# INNOVATIONS IN EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

## **PROCEEDINGS**

### GOVERNMENTAL EXTENSION SERVICES, THEIR GENERIC PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS<sup>1</sup>

V. Hoffmann<sup>2</sup>



### **ABSTRACT**

Governments should not directly engage in production or services, which are better performed by private legal entities. Sometimes it may be appropriate for the State to own or hold shares in private companies. In extension, governmental responsibilities should focus, in the long-term, on issues of public interest, with public funding and private implementation. Advisory work for private clients should be implemented by the private sector and paid for by their clients. Governments should create an enabling environment for private sector initiatives, e.g., provide and maintain the necessary infrastructure, support knowledge systems, and establish and maintain political stability and continuity and legal and physical security. The core business of governments is to

develop beneficial policies and to implement them through an efficient and reliable administration.

**KEY WORDS:** PLURALISM, PRIVATISATION, BUREAUCRACY, FINANCING, ROLE CONFLICT IN EXTENSION

- 1 Most of the basic ideas of this contribution have been published in Hoffmann et al. (2009)
- 2 University of Hohenheim 430, 70593 Stuttgart, Germany







### **INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES**

In developing countries, we find a situation in which, e.g., ministries of agriculture have a wide mandate, which covers administration and additional functions such as vocational training and extension work. Government withdrawal from these tasks without putting viable private structures in place (as observed in some African countries) leads to increasing rural development problems. The privatisation and pluralisation of rural services need sufficient transition time and governmental support.

In the meantime, governments have to continue providing services, even those for which the private sector is the main beneficiary, to avoid the decline of rural economies and increasing rural poverty. Industrialised countries have shown that governmental rural extension is possible and beneficial, if it is done in the right way. In most places, privatisation only began after a relatively high level of economic development had been reached.

'Rule' number one: avoid role conflict, which destroys the trust between clients and advisers. The training and visit (T&V) model of extension postulated 'extension only'. Unfortunately, this was not implemented in most countries that adopted the 'T&V system'. Advisers should never be misused to execute or promote governmental policies or programmes: their work should be aimed solely at improving the welfare of their clients, and must be client-orientated, demand-

driven and participatory.

'Rule' number two: no extension without appropriate content. Extension work should be divided into social welfare-orientated work with resource poor people and subsistence farmers, and business-orientated work with emerging and commercial farmers. The latter should take future responsibilities in farmer organisations and should create private organisations to provide professional services. In a transitional phase, this group (i.e., those doing agriculture as a business) should gradually be charged fees for services, up to full cost-recovery, to prepare the ground for privatisation. The small-scale and resource poor subsistence farmer should be seen as a temporary phenomenon, when off-farm and non-agricultural employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy is not yet sufficiently available. Good education and investment in transport and communication infrastructure are the first priority to help resource poor people, accompanied by food aid and disaster relief.

As small-scale subsistence farmers lack capital and liquidity, they cannot implement most of the recommendations of agricultural extension, and intensification and market integration is too risky for them. Emerging and commercial farmers need economic advice and entrepreneurial training, which most traditional agricultural extension field staff are not trained to provide. Management is also deficient in most rural organisations.

Institution-building, based on good education and training, should therefore be a priority task for governmental rural development programmes and in creating efficient innovation systems.

Rural advisers should organise themselves, expanding into active regional forums based on individual membership, democratic structures and independent from donors' money and influence – i.e., models such as the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) and the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR).

### **EXTENSION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Extension is an accelerator for rural and agricultural development. Following Mosher's (1966) classification, which talks about 'accelerators' and 'essentials' for agricultural development, we can enlarge the list and formulate *elements favouring rural development* (Table 1). The 'essentials' must be in place. If any are missing or inadequate, the whole development process will stall or be hampered. 'Accelerators' are additional factors that aid and enhance the development process by anticipating and avoiding problems or minimising the negative effects of development on certain categories of actors in rural development.

