follower (citizen).

The SDGs came into effect in January, 2016 and it is a (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) policy guideline and funding programme for the next fifteen years. The goals are to be accomplished by all member nations (189 countries) by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also known as the Global Goals (CGs) are structured to end poverty, protect the environment and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The

goals, 17 in number are fashioned out from the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and are presented in the diagram below:



Summary of SDGs Targets

The summary of the SDGs are the following:

1. Universal plan and agenda to tackle some of the pressing challenges facing the world such as poverty, climate change and conflict. Poverty is at the centre of all these goals.
2. Provide the expertise to drive progress and help support countries on the path to sustainable development.
3. Build on the accelerated progress already achieved under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs provide the foundation on which the SDGs are built. The latter rely on the structure of the former and widen its scope. The MDGs had existed and its goals are expected to be meaningfully achieved and implemented by member countries 15 years before the SDGs came into existence. It had existed for 15 years since it was established following the Millennium summit of the United Nations (UN) in 2000. All 189 UN member states, including Nigeria at that time, and at least 22 international organizations, committed to help achieve the 8 MDGs by 2015. The goals which are related to the SDGs are:

- (i) To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- (ii) To achieve universal primary education
- (iii) To promote gender equality and empower women
- (iv) To reduce child mortality
- (v) To improve maternal health
- (vi) To combat HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases
- (vii) To ensure environmental sustainability
- (viii) To develop a global partnership for development

When we compare the SDGs with the MDGs, we observe that while the MDGs are limited and few, the SDGs are elongated and greater in number, though each goal in the two development agenda has specific targets and dates for achieving those targets. The SDGs replaced the MDGs in 2016.

How far has Nigeria attained the implementation of the MDGS?

Nigeria is one of the UN member nations that signed and adopted the agenda MDGs in 2000 for implementation within the next 15 years. To help Nigeria and other developing nations, the G8 finance ministers agreed in June 2005 to provide funds to the World Bank, the International Monetary fund (IMF) and the African Development Bank (AFDB) to cancel 40 to \$55 billion debt owed by heavily indebted poor countries, Nigeria inclusive, to allow them redirect resources to programmes for improving health and education and for alleviating poverty (www.wikipedia/millennium development goals). It was as a result of this that Nigeria got a debt relief. The table below shows how far Nigeria has gone with the implementation of the 8- goal agenda.

Goals	Specific Target(s)	Result
1. Eradicate poverty and hunger	(a) Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day (b) Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	While Nigeria has one of the world's highest economic growth rates of 7.4%, poverty still remains significant at 33.1% (World Bank Nigeria Economic Report, July 2014). Attempts at poverty Alleviation: 1976: Operation Feed the Nation 1979: Green Revolution Programme 1986: Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) 1993: Family support Programme 2001: National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) No fewer than 112 million

		Nigerian's live below poverty level. This represents 67.1% of the country's total population of 167m (National Bureau of Statistics Oct. 18, 2016).
2. Achieve Universal Primary Education	(a)Ensure that ALL boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling (Emphasis mine)	This has not been achieved. We all know that many school age children are still on the street hawking or being trafficked for domestic slavery.
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	(a)Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.	There is an improvement on gender disparity in primary and secondary education given the statistics below: (a)Public Primary School Enrolment by State, Year and Sex. 2013-14 2013: Male – 12, 916, 185 female – 11,268,842 2014: Male -12,145, 968 Female – 10,983,959 (b)Public Junior Secondary School Enrolment, 2013-14 2013:Male – 2, 290, 478 Female – 1, 962, 892 2014: Male 2,393, 750 Female: 2,042, 229 Source: <i>National Bureau of Statistics: Universal Basic Public Education and Key Statistics in Nigeria</i> , 2016. The disparity in school enrolment between the male and the female child has reduced.
4.To reduce child mortality	Reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five.	According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 300,000 women die annually during pregnancy and child birth, 3m babies do not survive the first month of life, while 2.5m are still born, majority in Africa. Nigeria lost about 2,300 under five year old and 145 women during childbirth in a day

