

Human Capital Development (HCD) in Covid-19 Pandemic Era

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Abstract

The problems posed by covid-19 pandemic were enormous arising from the challenge of human capital development. The paper is an ex-post facto research and adopted its analytical methodology from the conventional content analysis based on secondary data. Meanwhile, the study anchored on Human Capital theory as the theoretical framework of analysis. The findings showed that the Nigerian government has not learnt any lesson from the Covid-19 Pandemic hence nothing very concrete, has been done in the area of human capital development. This is reflected in her level of apathy and disposition to the funding of education, health and the needed technological know-how as well as the needed corresponding research and development interest. The resultant effect of this, has manifested in the recent brain-drain of our medical personnel, unemployment and underemployment of human potentials, thus showcasing the level of underdevelopment in our system in the recent times. The paper therefore, recommends that in other not to make mockery of Nigeria again in the comity of nations or in the international community, government should increase her annual appropriations to health and the education sectors, as there is also need to look in-ward as it relates to the acquisition of relevant technologies and their development of their applications a priori. Government should develop the political will in intensifying effort towards providing Human Capital Development (HCD) programs within the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

Keywords: *Human Capital Development (HCD), Covid-19 Era*

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Introduction

Just like natural disasters, Covid -19 has hit the most valuable of humanity and whose toll on physical capital vastly exceeds its toll on human capital. The pandemic has left infrastructure untouched but has significantly affected, the health of millions of people as well as disrupted the socio-economic life of hundreds of millions of children and adults within the face of the globe. During the period, there were overwhelming spread of the virus because of inadequacy of health and medical personnel available for a rapid response action. This underscored the imperative of human capital development requirement. There were also the challenge of inadequate technologies such as local/foreign ventilators, vaccines, public protections equipment amongst others. Secondly, arising from the lock

down orders from the federal government, economic activities were shut down and this affected the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria. Not only that, because economic activities were on hold, many Nigerians suffered hunger and starvation and in effect, others who were not even affected by the virus died because of the hardship of the time. The above situation combined to underscore the imperative of Human Capital Development that would have assisted in curbing the menace of the pandemic.

Globally and following the above scenario, investment on human capital has become a subject of discourse amongst scholars, following the emergence of the pandemic. Lots of lessons have been drawn by developing countries in the face of increasing socio-economic realities of the time.

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus has actually coerced most countries of the world, particularly those in Asia, Latin America, Africa, South-America amongst others, to look inward on how to harness their respective human resources in a bid to tackle the menace associated with Covid-19. Conceptually, Ogwa, Ossai and Okoli (2016) affirmed that the concept of human capital was first used in 1960s by some group of economists in the University of Chicago to denote investment in education; more so, it has more likelihood of socio-economic payoff to the individuals and the society at large. That is to say that the idea of Human Capital Development goes beyond the above connotation.

Furthermore, *Human Capital Development* is the aggregate of investments in key areas such as health, education, on-the-job training and migration that have high propensity of enhancing productivity in the labor market. The over-reliance of developing countries of the world, on the developed countries for relief materials, vaccines as well as one form of grant or the other, shows the high volatility of countries of Africa {of which Nigeria is the focal point}. Asia amongst others, shows the slow pace of government investments in human capital development in the aforementioned continents. Hernandez and Wright (2015) in their work titled “Determining human capital impact on economic growth” affirmed the locus of development usually found in the rate of investment in human capital. Consequently, this accounts for the frequency of economic growth in lower and middle-income countries such as Nigeria. Succinctly put by the above scholar; primary education in most cases, is seen as the major contributing factor to human capital development in developing countries unlike in developed countries; where secondary and tertiary education are seen as the major source or contributor to human capital development (Ogwa et. al, 2016). It is not surprising why we have high level of investment in Research and Development (R&D) in later countries than in the former. This shows the disparity between consumers’ economy and producers’ economy.

The geographical and intellectual variance between developed, underdeveloped and developing countries have become a subject of argument in recent times as it pertains to brain-drain from Africa in the neo-colonial era. As such, this accounts for the reasons why some countries are at the mercy of others, while some countries will continue to be passive in the global capitalist economy. Furthermore, the above situation has exacerbated the underdevelopment of Human capital asset in Nigeria hence the mass exodus of the medical personnel severally and in the recent times to add to the continuous mobility of various capital assets in the Nigerian system.

