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An Exploratory Study of Service Delivery by Local Government Councils in Zimbabwe: A Developmental State Perspective

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Abstract:

This study is about service delivery problems which are affecting local authorities in Zimbabwe. The researcher was inspired to carry out this study by the need to address the issue of poor service delivery particularly, on the provision of houses, maintenance of the roads network, provision of clean water and better sanitary conditions among others.

The aim of the study was either to come up with practical guidelines which could help both policy-makers and executive in addressing those problems or to develop theories on the local government administration. The research was a case study of Epworth Local Board, and it was carried out without a research assistant. Three approaches in this study were adopted which were semi-structured interviews, document analysis and participant observations. The three approaches were chosen in order to allow triangulation of the results.

Literature review was carried out on similar studies which had initially been done by other researchers and it was realized that a lot of work had already been done in this area, however, it was observed that there were some research-gaps which were to be covered. Literature review of research methodology and innovation techniques was also carried out so as to come up with new ideas which could contribute in the running of local authorities.

During data presentation and analysis, new findings came up which contributed to the generation of new theories. Practical guidelines in the operation of local authorities were also developed. New insights also came up during the research such as those which are associated with distressed economies.

In terms of challenges, the research experienced problems in terms of funding the study. There were also limitations in regard to this study and one of them was that it was a single study whose results may be difficult to generalize. The research was also limited in terms of time. Despite the existence of some limitations which were observed, it is still being felt that the results can still be generalized since most of the findings had been triangulated.

At the end, recommendations were made and other areas for future studies were identified in the same process, and one of those future studies would be looking at issues which concern local authorities. The other area of study which would also be required would be to look at other issues which are outside local authorities in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *Service delivery, corruption, weak economy, policy inconsistency, accountability, political interference and performance management system*

1. Introduction

This study is about service delivery in local authorities in Zimbabwe in a developmental state perspective. Service delivery in a developmental state is not only limited to the provision of the basic services such as the provision of clean water, electricity, housing, health facilities and maintenance of the existing services, but it should also cover developmental projects which can improve the quality of life of the people. The provision of service delivery should be provided in consultation with the community so that the issues which affect them are addressed.

A local government area is established in terms of section 4 as per the Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:15 (1996) in order to offer services. The nature of services which local authorities should provide are as per the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013, and they are considered to be the third- tier arm of the Central Government.

A developmental local government should have a strategy so that it can implement its plans in future and that strategy should have a vision, mission, values and action plans according to (Manning, 2001). The vision of a developmental government must have a shared vision as per the balanced scorecard by (Kaplan, 2012:2).

It is therefore important that a developmental local government should engage its community when it is planning to provide service delivery. Besides the above it is expected that a developmental local government should also be guided by a governance system which may be in use such as Anglo-Saxon model in the case of the US and UK, then European model in the case of Germany and Asian model. When a developmental local government has shared values, all its processes should be aligned, Peters (2003:10)

Again, according to (The State of The Nation South Africa (2003/4), a developmental local government has four functions which it is expected to perform and these are:

- To improve social development and economic progress;
- To integrate and co-ordinate various projects in their areas;
- To encourage community participation in developmental projects; and
- To provide leadership, and equipping community with new knowledge through learning and information sharing.

In order for local government to be able to carry out these four functions the powers and functions of local government should be made clear, according to The State of The Nation (2003/4).

However, in Zimbabwe, the provision of service delivery has not been in line with the four functions of a developmental government as stated in the (The State of The Nation Address, 2003-2004). This view is supported by the fact that there have been some reported cases of cholera outbreak in the 2008 and 2010 resulting in about 8000 deaths. Given this situation of poor service delivery it is important to investigate and come up with clear understanding of the issues which affect the provision of service delivery in local government councils in Zimbabwe.

1.1. Importance of the Study

A number of papers have been written on the issues which affect service delivery in Zimbabwe and in 1981 Zimbabwe had a developmental approach after the Riddell Commission of 1980, which came up with a developmental program called Growth with Equity. There are also guidelines on the provision of public service which were issued through the African Charter for the Public Service of 2001.