		<p>in 2013 making it the second largest contributor to the under-five and maternal mortality rate in the world.</p> <p>Source: Child Health Survey by UNICEF in 2015.</p>
5.Improve Maternal Health	Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio	Refer to 4 above.
6.Combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases	(a)Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDs HALT (emphasis mine).	<p>In 2014, the HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate was 3.17% while the number of people living with HIV/AIDS was 3,391,600. which is about 2.7%</p> <p>Source: <i>Nigeria Demographic Profile</i> (2016).</p>
7.Ensure Environmental sustainability	<p>(a)<u>Integrate</u> the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programme; <u>reverse</u> loss of environmental resources</p> <p>(b)<u>Reduce</u> by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water</p> <p>(c)<u>Achieve significant improvement</u> in lives of at least 100m slum dwellers by 2020.</p>	<p>(1)Air pollutants are still very common in Nigeria. These pollutants represent a diverse range of substances, such as gases, biological materials which are remitted into the atmosphere and causing harm or discomfort to humans or other living organisms, or damage to the environment. The sources of these substances are natural (volcanic eruptions) or anthropogenic sources such as industrial emissions, combustion of fossil fuels for transportation, gas flaring etc.</p> <p>Source: Otitolaju (2016:29).</p> <p>2. Over 57m Nigerians have no access to portable water. In Nigeria children die yearly for lack of portable drinking water. Source: USAID (2017).</p> <p>3.There is proliferation of slums in Nigeria. 75% of dwelling units in urban</p>

		<p>areas in Nigeria are substandard and the dwellings sited in slums</p> <p>4. The high rate of poverty and illiteracy is one factor that contribute significantly to slum formation in Nigeria with unhealthy environment for comfortable living. This partly explains why 6-10 people would live in a room.</p> <p>Source: Bobadoye & Fakere (2016).</p>
8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development.	<p>(a) Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory. A commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction</p> <p>(b) Address the least developed countries special needs. This includes enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty alleviation.</p> <p>(c) In cooperation with the developing countries, develop decent and productive work for youths</p> <p>(d) In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries</p>	<p>(1) Nigeria over the years has received foreign aids from developed countries, World Bank; AFDB etc which run into billions of naira most times these aids are not judiciously used.</p> <p>(2) The data on Nigerian youth unemployment shows that over 60% of Nigerian youths are jobless.</p>

From the foregoing, we observe that Nigeria has not met all the MDGs within the prescribed period of fifteen years (2000-2015). The great challenges of the country have not been met by great action and impact by the Nigeria government.

Literacy Vs Illiteracy/Development Vs Poverty

I have had course to argue many times that literacy in the Nigerian context is not only the ability to read and write the English language only, but also the ability to read, understand

and write in one's mother tongue or indigenous language. The status of English has conditioned our mind to believe that you are an illiterate once you cannot speak and/or write English. This is not true. One can be literate in his mother tongue, and this is why nations like Japan, China, Germany, Italy, France etc who value their languages are more developed technologically and economically.

UNESCO's National Programme Advisor on Education, Dr Mohammed Alkali recently revealed the results of a UNESCO survey that showed that 65million Nigerians remain illiterate. (Vanguard 17 December, 2015). This means that just over 50% Nigerians are literate by UNESCO's standards. But we believe this ugly situation can be improved if Nigeria embarks on an effective mass literacy programme in indigenous languages especially for adults who cannot read or write and also implement the use of the language of environment for teaching and learning as stipulated in the *National Policy on Education* (NPE).

Illiteracy has adverse impacts on both the individual and society. People who are illiterate are far more likely to live in poverty, face a lifetime marred by poor health and social vulnerability. Economically, the impacts of illiteracy are also sizeable; workable productivity, unemployment rates and even national GDP are all affected by a country's literacy level. But even if mass literacy programme for adults is put in place, illiteracy will never be overcome while 10million Nigeria children remain out of school. Children of illiterate parents are far more likely to be illiterate themselves, therefore education programmes in our indigenous languages that target both adult as well as school children are key.

The importance learning and education play in people's life cannot be overemphasized. A child who can read and write for instance, will sufficiently enjoy better tomorrow, better employment prospects, better earning capacity, better access to healthcare and be less likely to face social exclusion.

To attain the goal of the SDGs, overcoming illiteracy in Nigeria will require a long-term commitment from governments (Federal, State, Local Governments), NGOs, educators and parents. The future of Nigeria and her people is closely tied to achieving widespread literacy.

What Role(s) for Indigenous Languages?

The appropriate information our leaders need to be able to provide guidance on the attainment of sustainable development can only come majorly from our indigenous languages. If only 79 million (53.34%) according to Wikipedia's list of countries by English-speaking population Nigerians, out of the total population of 156, 493,000 million, can speak and understand English, then many people are still excluded from adequate information on the goals of the SDGs as a result of lack of understanding and appropriate interpretation of the scheme. Without the use of indigenous languages for educating the masses, many of who are not literate in English, sustainable development then remains a mirage! Education in the language of the people is an essential tool for achieving sustainability.

