Up-scaling and re-branding agricultural extension service in Nigeria: Policy issues, options and challenges

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ABSTRACT

Agricultural extension service transformation is probably the most important development issue in Nigeria today. Food insecurity is a serious problem, and the outlook for the future appears very unsatisfactory especially with the near collapse of extension service institutional frame work. Like any other sector of the Nigerian economy, agricultural extension is a business which flourishes when the enabling environment is provided for its growth and development. It is sad to note that the sector presents a sordid tale of neglect in spite of its potentials and contributions to national economy. This article examined extension service in Nigeria in the past, present and anticipated future. It focused on the various extension programmes so far implemented in Nigeria, so as to identify specific parts played by various level of government; and bring out factors responsible for failure of some of the programmes. The paper thereafter highlighted expected policy issues, options and challenges with a view to up-scale and re-brand agricultural extension service in Nigeria for meaningful contribution to national agricultural development through extension delivery in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country endowed with abundant human and material resources. The country has an estimated land area of 923,773km² with varied vegetation and soil types that are suitable for a variety of agricultural purpose (Federal Ministry of Economic Matters, 2010). Of all the sectors of the Nigerian economy, agriculture possesses the greatest potential for playing a leading role in making Nigeria a self reliant nation. This is true because agriculture provides food, employment opportunities, earns foreign exchange and generates considerable revenue for Nigeria. In spite of the potentialities and prospects of producing food for home consumptions and export, achieving a balance between food and population growth is a serious problem in Nigeria today. This problem of production deficit and consequent decrease in per capital availability of food has resulted from the declining ability to produce enough food in the face of increasing consumption capacity. This situation has shown that Nigeria still manifest the typical symptom of a peasant agriculture where the farms are dominated by small scale farmers who are responsible for about 95 percent of total production. The livestock is still in the hands of nomadic herdsman, the poultry also is essentially the back yard type with few commercial units coming-up. The fishing sector is also predominantly artisan with the fishing crawlers still very rare except those smuggled into Nigerian territorial waters legally or otherwise by foreign industrial fishermen. Agro-forestry is only just beginning hence over the years, Nigerian fishermen simply exploited the bounties of nature and even failed to make adequate plans for early
regeneration.

The results of these rather easy going attitudes towards agriculture are low productivity in virtually all the sub-sectors. Prior to the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), and pre-independence era, food was produced in abundance and some major cash crops were exported sequel to the oil boom of the early 1970s which resulted into utter neglect of agriculture.

It was no longer possible for Nigeria to produce enough food to feed her teeming population. Consequently, the gap within demand and supply has continued to widen as producers of food fail to meet up with the demand both quantitatively and qualitatively (Onu, 2005). It is, however, rather sad to note that many years after oil began to flow in commercial quantities, Nigeria agriculture is still in the doldrums (Awoyemi, 2000). It is characterized by rather sluggish rate of growth and in some of the crops, outright stagnation or retrogression. It is also characterized by near collapse of institutional framework of extension service, agricultural research institution, credit institution, input services, marketing, etc. Part of this explanation therefore is the tendency to take the line of least resistance to the problems and in this case, Nigeria readily resorted to food importation instead of promoting local production.