However, despite the fact that Zimbabwe at one time had a developmental government and also the fact that there are service delivery guidelines to guide the African states on the provision of service delivery, there is poor service delivery in Zimbabwe today. Given this situation it is important to carry out a study which will make the following contributions:

- The researcher will make observations in the field to gather data with a view of identifying emerging patterns and anomalies.
- The researcher will then use patterns and anomalies to develop explanatory theories as discussed by Morrison (2003:3)
- Making contribution to the field of study by coming up with a model of local government, as well practical guidelines for policy makers.

Develop practical guidelines for managers in local government structures in Zimbabwe on how to improve service delivery.

Making a contribution to career by acquiring more knowledge in terms of the issues which affect local authorities in the provision of service delivery.

The researcher will be able to develop a second career path after retirement.

- Making a contribution to policy in terms of policy guidance.
- Contribution to organizational success

1.2. Assumptions of the Study

The researcher believes that:

- There are issues which are affecting the performance of the local government sector.
- Developmental programs are not addressing the issues which are affecting local authorities in their service delivery obligations
- The local government model which is in Zimbabwe is not promoting performance of local government sector.
- If policy makers were informed of the issues which affect the local government sector service delivery would improve.
- Performance of the local government sector would improve once the operating environment has been corrected.

2. Review of Related Literature

The issue of service delivery in local government sector is examined in the context of the themes which were identified in the provision of service delivery:

- Developmental local government
- Management systems
- Governance structure
- Performance management systems
- Quality assurance systems
- Remuneration systems
- Training and development
- Benchmarking

- Evaluation systems
- Value analysis
- Governance systems
- Integrated development plans
- Accountability
- Survey of existing ideas
- Survey on creativity and innovation

Each one of the above approaches can influence the provision of service delivery in the local government sector. The provision of adequate service delivery in Zimbabwe has been an issue of great concern to the general public for quite some time now, and any hope of seeing quality service delivery has been fading by each day as the situation in local authorities has been worsening all the time in a way which resembles that of a welfare state according to Ghani and Lockhart (2010:27). In various public discussions concerning the poor service delivery in local authorities, many reasons have been offered as the cause of the problems around the shortage of water in homes, deteriorating roads in towns, constant power outages, dilapidated health facilities, sewer blockages in homes and public places and many others, which is going to be the focus of this study.

Despite the existence of The African Charter for the Public Service (2001), which gives guidelines on the public service, and which work as a framework for developmental local government to its member countries it is only the Republic of South Africa which has adopted those guidelines.

As per (Public Service and Administration The Republic of South Africa White Paper, 1997), the Mbeki Administration managed to concretize the African Public Service Charter through the Batho Pele (People First) Principles which would work as a policy framework in the implementation of the strategy aiming to improve service delivery. This policy also states that the Public Service has to be:

- People centered
- People must come First
- Batho Pele means a better life for everyone.

According to (The Journal of Modern African Studies volume 19, numbers 1-4) Zimbabwe at independence in 1980 had a developmental strategy whereby it wanted to build a socialist, democratic and an egalitarian society with the desire to:

- Maintain and increase production.
- Rationalize incomes and services
- Rationalize some resources in other sectors

In order to achieve its objective of a developmental state, Zimbabwe came up with a major economic policy paper: Growth With Equity. The aim of this economic policy was to record a sustained high rate of economic growth which was estimated at about 8% per annum at that time (The Journal of Modern African Studies volume 19, numbers 1-4). It came up with its developmental guidelines after the Riddell Commission Report of 1981, whose primary aim was to distribute wealth in an equitable manner

The Growth With Equity policy document, was a major shift from what Zimbabwe had before its independence, whereby, Zimbabwe, which was Rhodesia then had a policy which was on economic substitution because it was under sanctions after having declared the Unilateral Declaration of Independence.

The developmental state in Zimbabwe began to fail at the time the country introduced Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1991. ESAP was introduced in 1991 so that the government would be able to deal with the effects of Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), which had been established during the colonial period. The ESAP's primary goal was to restore economic efficiency as well as creating the conducive environment for private sector activities.

Ever since the Zimbabwean Government introduced ESAP one development program after the other were being introduced but service delivery has not improved as of now.