It is against this backdrop that this work is set out to examine the following puzzles:

1. Are there underpinning factors that account for the low pace of *Human Capital Development* in Nigeria?
2. Is there any nexus between *Human Capital Development* and the lessons learnt during the Covid-19 era?

3. What can be done by Nigerian Government to enhance human capital development?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to explore the lessons of Covid-19 and the Nigerian perspective of human capital development in the pandemic. Specifically, the paper seeks to: a) link lessons learnt in the Covid-19 era with the need for *Human Capital Development in Nigeria*; b) to explore some of the challenges of Human Capital Development in the Nigerian system and; c) to evaluate the various measures put in place by the government to enhance *Human Capital Development*.

Methodology

The study is an ex-post facto research and as such, utilized secondary source of data anchored on the conventional content analysis approach wherein secondary data were deductively analyzed to arrive at the findings of the paper, supported by different empirical and extant literature that were explored.

Theoretical Framework

The work is anchored on Human Capital Theory. As the name implies, the theory originated from the domain of macroeconomic theory. The chief proponents of this theory are two British-Economists namely: Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Sir William Petty (1623-1687). Some of the advocates of this theory further include Schultz (1993), Becker (1993) and Harbison (2010) amongst other scholars. The basic assumptions or tenets of this theory include the following:

1. An educated population is a productive population. That is, formal education is highly instrumental and even necessary to improve the production capacity of a country's population.
2. That education enhances the efficiency and productivity of employees particularly, by increasing one's rate of cognitive stock of economic productive capacity (a product of innate abilities and investment in human beings).
3. Human resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations (Harbison, 2010). Why natural and human resources are passive factors of production; human capital remains the only active agent
4. That accumulated capital and exploited natural resources can enhance economic, political and national development.
5. Human capital considers labor as commodity that can be traded in terms of purchase and sales. Human capital encapsulates all the expertise and skills as well as knowledge one acquires via education and training.
6. Education and health care are key to enhancing human capital development as well as cardinal in enhancing economic outputs of any nation (Harbison, 2010). This is the rationale behind seeing any country's populace as its greatest asset {Nigeria, China, U.S.A amongst others}. In other words, *Human Capital Development* remains the most formidable weapon in transforming the economies of the world.
7. Human capital is a vital agent for boosting a firm's performance.

Application/Relevance of Human Capital theory to the Study

Nigeria as a country is endowed with diverse capital assets {man and material}. The relevance of human capital is such that it is pivotal in galvanizing other resources in achieving optimal organizational productivity or even required job performance. Cognizance of the imperative nature of human capital to the overall development of Nigeria, the government at different levels in the country have doubled their efforts in a bid to ensure that enough investments are made on the human

capital asset of the nation. No wonder, we have so many Nigerians making waves in different parts of the world, for instance, Prof Ngozi Okonjo Iweala. In the midst of abundant human and material assets prevalent in Nigeria, it is unbelievable that Nigeria has been lacking in the area of her developmental trajectory. This was reflected in her over-reliance on outside influence from countries in Europe, Asia, America and Africa amongst others for one form of aid or grants following the outbreak of Covid-19 in the country.

The above scenario played out during the period of the pandemic, when some Chinese medical experts came to Nigeria to install and to train the Nigerian Medical Doctors and health personnel on the intricacies of contending with the virus/pandemic as well as the technologies of combating the same pandemic, and only God knows the fortune that had caused Nigeria in her foreign exchange. The ability of some of the countries of the above continents like {USA, China, South Africa, Malaysia, Senegal, Madagascar, to mention but a few} to develop and construct on their own, ventilator (both foreign and local), herbal therapy, vaccines, public protective equipment (PPE) and so on; shows the long term investment of the countries on human capital development and research. This despicable condition of Nigeria became glaring in Ifejike (2017), when she pointed out that the education and health sectors are in shambles. She noted that, not only has hospitals in Nigeria remained death traps for both the rich and the poor; but also that the education sector is still void of constant infrastructure and professionals to man it. The inherent tendency to embark on different forms of strike by Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) amongst others, government indifferent attitude and inability to maintain the pacts or agreements signed in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), all pose serious challenge to the development of the Nigerian system. The lack of professionalism that stems from over-bloated workforce found in the above sectors as well as the politicization of public offices through patronage system, instituted by the political office holders, all combine to complicate as well, point to the need for Human capital development even in the leader cadre of the Nigerian state. The unintended consequences of the above situation is reflected on the over-reliance of Nigerian government and Nigerians on foreign products rather than on Nigerian close substitute. More so, the abysmal picture of Nigeria is reflected both within and outside the shores of country and by sheer neglect and total abandonment by present and past Nigerian leaders, has given us a bad identity as a backward nation suffering from acute and abject poverty in the midst of abundance.