Therefore, any government has to ensure the essentials first: any extension policy is dependent on a sound development policy and must be embedded in a well-developed rural knowledge and innovation system.



#### TABLE 1: ELEMENTS FAVOURING RURAL DEVELOPMENT: ESSENTIALS AND ACCELERATORS

#### The essentials for rural-development promotion

Sound rural development policy

Basic education

'Democracy' and peace

Health services

Legal certainty and reliability of institutions

Availability of credit

Basic infrastructure specifically for agricultural development:

- rural markets for farm products (including demand for farm products at local, national, regional and international levels, a marketing system and farmers' confidence in the working of the marketing system, and the reliability of fair prices)
- new technologies to increase production
- local availability of supplies and equipment

### The accelerators for rural-development promotion

Extension services

Education and training

Self-help promotion

Community development work specifically for agricultural development:

- production incentives (subsidies)
- conserving, improving and expanding agricultural land
- farmers' organisations (associations, groups, co-operatives)

Source: Based on Mosher (1966)

There are many effective methods and instruments for influencing behaviour and behavioural change. Governments can provide subsidies, administer taxes and levies, and prohibit and sanction activities and private companies can be encouraged to contract their services. These methods should be used when behavioural change is necessary, whether in the public or private interest, and they should not be replaced by extension work. Misuse should not damage the relationship of trust between advisers and clients, because extension needs to influence behaviour in a voluntary way, by motivating and enabling people to acquire new insight, a better understanding of their own situation and the options for improving it.

Insight cannot be administered, transferred or bought; it must be gained through one's own efforts – by learning – and this process is facilitated and supported by extension work. *Insight drives and directs behaviour and behavioural change*.

### PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC DELIVERY OF EXTENSION

Public service structures are inappropriate for delivering quality services, and public servants face particular problems when trying to provide good advisory work.

Public administration can be seen as an ideal type of organisation, in the sense of Max Weber (1922), for implementing laws and giving equal

treatment and justice to all citizens. Citizens can complain to administrative courts if they feel that public administration has not fulfilled its task. Staff regulations and budgeting in public administrations are tailor-made for this principal function, but turn into a major handicap if public servants are to perform production or service tasks. Organisations working in private legal frameworks are more flexible and can normally perform these tasks better than governmental structures. There is only one exception: governmental structures outsourced from the public service and working as entities in a private legal framework, but still owned and controlled by the government.

Why are public services unable to compete with private companies in service delivery? Their set-up, rules and regulations are created for the task of public administration. In this field, bureaucracy is not the problem; it is in fact the best framework for the task, because 'all citizens deserve equal treatment, in the face of the law'. A State with democratic rule of law needs a bureaucratic administration. controlled by courts of justice (Weber, 1922; Mayntz, 1968, 1978). This way of organising activities is clearly inappropriate for service or production tasks (see Table 2). That is why there has been a worldwide tendency to withdraw governmental structures from these fields of activities and to privatise parastatals, such as the German post, telecommunication and railway systems.

As well as staffing and budgeting regulations,



ask and special features	Appropriate set-up
Public administration	Bureaucratic, public-service regulations
High correctness	Staff regulations
Full transparency	Budget regulations
Equal treatment for equal cases	Strict division of responsibility
Public justice	Hierarchy
Low efficiency	Central management
	Non-performance orientated payment
Service delivery	Private legal framework
Client orientation	Free contracts and arrangements
Medium correctness	Profit centres
Special tailor-made treatment	Flexible client-orientated responsibilities
No public transparency	Decentralised management
No fairness to non-clients	Flat hierarchies
High efficiency	Performance-orientated payment

official extension services suffer from a widespread additional handicap called *role conflict*. The ministry of agriculture offices normally have a divisional structure according to subject matter. One officer specialises in animal husbandry, and carries out all the tasks related to animals: teaching, training, advisory work, administering directives of agricultural policy, subsidies, health control and prevention of epidemics, checking animal welfare, drug and pesticide abuse, etc. The same person can be a teacher to a farmer's son one day, a farm adviser the next day, the one announcing that a farmer's application for certain subsidies is to be rejected the day after, and a 'policeman' who comes to monitor compliance

with laws and regulations the day after that.