There are also reports by the (Africa Development Bank Group, 2013) on service delivery in Zimbabwe, where it has put forward corruption and weak governance systems as issues surrounding the poor service delivery in Zimbabwe and some of the reasons which were covered in the ADB report had also been raised in some other publications such as in (Transparency International, 2012).

Service delivery in local authorities is affected by a number of factors. For instance in (The State of The Nation Address, 2003-2004), Doreen Atkinson looked at a number of issues which could affect local government in the provision of services delivery, and some of the issues which she came up with, were relating to conflicts within the council structures. Besides the above factor local authorities are threatened with viability because of a lack of resources, incomplete decentralization, poor funding models and weak management systems. This has affected the quality of life of the people let alone development.

3. Overview of the Chapters

Chapter one looks at the background of the research. It outlines the problem statement, conceptual framework, research questions as well and the significance of the study. Above all it points to the general direction which the study is

taking. Chapter two covers literature survey and practices which the study has been looked at during investigations. The purpose of this chapter is to identify research gaps in the work of other scholars and see how this study can come in.

Chapter three covers survey of research methodology which will inform the study. It covers survey on creativity and innovation also. The chapter ends with a survey on research methods. In chapter four the study looks at final contribution, proposed solutions to the problems. It also suggests practices and solutions to the problems.

In chapter five, research design of the study is outlined as well as research philosophy and data collection tools. It will also cover issues relating to reliability, validity and how threats to the validity can be mitigated. Philosophical assumptions are also covered. Chapter six is on data presentation, analysis and interpretation. Chapter seven will be on general conclusion, recommendations. It will also look at the prospects for further research.

4. Title of the Study

The research topic of this study is "Exploratory study of service delivery by local government councils in Zimbabwe" Generally there is poor service delivery in Zimbabwe where there is shortage of water, poor sewer reticulation systems, frequent power outages, declining health delivery services, poor road network among other things. What is worrying many people today is that at one time Zimbabwe had a developmental local government in 1981 but later on abandoned it when it introduced ESAP in 1991. As from 1991 to date service delivery has been on a decline and various forms of developmental programs have been formulated but with very little impact in terms of service delivery.

Though the topic of this project is about an exploratory study of service delivery in local authorities in Zimbabwe in a developmental state perspective, this research is going to be a case study which will focus on Epworth Local Board, a municipality which is within the Harare Metropolitan Province, in Zimbabwe.

5. Definitions of Special Terms

5.1. Service Delivery

Service delivery refers to the provision of water, houses, roads, health centers, schools, developmental projects and others

5.2. Developmental local government

A developmental local government is defined as local government which is dedicated to work with people and other various groups which are found within local government areas so as to find sustainable means to address their social, economic and material needs as well as to upgrade the standard of living according to The State of the Nation South Africa, (2003/4).

6. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to attend to the

6.1. Primary Objective

Is to establish the services performance problems in local government structures in Zimbabwe

6.2. Secondary Objectives

- To establish issues that affect service performance in local government structures in Zimbabwe.
- To find out the performance management systems that are in use in local government structures in Zimbabwe.
- To establish how the performance management systems are managed at the following levels of the organization.
 - Executive management level.
 - Middle management level
 - Supervisory management level
 - Frontline staff member level
 - Individual level
- To determine how the service performance is remunerated and rewarded in the local government structures in Zimbabwe.
- To find out how the service staff members are trained and developed for service performance.
- To establish the values which guide service performance in local government structures in Zimbabwe?
- To understand how managers and workers are selected in local government structures in Zimbabwe.
- To find out the governance model that is applied in local government structures in Zimbabwe.

7. Research Questions

This research is guided by the following research questions:

The central research question of this study is: What are the services performance problems in local government structures in Zimbabwe?

7.1. Secondary Research Questions

- What are the services performance problems in local government structures in Zimbabwe?
- What are the performance management systems in use in local government structures in Zimbabwe?
- How are these performance management systems managed at the following levels of the organization:
 - Executive management level?
 - Middle management?
 - Supervisory level?
 - Frontline staff members?
 - Individual level?
- How service performance is remunerated and rewarded in local government structures in Zimbabwe?
- How is service staff members trained and developed for service performance in local government structures in Zimbabwe?
- What are the values that guide service performance in local government structures in Zimbabwe?
- How managers and workers are selected in local government structures in Zimbabwe?
- What is the local governance model for local government structures in Zimbabwe?