In spite of the prevalence of universal health coverage for citizens in Nigeria; the issue associated with public trust on the ability and capacity of the health sector has continued to remain a mirage. The attitudinal disposition of Nigerian politicians has further exacerbated the whole situation, as the issue of medical tourism in Britain, United States of America, India, United Arab Emirate (UAE), China and so on, has become a common practice in the polity. Nigeria is still not there, as she is yet to meet up global best practices as it relates to the above two key sectors in enhancing national development. The abysmal picture was fully exposed during the outbreak of Covid-19, sustained in Covid era and the lessons yet to be learnt. Emphasizing the relevance of Human Capital Development in period of global crisis, the United Nations along with her member states has stipulated that every member country in the league should allocate at least twenty-six per cent (26) of their annual budget to education. This is all targeted at beefing up skill acquisition as well as human resource training as it is cardinal to sustainable development.

Literature Review

Conceptual Discourse and Explications

There is no general consensus on what social science concepts entail, as it is often approached from diverse scholarly as well as ideological orientations, perspectives or inclinations. Despite the

variations about ideas of concepts amongst scholars and practitioners; its' central theses or assumptions still remains the same.

Human Capital Development also known as **Human Capital Formation**. According to Jhingan in Oyewole and Adejoke (2018), *Human Capital Development* entails the continuous and deliberate process of acquiring as well as increasing the number of individuals' who have skills, education or experience that is cardinal for the economic growth or development of a country's economy. This process is usually geared towards driving economic values in the direction of sustainable national development. It is not surprising that the differences amongst nations of the world is not usually attributed so much on natural resources/ endowments or the stock of physical capital but to the quality and quantity of human resources (Dauda, 2010). Chikwe, Ogidi and Nwachukwu (2015); further pointed out, that *Human Capital Development* could be seen as the act of providing opportunities to all citizens to develop to the fullest of the potentials via education, training and motivation as well as by creating enabling environment for these individuals to contribute their quotas toward national development. In a nutshell, *Human Capital Development* is quite encompassing. It could equally be seen as any effort to increase human knowledge, to enhance their skills, productivity as well as their resourcefulness through good governance, provision of supportive infrastructure such as education, health and social welfare packages. Jhingan (2007) noted that there are basically five (5) ways of developing human capital of any nation. They include:

- i. Investment in health facilities and services (this would help to boost life expectancy).
- ii. On-the spot training such as those associated with old type of apprenticeship as found in firms (succession plans).
- iii. Investment in formal education from primary, secondary to tertiary levels.
- iv. Study programmes or extension programmes.
- v. Migration of individuals and families to adjust to changing job opportunities.

In summary and in a broad sense; investment in human capital means expenditure on education, health and social services in general. While from a narrow perspective, it connotes expenditure on education and training.

Covid-19: Acronym Covid-19 popularly known as coronavirus 2019, is an acronym used to denote the name of the current class of virus that is ravaging the world currently and the year it came to effect in China and the year 2019 in Wuhan Province. The above virus is a new genre of coronavirus that cause illness which is normally reflected with the following symptoms severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), middle east respiratory syndrome (MERS) and common cold (NCDC, 2020; WHO, 2020).

