# DigitALL
## Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality

Paper presented by
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At the Celebration of
**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023**
By ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN TOWN PLANNERS
OF NIGERIA (AWTPN) - FCT CHAPTER

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**PAPER PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF TOWN PLANNERS, TPL. NATHANIEL M. ATEBIJE, FNITP, AT THE CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023 BY THE ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN TOWN PLANNERS OF NIGERIA (AWTPN), HELD ON 8TH MARCH 2023 AT ROOM 206, NOVARE EVENT CENTRE, ZONE 5, WUSE DISTRICT, ABUJA.**

Courtesies

**Preamble**

It is a great pleasure to be part of this celebration today. I feel so honoured to be invited by this group of intellectuals and professionals, more so because this programme is part of a global campaign. It is an indication that we are not only in tandem with trends and contemporary issues in action, but also to ensure that we want to be in tune and imbibe international best practices. This is how people and societies grow, develop and improve in knowledge and practice to bring innovation to their environment and practices.

I particularly appreciate the Association of Women Town Planners in Nigeria for their zeal and commitment to the development of themselves and contributions to the growth of the Institute. Since the inception of this group, I have observed a heightened involvement of our female members in a lot of activities which has promoted them and given them a voice to stand tall among other female professionals. We can only wish you well and pray for more prosperous growth and pursuit of excellence.

**The Theme**

The theme of this year's celebration is not only apt, but important and crucial to any organization that is interested in making progress. The theme, "**DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality**" is aligned with the priority theme for the upcoming 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW-67), "**Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls**" The event will bring together technologists, innovators, entrepreneurs, and gender equality activists to provide an opportunity to highlight the role of all stakeholders in improving access to digital tools and be followed by a high-level panel discussion and musical performances. The theme is backed by Goal 5 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It emphasizes gender equality in (or promoted by) the digital technology sector. This can be enhanced by addressing several factors categorized into three broad but interlinked areas: digital access, digital literacy, and

digital safety for girls and women in every part of the world. The international women's day provides an opportunity to empower women in all settings, rural and urban, and celebrate activists who are working to claim gender equality for women to enable them realize their full potential in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of leaving no one behind.

But let me quickly take you through a lighter mood by analyzing (or factorizing) the first word of the theme "DigitALL". Perhaps it may provide a challenge and provoke our thoughts in the direction of the objectives of this celebration. It is composed of three words which are 'dig', 'it' and 'all'. In sum, we are being advised to **dig it all.**

To **dig** means to search and find something that has been put away for a long time; to remove earth or debris from by digging; to hollow out by digging and to find by searching. The immediate implication of this definition is the use of energy and diligence to get bring out a hidden material. Effort is demanded; and effort as we used to describe in science is load multiplied by distance. So, if one claims to make effort and there is no evidence of change of location, then it is futility. It means, in digging, some force must be exerted for difficulties to shift base and for progress to be realized.

The word **"it"** refers to a word, action or what a concept is all about; it emphasizes the subject or object of the main clause; and purpose, significance or definition. Many times used as subject or direct object or indirect object of a verb or object of a preposition usually in reference to a lifeless. By application, this word describes a living or non-living thing, an action or object which has some value. We must therefore, understand that what we want to dig is something valuable and appreciable. Incidentally, it is not something that may be found on the surface, streets, open spaces or in the market. It is not common and can only be discovered through diligent digging.

Then the word "all" usually refers to the whole quantity or extent of a particular group or thing; the whole, entire, total amount, quantity, or extent of a thing. It has dimensions by which volume, depth, height and breadth can be measured. Innovation is a function of knowledge. It is in-exhaustive but sufficiently available to everyone who desires to have it.

I believe that the analysis of these words would have given us a direction in our search for innovation and attitudes that provoke and promote improvements in our activities.

**The Idea of Innovation**

Innovation refers to change, alteration, revolution, upheaval, transformation, a new idea, method, or device: novelty or the introduction of something new. Innovation is the process of creating value by applying novel solutions to meaningful ventures. In business, it is a product, service, business model, or strategy that's both novel and useful. It may not have to be major breakthroughs in technology or new business models; they can be as simple as upgrades to a company's customer service or features added to an existing product. Innovation means using new technology and using new ways of thinking to add value to an existing idea or product and to make substantial changes in society.