8. Design of the Study

The research design will be based on the research onion as given in Saunders et al (2009:108) diagram. The research design chosen will further indicate all the steps of the research together with the general approach which is to be applied in this research, Saunders et al (2010:99).

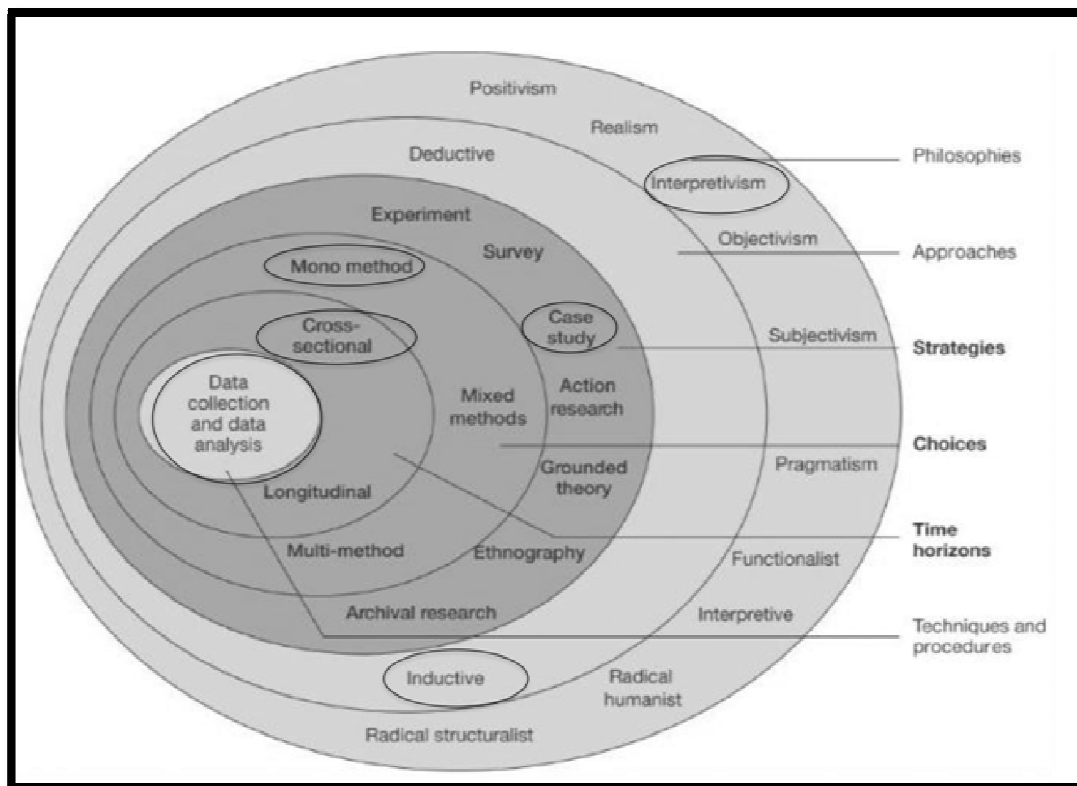


Figure 1: The Research Onion

The research philosophy in this case study is constructivism/interpretivism because the reality and accepted knowledge of the study is based on subjective perceptions and meanings of the research participants as per Saunders et al (2009:108). The research approach is inductive because I will be going out in the field to develop a theory and practical guidelines for improving service delivery in local government structures in Zimbabwe.

The strategy shall be a case study which will enable the researcher to understand service delivery issues in depth so as to generate solutions as per 'research onion' diagram of, Saunders (2009:108).

It is a mono study because it is going to focus on Epworth Local Board case study, which is within the Harare Metropolitan Province. The time horizon of this case study shall be cross-sectional. The data collection and analysis shall be based on the research questions which have been developed in this paper.

9. Research Philosophy/Paradigm

The research philosophy of this study which is interpretivism has its assumptions which are: ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical and methodology according to Saunders et al (2009:119).