The Nigerian Perspective Situation of COVID-19

Coronavirus has affected over two hundred and twenty {220} countries and territories of the world. Globally, we have 196, 868,719 cases with over 4, 207,276 deaths (Worldometer, 2021). African region estimated over 874, 036 cases with over 18, 498 deaths (Nigeria as a country recorded her first index case of Covid -19 on February 27th, 2020 following the arrival of Italian business man that worked in the country, who contacted the virus sequel to his arrival from Italy (Federal Ministry of Health, [FMOH],2020). Similarly, majority of other cases equally stem from the arrival of many Nigerians resident abroad into the country. Nigerian current status after test \sample collection and testing stood at 172,263 cases with 5,228 active cases, 164, 896 discharged cases and 2,139 deaths (National Center for Disease Control, [NCDC], 2021). As shown in the table below (see table 1),

Covid-19 pandemic has affected all states of the federation with worst hit states identified below. Borrowing from the ideas of Nkereuwem, Ejinaka, Olowu, Obeta, Adebowale and Udoudoh (2020), it would be apt to pinpoint that the despicable quagmire of the country as shown by the high level of covid-19 cases, is as a result of neglect by all and sundry on the relevance of human capital development in the country. No wonder, Anne (2010) affirmed in her work that Epidemics reveal the truth about the societies they hit. There is no gain saying that the global world pandemic has not exposed the state of government apathy {at all levels} in investment of qualitative researches; particularly in institutions of higher learning but also their psychological predisposition to frivolities that is devoid of any penchant in ultra-modern health infrastructure as well as in the welfare of medical practitioners in the country.

Linking the Lessons learnt from Nigeria's Covid 19 to Human Capital Development

Covid-19 first began as a health crisis with a grave impact on population. It later meta- morphosed into an economic and fiscal crisis with huge negative social implications. The focus being the exposition of the effect of Covid-19 on the health and education sectors. Covid-19 affected the aforementioned sectors in the following ways:

1. The deplorable state of health infrastructure: The increase in mortality rate of Nigerians both from covid-19 and other health related issues have raised lots of eyebrows about the level of governments' commitment to the social welfare of her citizenry. Since the outbreak of the virus, there has been a total neglect of other health issues in the country, leading to increase in deaths. The issue of fund is another factor that impeded the capacity of public health institutions to function effectively. The level of government budget mapped out for the health sector called for concern to all and sundry, coupled with the attendant corruption endemic in the system (see table 1 below). This factor is attributed to the high rate of medical tourism abroad and the lack of infrastructure in the health sub-system. Buttressing this point, Aregbeshola (2016) noted that in spite of the coverage of the National Health Insurance Scheme(NHIS) in 2004; majority of the Nigerian masses are unaware of the scheme as well as lack trust in the insurance system in the country. Similarly, stressing on the low level of government investment on public health facilities in Nigeria, the United Nations Development Programme, [UNDP],2020) noted that before the outbreak of the pandemic, there were a total of three hundred and thirty- {330} Intensive Care Unit facilities across the country {with Lagos having 30}. This is a call for concern for the largest black- country in the world with about 200 million populations. Following the outbreak of covid-19 in Nigeria, the NCDC had to establish five {5} testing and treatment centers. Lack of testing and treatment across states of the federation, incessant strike as well as the unattractive nature of public health sector is another issue of concern. Many deaths of public health workers, top politicians and other Nigerians have been witnessed in the face of covid 19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Table 1: Top 10 Nigerian states affected by Covid-19 as on 16th September, 2021

S/N	States of the federation	Number of Index cases recorded
1.	Lagos	75,591
2.	FCT	21,110
3.	Rivers	11,627
4.	Kaduna	9,409
5.	Plateau	9,274
6.	Oyo	8,604
7.	Edo	6,122
8.	Ogun	5,338
9.	Ondo	4,374
10.	Akwa Ibom	4,261

Source: NCDC Report, 2021

Table 2: Annual budget for the Nigeria Health Sector

Year	Total National Budget (NGN Billion)	Total Health Budget (Federal Government) (NGN Billion)	% Health Budget	15% of Total Budget (NGN Billion)	Gaps (Amount Needed to Meet Abuja Declaration of 2001 (15% Of Budget Size) (NGN Billion)
2014	4695.19	339.38	7.23	704.28	364.90
2015	5067.90	347.26	6.85	760.19	412.93
2016	6060.48	353.54	5.83	909.07	555.53
2017	7441.18	380.16	5.11	1116.18	736.02
2018	9120.33	528.14	5.79	1368.05	839.91
2019	8830.00	372.70	4.22	1324.50	951.80
2020	10594.36	463.80	4.38	1589.15	1125.35
					NGN 4.99 trillion