**ORIGIN OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN NIGERIA**

It may not be easy to define agricultural extension in a single sentence or phase. This is because any attempt to do so would involve a lengthy explanation of different principles and philosophy of extension. However, different experts and authorities in the field of extension have defined extension in different ways and formats to suit their aims and from the perceptive they were looking at it. However, all ended with extension aiming at improving the living standard of the populace. Defined literally, extension means the art of stretching out in distance, space, or time (Morrils, 1999). It also implies the act of pulling to the full or towards a particular point. Used professionally, the term extension must be admitted as both an elastic and imprecise word. It connotes a composite of meanings and thus does not yield to easy definition. In spite of the obvious difficulty in defining extension, extension has often been conceptualized as an educational process which promotes learning. It uses the findings of biological sciences and combines them with the principles of social science to bring about change in skill, behaviour, knowledge, attitude and practices in an out-of-school setting. Therefore, extension is viewed by its partisans as an informal, out of school and road side system of education designed to help rural people to solve their problems. It is in this line therefore that Obibuaku (1983) defined extension as an informal system of education while Morrils (1999) defined it as non-formal system of education. Vanden Ban and Hawkins (1996) see extension as the conscious use of communication of information to help people form sound opinions and take good decisions. Roling (1990) defined extension as a professional communication intervention deployed by an institution to induce change in voluntary behaviours with a presumed public or collective utility. Maudar (1972) sees extension as a science and indeed behavioural science which deals with creation, application and transmission of knowledge designed to bring about planned changes in the behaviour complex of the people with a view to helping them live better life through learning new ways improving their vocation, enterprise and institution. Asiabaka (2002) in his modern definition of extension explains it from the aim which extension strives to accomplish and tried to look at extension as involving both urban and rural clientele and this sharply disputes Adams (1982) who sees extension to be purely rural based profession. Asiabaka finally sees extension as possessing education dimension, economic dimension and social dimension, and finally sums extension as a voluntary out of school educational programme which uses the basic principles of teaching and learning to reach both rural and urban clientele and to improve their knowledge, skill and attitudes in their livelihood. William (1978) summed up extension three basic tasks as: Disseminating useful information; applying it to the analysis of practical problems; and helping people to use it to help themselves.

There are however three basic concepts which clarify the scope, understanding and meaning of extension. They include:

- Extension as educational process;
- Extension as education/change;
- Extension as salesmanship (Anaeto, 2009).

Modern agricultural extension work in Nigeria today covers a wide spectrum of services, such as, women in agriculture, youth development, land management, erosion control, agro-forestry, fisheries, etc. Albrecht (1986) explained or described extension in terms of goal which is to help and enable farm people to change their behaviour in order to solve or mitigate their problems, communication and voluntary co-operation as well as partnership, that is, no enforcement, domination or manipulation. Indeed extension means finding ways of making the encounter between the extension worker and the farmer a human experience, during which people learn together to build a future that they themselves will have created by their own efforts and where no ready made solution will be presented. The exact origins of agricultural extension in Nigeria are difficult to pin-point.

In some parts, it could be taken that agricultural extension occurred in Nigeria as early as its history as indigenous producers learned and adopted a new crop or
farming practice. In other parts, it occurred sometimes between 1921 when a unified department of agriculture was established for the whole country and 1954 when three separate regional governments were formed each with a ministry of agriculture. It is clear therefore that the history of extension service in Nigeria must be seen in terms of agriculture and its development. Nigeria has systematically metamorphosed to 36 states including the Federal Capital Territory and 774 Local Government Councils. This makes the three tiers of government namely Federal, States and the Local Governments to legislate on agriculture and by implication, on extension.

PRACTICE OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian Agricultural Extension Service before the 1991 era has been characteristics by parallelism (Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute - ARMTI, 2004). Each line department in the various Ministries of Agriculture carried out its own extension work. To this effect, Nigeria has experimented with a number of extension approaches and agricultural programmes with extension components. Notable among these approaches are:

- Conventional / ministry operated extension.
- Project development-based extension.
- Sectoral / commodity extension.
- University-based extension.
- Integrated rural development approach.
- Farmer-focused extension.
- T and V system.
- Unified Agricultural Extension Service (UAES).
- Farming systems research and extension.
- Private sector or agencies extension service.
- General extension system.
- Research-extension-farmer-input linkage system.

Programmes with elements of extension already practiced in Nigeria include among others:

- Farm Settlement Scheme.
- National Accelerated Food Production Programme.
- Operation Feed the Nation.
- The River Basin Development Authorities.
- The Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure.
- The Green Revolution.
- Agriculture Development Projects (ADPs).
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE).
- National Agricultural Land Development Authorities (NALDA)
- Better Life Programme for rural Women.
- Food security and poverty alleviation
- Agriculture Credit Guaranteed Scheme
- Family Support Programme
- NEEDS/SEEDS/LEEDS
- FADAMA, etc

Euphemistically, it can be said that Nigeria is a country with an agricultural extension in constant evolution. However, in spite of all the laudable programmes and extension approaches adopted in Nigeria, the questions that kept re-occurring include: Has extension made the much expected impact on the livelihood of the populace in Nigeria? What are the constraints militating against the success of extension service in Nigeria? Why are young men and women unwilling to make it a career? What should be done to make extension more attractive, credible and lucrative to both her clientele and those that have made it a career? What is the future of extension in a country with high potential like Nigeria? Should extension continue to adhere to its original principles and philosophy being review in line with each country peculiarity? What should be done to make extension more reliable and effective? Should extension be involved in input distribution answers and solutions to these question raised, if properly addressed would extension service help achieve all her important role of improved food productivity, increase in living standard of the populace and achievement of food security?