If you ask me to define innovation in the light of the foregoing, I would see it as the detonation of one's creative, imaginative and inventive capacity for the purpose of prosperity and improved living standard. It is the bridge that links existing body of knowledge with new methods of doing things. Innovation is a product of meditation and inspiration. In science, we talk of mechanical advantage as the force-amplifying effectiveness of a simple machine, such as a lever, an inclined plane, a wedge, a wheel axle or pulley system. It is well established that innovation is the cornerstone for sustained growth and prosperity. The corollary implies that where innovation stops marks the beginning of degeneration and obsolescence. In our academic institutions, it is usually said, 'publish or perish', in a developing world, we can say, innovate or deteriorate.

Our profession is a call for change; to remove ourselves from the darkness of the environment and leap into **the Brighter Future**. It is to work against the counter-growth processes that tend to stunt development of our association through little and big things which may be linked with systemic and poor absorption problems (in our case meaning the quality of information at our disposal and capacity to ingest and imbibe the contents).

Our vision requires building a culture of innovation and continuous improvement failing which, we can only stagnate or keep moving in vicious circles. Innovation helps to drive success; and to be innovative, there is the need for the mindset and processes to be open to new ideas. There must be a determination to think outside the box. The factors that catalyze growth and development must be imbibed. These are creativity and innovation. Creativity is thinking up new things while innovation is doing new things. In the words of Albert Einstein, "… the true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination…" and this imagination is nothing other than the unique human capacity to envision that which is not known and called innovation.

**Importance of Innovation**

Innovation plays a key role in introducing novelty to existing product lines or processes, leading to increased market share, revenue, and customer satisfaction. Sometimes innovation is used to upgrade the operating systems of the business or to introduce modern technologies for automation. It is characterized by effectiveness, novelty, and automation which help in evoking several benefits for businesses or an enterprise. Basically, the major advantages of innovation include:

i. **Creative Development** –business skill opens up opportunities and gives the potential for a new market and helps you to keep up with the current trends.

ii. **Provision of solutions to complex problems:** Leaders must use external (online data, literary works, etc.) and internal sources to develop inventive ideas to solve complex problems.

iii. **Continuous Improvement** –gives organizational sustainability for continual improvements and repackaging and re-branding.

iv. **Improved productivity** by presenting new ideas to business leaders to increase efficiency with minimum resources. Furthermore, reducing business and other risks.

v. **Enhances opportunities for uniqueness and novelty:** That is also helping in making the business stand out from the rest and vicariously contributing to increased revenue.

vi. **Provides a competitive advantage:** facilitates the formulation of promotional strategies that will help in increasing market share and revenue, giving the company a competitive advantage.

**Technology**

Wikipedia defines technology as the application of knowledge for achieving practical goals in a reproducible way. The word *technology* can also mean the products resulting from such efforts, including both tangible tools such as utensils or machines, and intangible ones such as software. It is the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area; (b) a capability given by the practical application of knowledge.

The Oxford dictionary refers to it as the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry. Emmanuel Mesthene defines it as as the organization of knowledge for the achievement of practical purposes while John Kenneth Gabraith sees it as the systematic application of scientific or other organized knowledge to practical tasks; "a creativity process involving human ingenuity. Technology is the *effort* to organize the world for problem solving so that

goods and services can be invented, developed, produced, and used. In his 2009 book, W. Brian Arthur sketched out three conceptions of technology.

i. "The first and most basic one is a technology is *a means to fulfill a human purpose*. … As a means, a technology may be a method or process or device… Or it may be complicated… Or it may be material… Or it may be nonmaterial. Whichever it is, it is always a means to carry out a human purpose."

ii. "The second definition sees technology as an *assemblage of practices and components*."

iii. "The third meaning considers technology as the entire *collection of devices and engineering practices available to a culture*."

**Advantages of Technology**

- **Increases production:** the technology helps increase production multiple times. The work done by the machine is more accurate and is done with perfection which is not possible in the case of human efforts. Technology has helped people make profits multiple times.
- **Saves time:** today, time is money. Technology (particularly automation) helps to save a lot of time and increases efficiency and productivity.
- **Technology helps improve services**: for example, banking services can be carried out from the comfort of spaces outside the banking hall.
- **Easy and quick communication:** technology has made communication so easy. This has reduced the risk of travelling by road, and invariably the rate of motor vehicle accidents. Now you don't need to write letters to your loved ones if you are missing them. Do a video call and feel them close to you.
- **Has increased safety:** technology has increased the safety of people. With the help of technology, there are CCTV cameras made that keeps your valuables at the shop and home safe. Everything is captured in the camera, and finding the thief becomes easy. Even our mobile phones, laptops, Godrej locker, have lock systems that keep our data and other valuables safe.