Source: Budget Office of the Federation, 2021

2. **Paucity of Investment in Research and Development:** Research efforts have become unattractive in Nigeria; making lots of scientists, technologists as well as educationists to develop high level of apathy towards research and education. This is incidental to the rate of brain drain in the country. Chikwe, Ogidi and Nwachukwu (2015) noted that research in education and in other sectors, hardly attract adequate government attention. This is found at all levels of government in Nigeria. This has led to frustration by professionals and associations in dire need of such research. The annual government budget on education is not usually adequate, not to talk more of providing enough grants to researchers and research institutes (See table 2 below). This has negatively affected the development of human capital in Nigeria. It is imperative to point out that non-investment of the country in research and development is attributed by many to the over-reliance of the country on world capitalist economies of the world such as covid-19 vaccines, public protective equipment like ventilators as well as testing kits. It is not surprising that no pharmaceutical industry in the country was able to develop their own vaccine nor technological companies found in the country able to develop local ventilators as witnessed in Senegal. Covid-19 exposed deplorable state of Nigeria's pharmaceutical companies as well as made mockery of the Nigerian government's ability to look inward to tackle the pandemic. This further, justifies the dire need for medical tourism outside the country.

Table 3: Annual budget for the Nigeria’s Educational Sector from 2010 to 2019

Year	Budget (# Trillion)	Educational Allocation (# Billion)	Percentage of Budget (%)
2010	5.160	249.09	4.83
2011	4.972	306.30	6.16
2012	4.877	400.15	8.20
2013	4.987	426.53	8.55
2014	4.962	493.00	9.94
2015	5.068	392.20	7.74
2016	6.061	369.60	6.10
2017	7.444	550.00	7.38
2018	8.612	605.80	7.03
2019	8.830	620.50	7.03

Source: Budget Office of the Federation, 2021

- Increasing digital divides and infrastructure gap in the educational sector: Covid-19 exposed the loophole in the utilization of ICT infrastructure in the country. More so, it justifies the outcry and call by educationists on the state of educational infrastructure as well as in the welfare of Academics or educationists {as reflected in the actions of unionism like Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) , Non Academic Staff Union (NASU) , Academic Staff Union of Poly-Technics (ASUP) , Nigerian Union of Teacher (NUT) amongst others}unlike what is found in other parts of the world such as Germany, United States of America, United Arab Emirate (UAE), Ghana and so on , Nairametric (2020) affirmed that the equipment, facilities and gadgets needed to enhance education in Nigeria is grossly inadequate. Lack of political will and corruption impede the capacity and ability of science teachers and lecturers to conduct research at the time of the pandemic, as the equipment required for their diverse researches is usually lacking. Aligning with the above idea, Lawal (2020) noted that low level of investment in human capital development is accountable for the slow pace of technological advancement as regards developing educational learning application for pupils and students. Internet access is another concern during the covid-19 era, as there was an increasing divide between those that have access to digital device or internet and those that do not access. For instance, it was found that internet access and access to digital device is more pronounced amongst pupils and students in private schools or tertiary institutions than their counterparts in public schools or tertiary institutions. The quality of internet network access was another challenge to accesse-learning(Obiakor and Adeniran,2020). The cost implication of data for online education is another factor that impeded human capital development within the era of covid, as some poor parents were not predisposed to making subscription with phones. In nutshell, students or pupils from poorer households are more likely to face challenges relating to affordability of learning online because they have less access to internet connectivity, device, power supply, functional Information and Communication Technology (ICT) amongst others. Consequently, they have to resort to television and radio programmes as alternative to online learning platform. It is right to point out that, power supply posed a major hindrance to the above alternate measures for learning (Hewlet and Hewlet, 2021).