It is in line with this that this paper decides to look at the up-scaling and re-branding agricultural extension service in Nigeria by looking at the policy issues, options and challenges.

CHALLENGES OF EXTENSION SERVICE NIGERIA

A myriad of challenges and problems are known to plague agricultural extension service in Nigeria. The location of Nigerian agricultural extension services within government agricultural and rural development bureaucracies have been seen with mix-feelings (Onu, 2005). Experts have expressed serious doubts as to whether bureaucracies are capable of providing effective services to the rural population. It may be enormous to assume that the various extension services of the agricultural and rural development agencies in Nigeria are performing to capacity. From available evidence, the performance of Nigerian agricultural extension agencies/ services has not been particularly satisfactory (Onu, 2005). Studies of the organizational structure and management of Nigerian agricultural and rural development agencies and their extension services have identified a wide range of challenges/problems which reduce efficiency. As most services are part of the state and national bureaucracies, they suffer from internal problems typical of government organizations. These among others include: Lack of entrepreneurial ability; their lethargic attitude towards decision-making; their inability to respond to incoming
information; they are highly centralized, inflexible and unable to cater for local variation; and also external problems may arise because of the inability of different parts of the bureaucracy involved in agricultural and rural development to co-ordinate their activities. Despite the efforts which have been invested into the formulation of prescriptions for extension reforms in Nigeria, most of the agencies have demonstrated a considerable capacity to resist change.

Frustration as a result of the inability of the extension service agencies to reform themselves has led to radical proposal to place extension and rural development services to the populace through participatory-oriented strategies (Onu, 2005).

Useful researches of the challenges/problems inherent in establishing and operating effective extension systems in Nigeria are highly inadequate in number and scope. But synthesis of the work done by extension experts such as Asibiaka (2002) and Onu (2005) combined with primary observations and direct experience by numerous professionals contribute to basis for some promising empirical conclusions.

A wide range of factors is related to the lack of success, including cultural and educational barriers, knowledge about promising innovations, economic benefits, weaknesses in the farming systems and failure of extension and research leaders to identify alternatives for improvement.

Specifically stated, the following considerations are among those which have imposed drastic limitations on the contributions by extension systems in Nigeria rural development.

- Extension systems have been put into operation in Nigeria without significant agricultural technology and available supplies of production inputs related to the level of technology to be applied.
- The extension process, being largely a foreign invention, has been carried into Nigeria in form and in pattern, and adopted without adequate modification to accommodate cultural norms and physical and manpower resources of the country.
- In most cases in Nigeria, extension systems have been put into operation to perform roles other than promoting agricultural production (Political or ideological propagandizing, distribution of requisites, regulatory functions, and multi-purpose work), with the result that focus on the central task of agricultural development has been diverted.
- Extension systems have been established with a staff at the local levels unable, by training to establish credibility in the minds of farmers at levels necessary to influence changed behavior related to modern agricultural practices, and without adequate administrative and technical support at State and National levels.
- Extension systems have been instituted without adequate coordination with research and training centres.
- In Nigeria, most extension systems have been instituted somewhat as a “fad” or a “prestigious step” without full recognition of the highly complex, sophisticated and costly nature of such systems, and the time and persistence required in developing requisite logistic support essential to success (Onu and Anyanwu, 1990).

According to Agbamu (2005), the following problems militate against effective extension service in developing countries such as Nigeria. They include:

- Inadequacy and instability of funding.
- Poor logistic support for field staff
- Use of poorly trained personnel at the local level.
- Ineffective agricultural research-extension linkages.
- Insufficient and inappropriate agro-technologies for farmers.
- Disproportionate extension agent to farm family ratio.
- Dilution of extension agent’s specific responsibility.
- Lack of clientele participation in programme development.
- Failure of input supplies to ensure effective and timely distribution to farmers
- Irregular evaluation of extension programmes.
- Policy, institutional and programme instabilities of national agricultural extension systems.