**Disadvantages of Technology**

- **Unemployment:** Technology can create unemployment. For example postal services have been reduced, works of card artists and industrial designers have been compromised by the use of computers and several other services that have been made redundant.

- **Data security**: Using the latest technology, fraudsters hack computers, bank accounts, office data, and a lot more.
- **People get distracted easily;** People get distracted easily by using different gadgets rather than going through something fruitful. There are social media that has kept youngsters, adults, and children engaged, and thus they get distracted from doing their daily chores. Kids find it hard to concentrate on their studies as most of them today own a laptop or a phone.
- **Health issues:** People today are so obsessed with technology that they forget to care about their own health. This affects their health in different ways. They have eye-sight problems, obesity, insomnia, and a lot more.
- **People get involved in seeing unwanted things:** due to the internet, people, especially students and youngsters, get involved in seeing the wrong apps.
- **Addiction:** some people have an addiction to playing online games, using dating websites, watching a movie every night.

**The Role of Digital Technology in Achieving Goal 5 of The SDG: Gender Equality**

It is without a shadow of doubt that technology has changed or is changing the way we live. It has facilitated globalization through enhanced communication and transportation. Over time, women have been major contributors to the advancement of technology as the first computer program which was written by a woman named Ada Lovelace in the 1840s revolutionized the computer technology that we still enjoy today (Magruder, 2015). Currently, computer or digital technology has become a part of mankind's daily life. Technological innovations in health have enhanced the process of child bearing, birth, and growth; technology systems are applied to the process of learning and knowledge sharing; digital literacy is a vital skill for employability and high earning potential; relationships are ignited and strengthened by innovations in communication technology; and so on.

However, technological progress outpaces progress towards gender equality, replicating physical-world gender inequality into the digital world. As such, technological innovations do not benefit women and men equally despite the contributions made by women who are pioneers of the present-day technology. In the employment sector, women occupy only 27% of positions in the technology industry, about half of them are likely to quit before the age of 35, and the other half likely to quit by their mid technological career due to unequal opportunities and support systems as men are highly favoured over women in the tech-sector (Singh, 2023). Technology has also exposed women and girls to abuse, particularly many

forms of online gender-based violence such as online stalking and sexual abuse including revenge pornography and unsolicited photo sharing.

Nonetheless, these do not eliminate the other benefits that digital technology has provided for women. It has been a resource for the promotion of education empowerment, social empowerment and economic empowerment for women, particularly in the exchange of aid, ideas, knowledge, and opportunities between women in developed and developing nations. Digital technologies have also impacted feminist movements in definitive ways helping organizations and strategies, creating knowledge, and building solidarity beyond the limitations of physical and administrative borders.

This year, the International Women's Day 2023 on 8th March highlights the need for inclusive and transformative technology and digital education so as to reduce or eliminate the digital gender inequality and enhance the benefits of digital technology for women. The theme: **DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality,** is backed by Goal 5 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It emphasizes gender equality in (or promoted by) the digital technology sector. This can be enhanced by addressing several factors categorized into three broad but interlinked areas: digital access, digital literacy, and digital safety (Tyers-Choedhury & Binder, 2021) for girls and women in every part of the world.

**Digital Access**

Enhancing digital access for girls and women implies removing barriers to devices, data, and networks. By the latest estimates from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), about 52% of women in the world have never used the internet while 45% of men have not, representing a digital gender gap of 303 million people (EQUALS, 2019). Some of the barriers to digital access are as a result of:

i. **Financial inequalities:** Men are better placed than women to afford the technology systems they need to access the digital world (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2021). Equal economic opportunities thus need to be extended to women so as to empower them to close the affordability gap.

ii. **Cultural practices and social norms**: In some cultures, particularly in developing countries, women and girls are more restricted from accessing the digital world with some cultures outrightly banning women from using mobile phones and parents/guardians more willing to provide mobile phones and internet access for their male children ahead of female children.

**Digital Literacy**

Digital literacy is closely linked to digital access as one complements the other. Women and girls require access to the digital world in order to enhance their understanding of it, and they need the understanding to better take advantage of digital access where available. Enhancing digital literacy begins by educating girls from a young age in STEM fields, dismantling exclusionary obstacles. Girls and women must believe and accept that STEM working sectors are not gender specific. They should be encouraged to venture into the tech sector and the right opportunities must be open to them. Women need to be attracted and retained as teachers and professors in STEM fields, especially computer science.