9.1. Interpretivism

Interpretivism paradigm is different from the other paradigms because it does not agree with the views of positivism, however, interpretivism paradigm believes that the reality is socially constructed and that it is subjective which can change over time resulting in multiple meanings as per Saunders, (2009:119). It believes that human beings may react to the fact that they are being studied which in a way may influence the results of the study, Creswell (2008:6). Lastly, the interpretivism paradigm is constructed from social and historical events, Creswell (2008:6).

10. Data Collection Instruments

10.1. Document Analysis

The sources of documents were newspapers, magazines, letters and memos, government publications and official statistics, Denscombe, (2010:217). On document analysis all documents which were used in this research were analyzed so that the data that was used in the research would be reliable.

The researcher is a Town treasurer at Epworth Local Board and would easily negotiate for access to the documents which are relevant to the study. The analysis of documents would provide the researcher with a lot of data without a lot of cost and travelling, Denscombe (2010:232). Document analysis was chosen because it is possible to pick espoused policies in the system.

10.2. Participant Observation

Participant observation was another approach of data collection that was adopted in this research because it gets evidence by witnessing the events Denscombe (1998:152). The researcher is the Town Treasurer at Epworth Local Board and can easily participate in the daily activities of the council but collecting data in an ethical manner, Becker and Geer 1957:28) as quoted by Denscombe (1998:153). Apart from document analysis, participant observation was carried out because it was noticed that people in Zimbabwe are not free to express their opinion and as such one other way of getting information was through participant observations where people would be caught off-guard.

10.3. Interviews Including Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviews

The unstructured and semi-structured interviews was adopted with key personnel at the council as well as those at the parent ministry. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews would allow informants to explain themselves on the service performance problems at Epworth Local Board in line with their on thinking and perceptions, Denscombe (2010:175). In the semi-structured interview the researcher would be flexible Denscombe (2010:176). The researcher had to use unstructured interviews because he had realized that it was difficult to obtain reliable information in Zimbabwe because it is not an open society whereby people would speak their minds openly. As such, it was realized that it could only be through semi-structured interviews that the researcher would be able to catch them unguarded. In in-depth interviews, twenty key informants who were purposively sampled in this case study were interviewed

10.4. Validation

Few sets of questions were administered to the purposively sampled targets in order to test for the consistency.

10.5. Validity

Validity is another word for truth (Silverman, 2011:276) and the word validity also refers to whether the findings are what they are supposed to be. The word validity can also be interpreted as referring to the accurate findings of the social phenomena which will be studied according to Hamersley cited by Silverman (2003:175).

Generally qualitative research tends to suffer from threats of 'anecdotalism' which occur when a study has included only a few deliberately picked examples, and also whereby investigators have justified the inclusion of certain material which at the end the representativeness of the data comes into question.(Silverman, 2011:276). In order to deal with threats which will affect the validity of this study a few methods of triangulation will be adopted in data collection such as document analysis, participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews (Silverman, 2011:277). As a way to complement the above method of dealing with threats to validity, respondent validation will be applied whereby tentative results will be shared with

the participants. Other methods of dealing with the threats to data validity will be the constant comparative method, comprehensive data treatment, deviant data analysis as well as using appropriate tabulations of the data collected (Silverman, 2011:278).

10.6. Pilot Study

Four interviewees were approached with a set of questions in order to test on the consistency of information which would be provided and that helped to refine the questions of the research.

Data analysis was done in terms of the identified themes which were: The literature review strategy shall be thematic as follows:

- Local Government Model
- Local Government and Developmental Policies
- Local Government and Party Politics
- Performance Management
- Remuneration System
- Training and Development
- Selection and Recruitment System
- Transformation Leadership
- Services Delivery Challenges

11. Findings

It was observed that generally the performance of local authorities was being affected by a lack of resources which impacts negatively on their performance. The other issue was that decentralization in Zimbabwe is not complete and that there is a lot of excessive control by the central government. The country does not have a developmental local government, it does not have service delivery framework for local authorities to be able to be guided in their obligations.

The study has also noted that local government councils were being affected by a lack of leadership, absence of an oversight model to guide councilors. The projects were being poorly implemented and they were characterized by a weak evaluation system, poor performance management systems as well as non-existence of training and development programs among other issues. All these factors being put together affected the performance of local authorities.