In addition to all these challenges/problems confronting agricultural extension, there are still other problems bothering on personal attitude and credibility such as the notion of extension as a rural based profession, the supply driven approach of extension rather than the demand driven approach, the inability of young men and women to make a career out of extension service, inadequate or lack of infrastructure in the rural areas which makes it unattractive for staff of extension service to live in the rural area, lack of credibility on the part of extension agents from their clientele who see them as medical doctors who diagnose, prescribe but cannot dispense and the apparent non-challant attitude and lip services by the political class-the government and policy-makers.

**POLICY ISSUES OF INTEREST IN NIGERIAN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE**

The causes of stagnation of Nigerian agricultural extension service are quite numerous and complex. Some of them are forces operating outside the sector itself and over which little control can be exercised. It is important therefore to examine some issues which would be of interest in arriving at policy options and actions in
Nigerian agricultural extension service. Such issues include among others:

- The farmers: It is important to look at and understand the source of the bulk of our food that is, the small scale farmers in the rural setting. The typical Nigerian village is not better than what it was thirty years ago. The programme of agricultural extension via educational procedure and its relationship with rural development through the provision of rural electrification, rural water supplies, access road and rural health are still very thin on the ground in most part of the country. Also added to this remains the fact that farmers tools and mode of operation have not changed for generation. Unfortunately, the employment opportunities in the industrial, construction, banking, oil and commercial sectors are so great and the wages so high that it has become virtually impossible to make profit using human labour in any farm enterprise. The more disturbing part of this is that the emigration from the farms is done mostly by young and able bodied men and women thus leaving the aged and the women with the onerous responsibility of feeding the nation.

- Institutional problems: The near collapse of the agricultural extension institutional framework is the greatest problem facing the agricultural sector. At present, the extension service appears very weak and lacks direction. Farmers are very much on their own, the extension workers farmers ratio is still very wide (1 to 25,000) and in most cases, the farmers do not even know or care about the existence of the service (Ezedinma, 1985). Another major institutional problem is the general status of physical and social infrastructure in the rural areas-the roads, the schools, water supplies, electricity, health centres etc. It is well known that the rural majority are a disadvantage lot in terms of accessibility to the essentials of life and the urban-rural wage disparity has further helped to lower the standard of living of those in rural areas and has thus fuelled the well known rural to urban migration and made it difficult for extension workers to remain in rural areas.

- Agricultural research: Another major issue in the activities of extension service is the apparent weak link between research, extension and the farmers. There still appears to be many unresolved technical problems. The research needs to provide more varieties of improved seeds adapted to the various ecologies, devise better agronomic practices including soil and water management. Improved and adapted livestock are yet to reach most farmers. The problem of storage is still to be solved; food processing is almost an untouched area for research. The conventional research system whereby top-down approach is still very much in use in spite of the farming system research and development concept. The effect all these therefore is that most discoveries in areas of engineering innovations, medical breakthrough as well as agricultural discoveries do not go beyond the gates of the universities and the research institutes.

- Problems of infusion of modern technology into Nigerian agriculture: The transfer of technology to subsistent farmers is not an easy task because it entails some risk bearing on their part and secondly the technology cost money to introduce. There is therefore urgent need for government to appreciate this and thus make impact in raising productivity of the farmers.

- Cooperative societies and other forms of farmers association: Cooperative societies have been used in the past to improve the lot of farmers and strengthen the extension service. The general feelings of insecurity among peasant farmers make it difficult for them to stake their survival in favour of group action and to make it worse; their leaders often betray their trust by embezzling society funds.

- Other areas of interest: Other areas of interest in moving agricultural extension forward include: Marketing; farm inputs and agricultural incentives; pricing, credits and investment in agriculture; manpower development and utilization, land tenure; problem of planning/ government intervention; political instability, etc.

Generally agriculture extension policy has remained a part of national development and agricultural and rural development policy. In most developing countries including Nigerian, three forms of extension had been noted. They include:

- Provisional extension policies which is the most common form of extension policy and becomes handy in the absence of formally enacted policy. It is a form of a provisional or ad hoc policy;
- Decrees and proclamation which are policies issued by the head of state or by the executive officer of the government and;
- Legislated extension policies which involve policies embodied by the country’s highest law making authority.