**Digital Safety**

Research by the Web Foundation (2020) revealed that 52% of young women have experienced online abuse which can take many forms including bullying, stalking, sexual harassment, and sharing of intimate images without permission. Social media in particular is a difficult platform to ensure digital safety because the enforcement of formalized policies and regulations from governments, law enforcement authorities, and social media companies is more problematic. It has become an avenue for strangers to abuse women and girls whose vulnerability is amplified by limitations in digital literacy. For gender equality to be achieved, online gender-based violence must be eliminated thorough improved enforcement of online laws and increase in digital literacy for girls and women to reduce their vulnerability.

**Applying Digital Technology to Achieve Goal 5 of the SDGs**

Goal 5 of the SDGs focuses on enhancing gender equality by empowering women and girls through nine targets as presented in Figure 1. The targets provide a framework for streamlining the applications of digital technology in achieving gender equality. Digital technology can help achieve gender equality in the following ways.

- Information sharing, knowledge dissemination and publicity.
- Enhanced access to justice systems.
- Increased awareness of female role models.
- Economic empowerment.
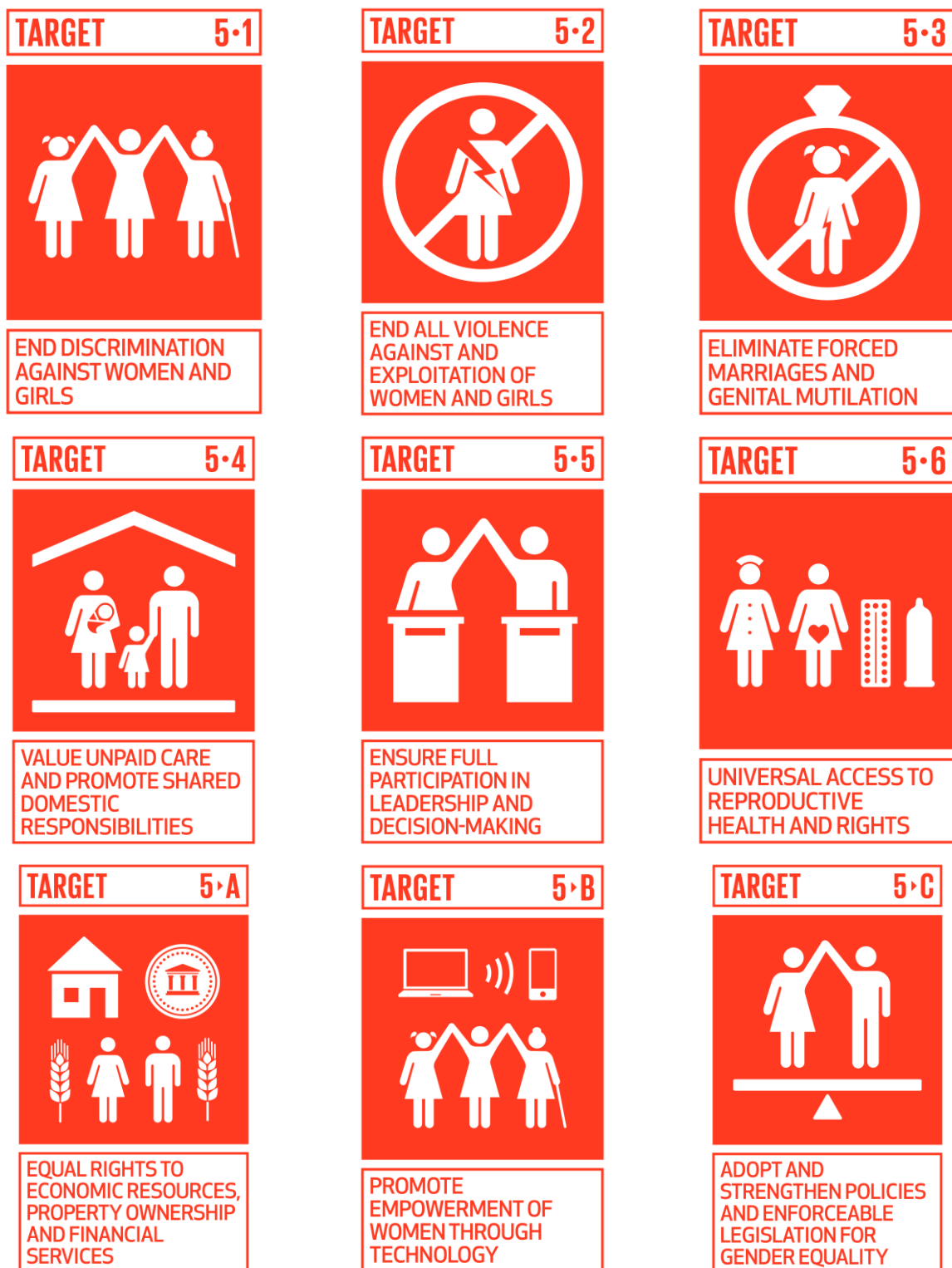- Improved health technology for enhanced reproductive/menstrual health.