The Challenge of Human Capital Development in Nigeria

After a careful review of extant literature by Chikwe, Ogidi and Nwachukwu (2015), Hernandez and Wright (2015), Ogwa, Ossai and Okoli (2016), Oyewole and Adejoke (2018) amongst others; it is appropriate to infer the followings as some of the major impediments to HCD in Nigeria.

- a. Brain-drain: The disparity between those that are professionally trained, those produced as well as the number of individual productively engaged, account for this factor.
- b. The underutilization of an employee, the global competitive nature of workforce in the world and the poor remuneration, account for the movement of employee from Nigeria to other countries for greener pastures. Nigeria has the highest level of capital flight around the world. As such, this is tantamount to lack of investment in capital development. Developed countries in the twenty-first century use the instrumentality of scholarships and lottery visas to attract the best of the bests to their country.
- c. The emergent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has impeded government interest in *Human Capital Development*. Development in information technology has impacted on how jobs are performed and as such has led to the quest for skillful workforce. By implication, those not knowledgeable in one aspect of ICT are kept unemployed and underutilized. It is right to point out that any organization, that inhibits innovation or ideas are more likely to wither away (entropy). Organizations should train and retrained their employees in other to stay in business.
- d. Dynamism and diversity in the composition of workforce in Nigeria: The preference for a particular gender in recruitment process without due consideration of an employee's competency, skills and potential, poses an obstacle to *Human Capital Development*. Workforce diversity has become a reality that affects every aspect of *Human Capital Development* and issue arising from strategic planning for recruitment and training.
- e. Lack of political will: Nigeria is a secular state and as there is need to separate religion from politics when investing in human capital. Human capital development has been subjected to criticism in Nigeria because most of our political leaders are devoid of any interest or commitment towards the manpower found in their diverse terrains. The neglect in the investment on human capital has metamorphosed into an increase in social vices {crime, prostitution, human trafficking, kidnapping, insurgency, banditry and so on}. Ineptitude of government in the area of *Human Capital Development* has impeded technological advancement; as citizens with potentials in one aspect of science and technology are often neglected. Such neglect is often traceable to some primordial ties.
- f. Lack of sponsorship or infrastructure: The paucity of funds for individuals, students and lecturers to further their potential in diverse areas of their callings, has posed a stumbling block to *Human Capital Development*. Non-investment in research and development shows the abysmal picture of technology ingenuity in the country. Sponsorship and provision of infrastructure should be a joint effort between government and affluent individuals in the country.

Conclusion

The relevance of human capital development in the growth and creation of wealth amongst nations of the world can never be over looked. Similarly, recognizing that human capital development is not the sole responsibility of government alone but also the responsibility of affluent individuals in the country, as this will go a long way in boosting the rating of Nigeria in the comity of nation as it relates to the issue of Human Development Indices (HDIs). Nigeria is blessed with diverse physical, financial and mineral resources but cannot be rated higher in the HDI if all these material resources do not metamorphosed into positive living and longevity of all her citizenry. In spite of Nigeria being an oil producing state; there is need for government to channel more resources to human capital development. The above situation accounts for the overwhelming experience of the medical and health workers of Nigeria during the era of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the helpless and hopeless situation that confronted them and is still confronting the citizenry in combating the dreaded virus in Nigeria.

Sequel to the above conclusion, this work made the following recommendations:

- i. There is need for effective public awareness on the benefits of developing Human Capital and the contributions of research to national development.
- ii. Government should double or increase her budget on education and health sector development to match with global contemporary developments. Similarly, there is need for government to come up with legislative frameworks that would back up policies targeted at boosting research development in the country.
- iii. Government should provide free primary and secondary education to all. More so, education at tertiary level should be more (practical) skill based than (theoretical) knowledge base. Similarly, the primary health care coverage should be integrated to capture all citizens and so widen the scope of social welfare scheme of the government policies and programmes.
- iv. Selection for *Human Capital Development* should be strictly based on merit and not on any primordial ties or political patronage. By so doing, public trust will be built and regained.
- v. There is need for government to provide employment opportunities for her teaming graduates as well as create technical vocational centers in order to make unemployed youths to become self-reliant.
- vi. *Human Capital Development* should be encouraged in government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) by making funds available. In this, awareness would be intensified to encourage enough participants to show interest.

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