**POLICY OPTIONS AND ACTION**

Trends in policy issues in Nigeria during the colonial era as far as agriculture and agricultural extension/ rural development were simple driven in a one-way configuration. The idea then was to tailor Nigerians agriculture to a system that suited the interest of the colonial masters. At independence during the first national development plan (1962-1968), policy centered on establishment of farm settlements, tree crop plantation, cattle ranches extension service and fertilizer supply. Other development plans centered on different sectors of agriculture and non-agriculture properly the issue of extension service thus leaving extension in the hands of government with poorly arranged policies. If
Nigeria's target is to remain self-reliant and self-sufficient in food production, it becomes imperative that appropriate agricultural extension policy options and actions must be adopted by the country. To this regard, policy must address and centre on these.

- Extension mission and goals: Here the extension mission should be reflected in the statement of goals and objectives that are already agreed upon by the stakeholders and should be periodically reviewed by policy makers and representative from stakeholder groups.
- Extension approach and functions: Extension approach pursued should reflect the mission of extension and will define the functions, programmes and tasks that will be carried out by the extension staff.
- Subject matter coverage of extension: The subject-matter coverage and content need to be considered in extension policy.
- Geographical coverage: Geographical coverage can be an important policy issue because of both political and cost implications. It is clear that, having multiple sources of funding especially from different levels of government will increase the number of shareholder and will result in an extension system that has broader base of support and that is more responsive to stakeholders at the local level.
- Clientele or target beneficiaries: According to Contado (1997), the common criticism of extension service especially in developing countries is their neglect of the vast number of small-scale farmers in favour of fewer numbers of large farmers and the near neglect of the more vulnerable groups-the woman and youths. It is therefore important to recognize the role of these classes of people and consider their interest in extension policy.
- Organizational issues: The extension organization embodies different aspects of an extension system which provide the management framework for extension service and this thus affects the scope, magnitude and structure of the extension system, including factors such as control, cost-effectiveness and the impact of the extension service. This organizational issue calls for policy arrangement that would promote integration of the agricultural extension system.

Extension staffing issues: Staffing in extension remains one area that needs to be given serious attention. The extension workers-farmers ratio is still very disappointing. Given the mission, scope of work and available resource, what type of qualification and how many extension staff should be employed by the system. What should be the proportion of subject specialist to field extension worker? How should extension staff be deployed, how often should they be transferred and what incentives should be provided in order to ensure that they work closely with all groups of farmers.

- Extension funding: Agricultural extension in Nigeria has been experiencing dwindling funding from the governments. The most difficult and challenging policy issue facing extension today is to secure a stable source of funding. It is important that policy makers should examine this issue better.
- Stability: A good extension policy should promote extension system stability, extension should not be rigid. It should be responsive to all major groups of farm people and sufficiently inclusive to allow public, private and non-governmental organizations to contribute fully to agric development goals of the country.

Extension policy formulation and action

There is no standard formula to be used in formulating agricultural extension policies. It should be noted however that most existing laws and policies on extension have been formulated by planners and policy makers in the ministry of agriculture and agricultural committees in the legislative branch of government. Normally, agricultural extension professionals from agricultural universities or from abroad are called on to provide advice and to assist in drafting extension legislation. A congressional hearing is normally conducted before extension legislation is finally enacted into law. In fact to be more relevant to the needs of the farmers and other clientele, extension policy should be reviewed and formulated through a participatory approach. This will thus ensure farmers participation and this farmers involvement in policy formulation and periodic review is the most effective means of creating a "demand driven" national extension system (Contado, 1997). It is therefore important to emphasize that in formulating extension policies, actions should always shift to the following issues and options.

- Who is the farmer?
- The extent, quality and effective utilization of the farm.
- Supporting infrastructure.
- Farm credits, input distribution and farm technology.
- Funding of agricultural extension services.
- Alternative sources of funding of agricultural extension services.
- Factors that shapes extension policy such as population, land scarcity, social change and income level.
- Political system.
- Extension theory, management and administration.
- Technology level.
- Extension structure.
- Education.
- Research system.
- Involvement of private extension service.
- Professionalization of extension service.
- Privatization and commercialization of extension service.
• Attaching a definite policy statement to extension service other than the educational and training roles only.