Role conflict is a major handicap for successful advisory work, because it damages the necessary trust in and image of the adviser (Rheinwald, 1964). Even when advisers don't mix up their different roles and are clear about which of their roles they are acting out, clients are often confused. To avoid role conflict, there are three levels at which the problem can be solved.

 At the office level, districts are subdivided among advisers so that adviser 1 advises, say, in subdistrict A, teaches pupils from sub-district B, and does administration and monitoring work in sub-district C. Adviser 2 advises in B, teaches for C, and monitors in A, etc. In this way,

- personalised role conflicts are dissolved, at least for the clients.
- At the service level, the divisions follow functions: education, advisory work, and administration and monitoring. Public servants work full-time in only one functional division. This ensures that the role conflict is fully resolved, but clients who are angry may attribute the reasons to the service as a whole and project their anger onto neighbouring divisions as well, even if the individuals involved are different.
- The extension service is outsourced to a service organisation under a private legal framework, doing only service tasks. In this way, role conflict is impossible and service efficiency is improved.

A third handicap in public service is the predominance of the administrator's role. Administration and representation of the State is mostly viewed as the principal task; promotion within the organisation depends mainly on loyalty shown to this main task and role, and thus clientorientation is not really rewarded. Over the years this creates a deeply rooted attitude on the part of public servants to view clients as potential lawbreakers and as risks to public order, who must be controlled and guided in order to maintain public order and to promote the public interest. It is evident that, with such attitudes, good partnership and client-centred relationships are difficult to develop (Teklu, 2006; Lemma, 2007). As a consequence, public bodies might own service



companies or might finance services in the public interest, but *service institutions should not be managed under public-service rules*, they should work in a private legal set-up.

### RECENT CHANGES AND TASKS FOR EXTENSION POLICY

The landscape of agricultural extension is changing. Extension services worldwide are being critically examined in the face of global economic, political and technological developments. There are growing calls for *reform of extension systems* (Rivera, 2011) to respond to the emerging changes and demands within countries and globally, including decentralisation, globalisation and market liberalisation, food safety, food quality and chain management, sustainability of ecosystems and natural resource management, knowledge management, privatisation and democratisation – all of which pose challenges for rural people and for development assistance organisations.

For decades, extension was largely seen as a public task funded by governments and donors. Public extension services have been criticised for ineffectiveness and lack of sustainability. The inability of governments to afford funding for public extension services has led to diverse reforms of the public sector funding and delivery system in many developing countries. The general trend is towards decentralisation, privatisation, demand-orientation and pluralistic service delivery and funding.

Common aspects of most reform endeavours are: accountability of service providers to users, more private sector participation, a focus on learning instead of one-off advice, participatory and peoplecentred ways of working, renewed emphasis on organisational development as a means of empowerment, and attention to marketing and other services along value chains. The major danger associated with reforming public extension services is that of changing only the rhetoric at the top while failing to change practices at field level.

There are not yet any satisfactory experiences or lessons on management arrangements for organisational partnerships, demand-led models or decentralised extension services. These issues are being explored in many countries and specific strategic options and first lessons are emerging, e.g., from two World Bank flagship projects, National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) in Uganda (Isubikalu, 2007) and Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) in India (Singh et al., 2006; Chandrakandan and Fernandaz, 2008), and from countries in transition such as Azerbaijan, which all show more unsolved problems than progress with the new approaches.

### Decentralisation

The driving force for decentralisation is the rationale that development decisions are best made by district or municipal technical and administrative officials, as they are physically close to the farming

population. Decentralisation of extension services requires a policy backed by political commitment, which regulates the *transfer of authority and financial resources*, determines local responsibilities, and establishes the mechanisms for public participation and social monitoring.