Our aspiration for better future that we envisage through the SDGs will require fundamental changes in our character and commitment to excellence. We need to change the way we do our things for good policies to be effectively implemented. But, disturbingly, in spite of the fact that Nigeria parades some of the most brilliant and intelligent human beings on earth, it is always bewildering, as to how we ended up with the type of people bestriding our political

landscape. The State Houses of Assemblies and the National Assembly are full of incompetent, unfocused and greedy politicians who do not really understand their roles in the development of Nigeria. The recent melodramatic conundrums on appointment of the head of EFCC and the certificate saga are cases in point. This has done incalculable damage to our development.

One of the targets of the SDGs is the improvement of life for the majority. In every African country, including Nigeria there is always a rural majority. For instance, according to the UNDP (2006), it is estimated that over 80% of the population of the Niger Delta resides in rural areas. Such rural communities have very limited social and economic opportunities with a very low level of infrastructural development. The neglect found in the rural areas of the Niger Delta Region is present in other places across Nigeria.

One of the theoretical assumptions forming the basis of any social impact assessment is that while all societies are changing, an intervention will surely have an impact on the local society (Ayeni 2010: 7). The level of participation of the rural society in development, implementation and evaluation of policies depends on how they are able to gather information on projects, understand and interpret them in their own local language. Information and education are essential tools for achieving sustainability. One of the major purposes of language is to transmit a piece of information (a message) between a source, in this instance, government and a receiver, the local or rural communities. Communication can only be said to have taken place if the message transmitted by the sender is understood in the same way by the receiver without distortion. If this is taken, then it is a common knowledge that the language of the environment of the people the message is meant for is the best at that instance for communication.

For democracy to thrive and survive, and for developmental growth via the SDGs to be achieved, people need to be empowered by information. As instruments for stimulating communication, the mass media also need to continue to consider and sustain the use of indigenous languages as resources that can promote social relationship between government and the people. The mass media should air greater percentage (thinking of about 70-80%) of their programmes in indigenous languages than in the English language. The establishment of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) in almost all the states of the federation for promoting our various cultural heritages is a plus for Nigeria. At the state level there also exist various electronic media set up by state governments for dissemination of information on government programmes and projects. Though these state-owned media most times employ the language of their immediate environments and in many cases, even the local dialects for broadcast, there should a reduction of their being used as propaganda tools and for political vendetta as they are used to relay the various 'achievements' of the party in power, their paymasters, under the popular tag of 'democracy dividend' which at times are cosmetic. This is done to inform the masses how the party in power has 'transformed' the society and how they are greater than their opponents in making life better for the people.

During political campaigns or at political gatherings, I have closely observed that many aspirants use their local languages for grassroot mobilization. With their local languages, they employ exaggeration and sensationalism, and in their address to the people, a wide range of strongly pejorative labels, such as bias, prejudice, propaganda, misinformation, indoctrination, brain-washing are employed to convince the people and persuade them to get their votes. In

this context, the local languages are languages of persuasion and if they really are, then they are the best for information on the SDGs.

Language Policy and Language Politics

Igboanusi (2017: 9) has rightly noted that our language policies are often at variance with practices, and teachers and education supervisors are confused about the language policy in schools. There is politics and conflicts in the choice of language of instruction and the implementation of the language provisions of the policy on education. Writing on the politics of language, Shohamy (2006:xv) in Igboanusi (2017:10) submits that “while language is dynamic, personal, free and energetic, with no defined boundaries, there have always been those groups and individuals who want to control and manipulate it in order to promote political, social, economic and personal ideologies”. Summing up Shohamy’s views, Igboanusi notes that in the context of education, language-education policies have always centred on educational and ideological regulations of language.

The manipulation and the circumvention of the implementation of the National Policy on Education (NPE) are political. The language policy has suffered from poor implementation due to several problems among which are negative attitude to indigenous languages, avoidance syndrome and the influence of English language on every aspect of our national life (Kolawole 2016: 6). Bamgbose (2005:42) also commented on why our language policy fails to work by noting that for political reasons, government has failed to specify how the policy is to be implemented. He further identifies reasons such as perpetuation of colonial language policies after independence, dominance of English, marginalization of the so-called minority languages, formulation of language policies without any plan of action for their implementation and drafted policy with escape clauses.