| TARGET 5·1 | TARGET 5·2 | TARGET 5·3 |
| END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS | END ALL VIOLENCE AGAINST AND EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS | ELIMINATE FORCED MARRIAGES AND GENITAL MUTILATION |
| TARGET 5·4 | TARGET 5·5 | TARGET 5·6 |
| VALUE UNPAID CARE AND PROMOTE SHARED DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES | ENSURE FULL PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING | UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS |
| TARGET 5·A | TARGET 5·B | TARGET 5·C |
| EQUAL RIGHTS TO ECONOMIC RESOURCES, PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND FINANCIAL SERVICES | PROMOTE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH TECHNOLOGY | ADOPT AND STRENGTHEN POLICIES AND ENFORCEABLE LEGISLATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY |

*Figure 1: Targets of SDG Goal 5*

**The Issue of Gender Equality**

The movement towards gender equality began with the suffrage movement in Western cultures in the late-19th century, which sought to allow women to vote and hold elected office. This period also witnessed significant changes to women's

property rights, particularly in relation to their marital status. There was a significant step taken in this direction in the Women's Conference which was held in Beijing in 1995. In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), States affirmed women and girls' human rights as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, was an agenda for women's empowerment and considered the key global policy document on gender equality. It sets strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in 12 critical areas of concern:

- Women and poverty
- Education and training of women
- Women and health
- Violence against women
- Women and armed conflict
- Women and the economy
- Women in power and decision-making
- Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women
- Human rights of women
- Women and the media
- Women and the environment
- The girl-child

The UN Women's Gender Snapshot 2022 Report revealed as follows.

At the current rate of progress, the report estimates that it will take up to 286 years to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws, 140 years for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace, and at least 40 years to achieve equal representation in national parliaments. To eradicate child marriage by 2030, progress must be 17 times faster than progress of the last decade, with girls from the poorest rural households and in conflict-affected areas expected to suffer the most.

The report also points to a worrisome reversal on the reduction of poverty, and rising prices are likely to exacerbate this trend. By the end of 2022, around 383 million women and girls would have been living in extreme poverty (on less than

1.90 a day) compared to 368 million men and boys. Many more will have insufficient income to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and adequate shelter in most parts of the world. If current trends continue, in sub-Saharan Africa, more women and girls will live in extreme poverty by 2030 than today.

**The Agenda of Nigerian Women for the Celebration of 2023**

From the internet, I learnt that over a million Nigerian women from different walks of life will be out today to protest against rejected gender bills in the National Assembly. They will also be protesting against the denial of citizenship to the foreign-born husband of a Nigerian woman, women's inability to take indigeneship of their husband's State after five years of being together, denial of 35 per cent appointed positions, party administration and leadership, as well as, rejection of specific seats for women in the National Assembly.

Gender equality, parity and end to discrimination against women will equally take the centre stage as they join their counterparts across the world to celebrate this year's International Women's Day (IWD). Part of their demands includes urgent re-convening, reconsideration and immediate passage of the five gender-related bills; and passage of the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEOB) bill, currently before the senate. May these efforts receive the favour of our legislators.

**Conclusion**

I join the women in their efforts to step out of playing the gender card and start playing the value card. Women must be empowered to transform their perceived weaknesses into opportunities. It is however, important to note that men (and women) are creations of God and not manufactured. They are created through divine artistry and not made out of calibrations of machines or moulds. All men are not created equal and cannot be equal. Men and women are created to complement one another for betterment; and not struggle or comparison. I have seen women who are better than men and vice versa. They got such status through hard work and the grace of God. I am comfortable with the desire for equity rather than equality.

I thank you for listening.

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