### **Pluralism**

Governments are less able to continue providing all the services they had previously offered. With rising costs, limited resources and changes in the prevailing philosophy about the appropriate extent of government intervention, governments have been slow to increase provisions for many publicly funded activities. This means that, in many developing countries, public extension services face a financial crisis. This has led to new forms of institutional arrangements for extension financing and delivery. Contracting out is being tried in many developing countries as a public sector reform and private sector development. There is a consensus that input and output services should be provided by the private sector and that public funds should only be used for building up private sector systems and for regulatory and quality control functions.

More and more service providers are entering the extension field with a range of partnership arrangements. In many developing countries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private companies, semi-governmental organisations, farmer organisations and others, are delivering



extension advice to producers using a range of modalities. Extension is taking on the task of facilitating debate on ways of doing things and organising activities to improve the wider aspects of livelihoods. Options for fulfilling this task include public, private and mixed funding and a range of delivery and management arrangements. It is now widely accepted that no single actor or agency is best placed to offer the wide range of services required. This means that a plurality of extension services is needed to support producers and the rural poor by undertaking various extension activities. The role of public sector extension in pluralistic service systems must be to assure quality and enhance the demand capacity of the client system (Hoffmann et al., 1998; Kidd et al., 2000). When the private sector is contracted to deliver public extension, there should be a followup monitoring and evaluation mechanism (Alex et al., 2002).

The principal models of structuring, organising and funding extension range from purely public sector models to purely private ones, with collaborative and contracting mixes in between. For an effective extension service delivery in a pluralistic setting, the roles of public and private actors and agencies need to be clearly defined. Public delivery of services may be necessary in remote areas, while partnership arrangements may be necessary elsewhere, and private delivery in well-integrated areas. Where public and private

extension systems compete, the public service should claim *full cost-covering fees*, in order to avoid unfair competition and to give private actors a chance to develop.

#### **Privatisation**

Inefficiency, reduced government funding and commodification of agricultural knowledge have created the drive towards privatisation of public extension services in many developing countries. In Latin America, for example, large parts of the public extension services have now been privatised.

Agricultural knowledge and information has become a commodity. The consequence of privatisation is that farmers must now pay for extension services. The institutional arrangements for privatisation may involve a range of modalities for financing and delivering extension services, including outsourcing, cost-recovery and voucher systems.

The debate about whether extension advice should be public or private goes on, and there is no clear evidence based on experience to favour one side or the other, but there is one point of consensus in favour of a mixed pattern: free extension advice for resource poor farmers and a private extension service for better-off farmers. The view that once the public sector had withdrawn from agricultural services, the private sector would fill the void proved largely wrong, especially in Africa, and it remains a task of the public sector to proactively foster the building of functioning institutions – be they public,

co-operative or private.

Private extension has some inherent weaknesses, including the isolation of advisers and lack of quality standards and control – and it is here that the public sector has an ongoing role to play. The public sector must work to strengthen the private sector in terms of improving mechanisms of quality assurance, and evaluation of systems (through creating local forums and bodies at different levels that keep an inventory of potential providers and promote it to users to enable them to identify reliable providers). It should also offer regular capacity-building support to farmer organisations and groups, and local forums and service providers.

### Widening perspectives

Although agriculture remains the backbone of the economy in developing countries, extension is expected to diversify its services beyond agricultural production. Extension is wider in scope than that relating directly to agricultural production. The old term 'agricultural extension' is gradually being replaced by 'rural and livelihood extension' or 'rural advisory services'. The role of extension in poverty reduction is not to be seen only in crop or livestock production, but also in livelihood diversification. It embraces production, the wider production context, and wider aspects of livelihoods. Small-scale farmers have information and educational needs beyond improved



agricultural technologies. Many relevant issues, such as population and environmental education, and education on HIV/aids prevention, are being integrated into extension programmes in many developing countries.