The creation of states or local governments in Nigeria has also been for political and linguistic reasons. The fact that the demographic movements within Nigeria, and the country’s sociolinguistic and economic history have ensured that the boundaries of a given state are not conterminous with the geographical spread or dispersal of a particular ethnic group for which the state has been created is another issue that has always led to the agitation for the creation of more states or local government. The result of this dynamics of spatial population distribution is that, no matter how one defines an ethnic group, most states and local governments in Nigeria are not, and could not be ethnically homogenous. The concept of majority and minority ethnic groups or linguistic majority (major language) and linguistic minority (minor language) is politically motivated and is conceptualized within an ideological framework of nationalism in which language is central to the construction of the nation. The sentiment of group or ethnic identity has made ethnic groups, whose languages have mutual intelligibility with their neighbour’s and who also share same tradition and cultural values to start seeing their language and culture as distinct. The case of the Efik and Ibibio of the South-south Nigeria is a pertinent example. So long as the Nigerian nation is conceptualized only in geographical term, there will be no end to agitation for state or local government creation. Nigerian languages have a role to play in defining the constituent units of the Nigerian federation and linguists and language experts are needed in this area.

Many parents still believe that access to social mobility and political power is associated with proficiency in English language. For this reason and others the elites have tried and are still trying “to manipulate the language policy to achieve economic ideology and protect the future of their children” (Igboanusi 2017:10). This is why publishers manipulate language

policies for commercial gains and Proprietors of private schools promote language ideologies that strongly link educational success with the English language. From the foregoing, we also agree with Igboanusi (2017:11) that in Nigeria, language education ideologies are essentially constructed from certain political and economic standpoints.

The Role of Linguists, Language Experts and the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN)

The teaching of Nigerian languages in our schools or colleges has not received the necessary support in such areas as adequate funding, capacity building for teaching personnel and supporting infrastructural facilities. It is on record that Nigeria is blessed with many indigenous languages and ranks third in terms of countries with the highest number of languages in the world. For instance, Lewis, Gary and Charles (2013) in Kolawole (2016) observe that while Papua New Guinea and Indonesia have 830 and 772 languages respectively, Nigeria has 521. Unfortunately, Nigeria has not harnessed her language resources and truly develop as a nation because of lack of effective language planning.

Any activity that is employed to effect changes in a language or the use of a language can be referred to as language planning. There are two major levels of language planning: the macro, which involves large-scale planning and undertaken by government or its agencies because of the huge budget required, and micro planning, which is a small-scale activity which can be undertaken by groups or individuals. Linguists, Language Associations, language communities and individuals can get involved in micro language planning. Since the central focus of language planning is the identification of language problems which may include standardization, vocabulary extension or expansion, lack of adequate reading materials etc. individuals or groups, or a language community can come together to look at ways of solving a problem which a language may have. As Igboanusi (2017:17) rightly observes, “it is no longer fashionable or even helpful to place every responsibility for change on the government”. He therefore believes that “there is a need for paradigm shift and a new approach that will see stakeholders initiating language planning processes and collaborating with policy-makers towards achieving language reforms in different contexts”.

I will now refer to 3 out of the 8 objectives and functions of NINLAN to assess her level of involvement in the development of Nigerian languages. These functions are the following:

- 1) Be a resource centre for specialized professional services to the public and private sectors of the Nigerian economy
- 2) Be a Nigerian centre for research into Nigerian languages
- 3) Provide courses of instruction and other facilities for the pursuit of learning Nigerian languages.

From my observation and personal conviction so far, NINLAN is yet to make any meaningful impact on these above-mentioned functions since its establishment about 24 years ago. Instead of focusing on the triad of teaching, research and community service, which are the focus of a university, the major concern of the Institute has always been the clamour to award degrees, and as it seems, only talismanic powers can convince government that NINLAN was established to award degrees among other things. Researches by staff of the Institute are mostly individual and just for the purposes of promotion. Outcome of research, therefore, are warehoused and does not get to the public domain or government. I have been involved in the translation of the Financial Regulations of the Central Bank of Nigeria from English into Yoruba and currently invited by the Bible Society of Nigeria to revise the Yoruba Bible. These cases, which are also for other Nigerian languages, came through individual efforts of colleagues who know how to press buttons and have their ears to the ground. A Corporate

entity (NINLAN), which has more muscles and strengths than individuals should develop a process of attracting some of these projects. Quite recently too, a close friend and a Professor of Sociolinguistics in a University in the south-west was just awarded a TETFund research grant of almost N50m for his research on Terminology Planning for Health Discourse with focus on HIV, AIDS and Ebola discourses. With his team of medical and language experts, the project has resulted in three important books namely English-Hausa Glossary of HIV, AIDS and Ebola-related Terms, ditto for the other two Nigerian languages. A peep into their research and outcome might be of interest to this gathering. For the purpose of eliminating stigmatization and discrimination of persons living with HIV and AIDS, the research team tried to modernize these two nomenclatures by adopting the following:

English	Igbo	Yoruba	Hausa
HIV	Ori Nchekwa Ahu	Kokoro Apa Soja Ara	Karya-garkuwa
AIDS	Mminwu	Aarun isodole ajesara	Kanjamau
Sex Worker	Ndi mkwughari	Gbele pawo	Mata masu zaman kansu

These terminologies might stimulate arguments as I feel there are better terminologies for these concepts. But I leave that for another time as this is not the point I want to bring out here really, but that where was NINLAN in all these?.

For number three objective above, we are yet to see materials for teaching Nigerian languages produced or published by the Institute. We are not talking about journals here but pedagogical materials for aiding language teaching.

In view of the fact that the activities of the Universities and some other parastatals such as the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) and Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), whose mandates disturbingly coincide with NINLAN's and have almost made her activities ecliptic, shouldn't the Institute now put on her thinking cap and look for how to be relevant by focusing on other areas under her functions?

RECOMMENDATIONS

To meet the SDGs Agenda there must be a consideration of the following:

- ✓ Government must realize that it is impossible to drive and promote development if information about the SDGs are conveyed in the English language. These areas of development can only be meaningfully communicated to the people if their indigenous languages, in which they carry out their daily developmental programmes of farming, trading and socializing are employed. In essence, our indigenous languages have serious roles to play in ensuring the success of the SDGs.
- ✓ For meaningful development to take place, literacy must be entrenched. Nigeria should embark on an effective mass literacy programme and implement the language provisions of the NPE.
- ✓ Nigeria should do more to promote education if our government truly knows the meaning of the concept and its impact in the development of a nation. The total budget allocation to education in Nigeria in the last five years has consistently been decreasing as shown by these figures: N306.3b (2011; 7.6%), N400.15b (2012; 8.43%), N426.53b (2013; 8.7%), N493b (2014; 10.7%) and N492.03b (2015; 8.7%). It is obvious that the percentage being allotted to education by Nigeria is inadequate

- when compared with countries such as Ghana (31%), South Africa (25.8%), Cote D'Ivoire (30%), Kenya (26%) and Morocco (17.7%). (Kolawole 2016:15).
- ✓ Since adequate funding for language planning and development is no longer coming from government, language associations and language communities should look for an alternative source of funding such as levying members or going to wealthy individuals or corporate bodies who are interested in such enterprise. The Yoruba Studies Association of Nigeria just completed a revised version of Yoruba metalanguage with funds contributed by members. The work will soon be published.
 - ✓ To be more relevant and known NINLAN should either hire a consultant based in Abuja, who will be nosing around to source for projects for the Institute or have a liaison office there. The FCT is the seat of power and most of the Agencies competing with NINLAN are based in or around Abuja. They get first hand information before NINLAN and their Chief Executives are 'close' to the people in power. The location of the Institute at Aba is an albatross coupled with the fact that nearly all the Chief Executives of the Institute are not politically savvy, which is one of the qualities they need to attract attention to the Institute from the headquarters.
 - ✓ NINLAN should start looking for Language Resource Centres abroad for partnership and collaboration. This can attract grants and exchange in human and material resources.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

What we have simply done in this paper is to look at the roles of our indigenous languages in sustaining the SDGs. A brief assessment of how far Nigeria has implemented the MDGS which came earlier and on which the SDGs emerged was done. Our finding was that Nigeria has not gone far in implementing the MDGS not to talk of the SDGs. We further submit that for Nigeria to achieve the implementation of the SDGs before 2030, the level of illiteracy must be drastically reduced and our indigenous languages should be largely used to promote the SDGs to make meaningful impact. The roles of Linguists, language experts and stakeholders in promoting and developing indigenous languages were also highlighted. Recommendations to help achieve the implementation of the SDG's were also given. It is our hope that if these recommendations are used for guidance and implemented, Nigeria can achieve most of the SDGs by 2030.

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