Political instability, policy inconsistency and weak government systems were also part of the factors. A lot of factors which are affecting local authorities would require the attention of policy makers. However, there are also other issues which require the executive's attention such as the issue of corruption and lack of transparency.

Local authorities are also failing to raise funds for their operations mainly due to a lack of funding models like the ones which are in China and the Temasek model of Singapore. There is very little innovation which is taking place mainly because management is not being given room to make decisions. The governance system is not streamlined and there are parallel structures in the local government sector and all these issues hinder development. A lack of political fairness in terms of service delivery in the local government sector, lawlessness as well as lack of commitment are also affecting performance of local authorities.

12. Conclusions

12.1. Answering of Research Questions

The central research question was; what are the service performance problems in local government structures in Zimbabwe? This question was partly answered using document analysis and also partly answered by the findings which came from participant observations. In-depth interviews provided a lot of answers to the performance problems of councils which range from governance issues such as corruption to the existence of parallel structures within the local government structures such as those of district administrators, provincial ministers and chiefs. It also brought out findings of political interferences, lack of resources and poor performance of the national economy as issues which affect service delivery.

12.2. Proposed Researches

The further researches which would be required in this same area of study would need to look at:

- Whether the local government sector would be able to recover any time soon or not, given the long period of negative growth of the economy of Zimbabwe.
- How the issue of transparency could be handled in order to address the governance issue in Zimbabwe.
- The ways in which the political interference in the local authorities could be stopped in view of the growing political uncertainty in the country.

13. Limitations of the Study

Despite the fact that the research questions were answered, it is acknowledged that this study had some limitations. The first limitation was that it was a single case study whose findings may be difficult to generalize (Denscombe 2014:64).

The other issue is that this case study cannot be considered as a complete work on the issues which affect local authorities in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, by looking at the nature of this case study, it is also difficult to consider it as a representative of a survey sample (Denscombe 2014:61.)

It is also important to point out again that the findings of this case study, are just provisional and they may need to be supported by future findings of other studies in a similar nature (Denscombe 2014:62).

13.1. Generalization

However, despite the limitations of this study which have been given above it is felt that the findings of this case study could still be used to develop theories in regard to public service (Denscombe 2014:61).

The other important use of the findings of this study is that they can be examined and help to create a better understanding of the situation in the local government sector. The policy-makers will be able to understand what is happening in the local authorities as well as in the parent ministry. The issues which require attention will be attended to such as the problem of espoused policy and that of policy in use which should be corrected (Denscombe 2014:63).

It is still being felt that the findings of this case study will be helpful in coming up with practical guidelines for the policy-makers and executives as has been done in chapter 6, on the contributions of this research. The contributions which have been given could not have been made without this case study. (Denscombe 2014:63).

13.2. New Insights

There were some new insights which came out of the research such as that:

- There is conflict between espoused policy and policy in-use in a distressed economy
- Performance contracts are not being taken to the shop floor level
- The electoral system does not always produce competent councilors.
- There is disintegration of the governance elite as well as the disintegration of the elite in local government.
- The reward system in the local government structures is skewed.
- Where systems have collapsed there is a weak government model.
- When sanctions are imposed it is the poor who suffers.

13.3. Unanswered Questions

Some of the unanswered questions were:

- Whether it is possible or not to correct the whole government system within a reasonable time?
- Is it possible to be innovative in the local authorities when there so much interference by the central government?
- Is it possible for government to complete the decentralization exercise in terms of resources as well as bringing transparency in its systems?
- How best can the local authorities be re-capacitated given so many years of negative growth?

14. General Recommendations

As a general recommendation it is advisable for the government to:

- Go back to the Riddell Commission report of 1981 if the developmental local government is to be restored.
- Fix its local government systems if a developmental state is to be achieved.
- Develop ways of enhancing political will if at all developmental goals are to be realized.
- An effort should be made to create an environment of transparency in the country.
- Take the performance management systems up to the shop-floor levels.
- Quickly change its espoused policies and replace them with policies in-use.
- Complete its decentralization policy.
- Put in place mechanisms of fighting corruption in the country.
- Respect private property rights.
- Consider the contributions made in chapter 6.
- Give autonomy to local authorities and space to the executives to make decisions

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