Extension is no longer an isolated activity. It operates within a larger knowledge system that includes research, education and support systems. This means that support for extension must be located in a sector-wide context, nowadays discussed under the label Agricultural knowledge and innovation system. In recent times, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have developed general frameworks to guide development work in rural areas. These frameworks placed extension into a broader context, as Mosher (1966) had done previously. Extension is embedded within a wider service context, including credit, input supply, processing, marketing, and communication and information services. The value-chain approach is being used as a new strategy for agricultural and rural development. Extension services can be offered along the value chain by various actors.

The role of the public sector then becomes one of regulator, facilitator and enabler. A major role for the public sector is to support the creation of pluralistic and decentralised service markets and

to foster existing or new private service providers through capacity-building, organisational development and networking. Different mechanisms can be developed to make services effective and responsive to demand. For example, demand-side funds are a mechanism to direct public funds towards promising services and service providers, in extension and in applied research. Farmers or their groups determine demand for services, and suitable service providers are contracted directly by users or by the local government (Katz, 2006). Contract farming is an example of providing embedded services, which can be provided along the value chain. In this way, the duty of the public service is to ensure that the interests of small-scale farmers and the commercial actors involved are congruent, and that the poor have adequate bargaining power to avoid exploitative arrangements (Katz, 2006). Contracting with poor people is not easy and companies face problems regarding the reliability of their partners, who are often unable to fulfil their contractual obligations (Canz, 2005).

### Participation

New directives on poverty reduction handed down from above are not sufficient. Mechanisms for public participation and social control are crucial if the poor are to benefit from reforms. The demand side of extension must be developed through institutional interventions and reforms. Special gender strategies should be implemented to integrate women better (Marange et al., 2006). Good advisory work must be participatory by nature; and 'participatory extension' should be seen as a pleonasm. The fact that the term has been used increasingly worldwide only goes to show that it is not obvious and that, in reality, despite all the claims of the larger donors, mainstream extension work has retained its top-down orientation and is not at all bottom-up. In a top-down governmental system or in a strongly hierarchical culture, genuine participation cannot be introduced. And yet enforcing participation as a response is a paradox and is not at all participatory (Cooke and Kothari, 2001)

### Poverty and vulnerability reduction

Agricultural services are only useful for poor people if they offer services that help improve their income and livelihoods. A key requirement for making extension relevant for the poor is an *understanding* of the poverty situation and livelihoods of the poor. Extension must include elements of pro-poor growth and vulnerability reduction. Reducing vulnerability means increasing resilience to livelihood shocks, protecting the environment, providing access to safety nets, and supporting better health and nutrition.

Agriculture is important for pro-poor growth and has leverage on growth in other areas through raising incomes in rural areas, fostering growth in



the rural non-farm economy as well as employment and income opportunities. Pro-poor growth means growth in sectors in which the poor are involved, in regions where the poor live, and which makes use of their resources (Katz, 2006). Creating markets for domestic agriculture is a major challenge for pro-poor agricultural growth. Developing profitable opportunities that benefit poor rural producers is a big challenge in developing countries. Public policy is very important for pro-poor growth.

These changes and trends require a redefinition of the public role of extension. There is little scope for extension to contribute to poverty reduction unless agricultural and rural development policies adequately address global economic, political and social changes. Extension must be embedded within a broader reorientation of agricultural and rural development policies.

Agricultural services are a crucial resource for improving the livelihoods of rural people. They extend far beyond what is commonly understood as extension services. They include a set of institutions or actors that are essential to make agricultural production profitable for the poor rural producer, along with a range of services, from access to knowledge and information through to marketing of agricultural products, which must be synchronised. A value-chain approach may be a good way of conceptualising this integration of services at different levels. *Building a functioning* 

agricultural service system is an important function of public policy.

Public investment in weakly integrated areas should focus on supporting the identification and development of economic opportunities, building knowledge, input and market links between these areas and relevant actors in more accessible places, and capacity-building on the service demand and supply side, as well as within the local government (Katz, 2006). Building up a pool of public service providers is necessary for reaching the poor effectively. Public efforts must concentrate on promoting village-level service providers who form the link between the dispersed village communities and the formal agricultural knowledge and information system. Para-vets are a good example of animal health services.