Up-scaling and re-branding agricultural extension in Nigeria

Re-branding has to do with changing perception. It is about de-stigmatization or what is called image substitution. It is efforts aimed at seeking to change the way other people see Nigeria or what they think about Nigerians. Real and enduring re-branding can only come by achievements, performance and by deliberate efforts at building a portfolio of assets and accomplishment. Re-branding has to do with serious positive change in attitude and behaviour which extension depicts. There is no way we can think of re-branding Nigeria effectively and successfully without re-branding the various sections that make-up Nigeria, the various organizations, units, ministries, parastatals and individuals. To this end therefore, Nigerian agricultural extension should not be an exception since a lot of things have gone wrong within the sector.

To up-scale Nigerian agricultural extension service, Nigerian agricultural extension must be re-branded, government must produce on its promises, government must show honest commitment on agricultural extension so that its citizens will develop confidence on government ability to address the needs of extension service and the farmers, there must be complete change of attitude by both the government and the average Nigerians including those in high places. This can only be achieved when the following indices and operational assumptions are considered.

• Recognition and philosophical acceptance by government leaders in Nigeria that agriculture as the primary industry in the nation’s physical, biological, economic, social and to an increasing degree political development.
• Establishment of macro policies favorable to increased food production on such matters as price levels for agricultural products and purchasable production inputs, production credit, marketing facilities, availability of production inputs, (seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and irrigation facilities) and related requisites.
• Provision of a body of science and technology that is technically sound, economically feasible, and socially compatible, sufficient to meet Nigerian agricultural and rural modernization requirements.
• Recognition that an extension system does not, as sometimes appears or mistakenly to be the case, offer a utopian solution to agricultural and rural modernization; that it is only one of the numerous, needed inputs, and that its effect is in the nature of a catalytic ingredients of the modernization mix.
• Realization that an effective extension system is a highly complex, costly and time-consuming enterprises. It is complex because the human mind (the object of its focus) is complex. It is complex because a relatively large staff is required for wide coverage, and professionally trained staff is required to achieve effective credibility. It is time-consuming because the re-patterning of human behaviour requires a cumulative effect to reach the high level of mental conviction that results in belief substitution—a precondition for behavior modification which extension aim to achieve.
• Professional field staff adequately supported by technical specialists, supervisors and administrators, at all essential levels in the organizational hierarchy.
• Continuing source of staff training-pre-services, in-service, and advanced-for all categories of personnel and opportunities for staff development at increasingly higher levels of professional competency.
• Financing at an effective level of all essential elements of the system, especially staff salaries and necessary amenities, needed equipment, supplies and facilities, transportation and communication channels.
• Co-ordination of the extension system with research centers, universities and colleges of agriculture in such a way that each benefits from the resources, problems, feedbacks, and achievements of the others which shows an ideal role of extension with research, training instructions and farmers for effective agricultural and rural development in Nigeria.
Continuous systematic evaluation of the objectives of the extension system- the achievements and e ffectiveness of resources utilized by the system.

CONCLUSION

Agricultural extension remains the most important strategy to reach the farming household globally, both in the rural and urban sector. It is also one of the prime movers of agricultural development throughout the world. However, the major problem of establishing and maintaining an effective agricultural extension service hinges on the lack of a realistic policy or an unstable policy framework for charting the mission of extension system. Inconsistency of extension policy has also remained a serious problem to our extension activities. Extension policy has always been tied to the apron sting of the government with the result that it has always taken a top-down approach where people sit down in the offices and assumed away the problems and needs of the people. Thumm (1989) considered the factors that need to be looked at in any effort to moving meaningful extension policy as shown in Figure 1.

• It is clear from all intents and purpose that re-branding and up-scaling Nigerian agricultural extension ought to be accorded top most priority in national and international
- development. However, if this is to materialize, Nigerian must show complete attitudinal change on their perception of agricultural extension and the policy makers and government must see agricultural extension as an important component of meaningful agricultural development as well as a serious contributors and stakeholder in the nation’s economy.

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