As economies of scale acquire increasing importance in a globalised world, there are thresholds of viability and profit-making that poor people cannot reach, and grouping them together creates high transaction costs. Therefore better-off farmers, larger holdings and companies should not be excluded from development programmes; their capacities are urgently needed to achieve profitability and sustainability in economic activities and projects. Public and private partnerships are urgently needed to start new economic initiatives and to satisfy the rapidly growing demand for land-use products (e.g., food, feed, fibre, fuel) in the future. The spirit of entrepreneurship must be

developed further in the rural population in parallel with economic development. Effective farmer organisations can only develop out of a farming community that is economically successful, making agricultural education attractive to the best brains.

### THE OLD ORDER DISSOLVES

The new co-ordination mechanism is a market for services, but it is a non-transparent market. There is no complete list of providers and no statistical information available about what and how and at what price services are sold. There are no clear quality criteria and no standards governing service quality.

The same holds true for extension training and for training in neighbouring service areas such as facilitation, conflict mediation, coaching and trainer training. In industrialised countries, we find all kinds of services on offer in the market, from cheap to highly expensive, from serious to highly questionable, and the clients (farmers or extension agents) are left on their own to select their training institution and training or service programme. They have difficulty assessing the quality and comparing what they got with what they might get from others.

But this does not mean that the chaos of free market negotiations is unproductive. It depends on trustworthiness; donors to public-interest programmes might carefully check to whom they



award contracts and from whom they commission mid-term and final evaluations. To assess the private providers of such services, it is useful to get quality guarantees or recommendations from organisations that enjoy the trust of the potential clients, such as farmers' unions, agricultural societies, chambers of agriculture or commerce. These organisations can then withdraw their recommendations or patronage if clients among their members lodge complaints.

In addition, the agricultural press could report on successful advisory work, on standards and quality criteria, and perhaps also on failures and scandals – helping to develop a consciousness of service quality and appropriate payment levels among its readers.

### THE NEED FOR A PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION

If we look at the lawyers' profession, we see a similar problem, except that it has been solved rather more effectively. A chamber of lawyers grants the licence to work and is also allowed to withdraw it. A professional code of conduct, valid for all professionals, has existed for a long time. If clients complain, there is a grievance system in which an ombudsman checks the complaint and helps the clients defend their rights. The chamber of lawyers is based on a special law, guaranteeing its existence and power.

Unfortunately, even the most pluralistic and

decentralised extension systems, such as the one in Germany, have neither such a law nor a professional association of rural advisers. The view is that as long as we had the involvement of official agricultural advisory services – the ministries of agriculture and the chambers of agriculture – there was no strong need to have such an association. Now, nobody is asking for such a regulation or dares to take the initiative to create such an association. When agriculture and rural development are determined mainly by European Union (EU) policy, it is best for the association to be founded at European level.

To begin with, a voluntary network organisation could be established to develop some initial products and advertise for membership. Members could be individuals or organisations working in rural extension. More powerful organisations in the field of agriculture and rural development might wish to join, because they want to preserve their influence on what is going on in such an important professional field. Only members would have access to the basic services of the network, such as information on the homepage and through an e-mail information service, but they also have the right to advertise by virtue of being a member of the network; this is all included in the normal membership fee. Further services (e.g., training, supervision, coaching and publications), available only for members, are provided with payment of additional fees. The network managers do not

necessarily have to provide these services by themselves or using hired staff; it might be sufficient to contract the work out to good quality providers.

The network can install an arbitration board and, in severe cases of deviation from the code of conduct, withdraw membership. It can also start to do public relations work and political lobbying for legislation, extension programmes and the necessary budgets for extension work in the public interest. The network should be open to all kinds of organisations in the professional field and support the diversification and decentralisation of the services in a pluralistic extension system. It should initiate systematic research on rural extension issues, define research questions and propose programmes for finance and advertisement, from EU down to regional level. And it should defend the members' interests in the improvement of the whole rural knowledge system.

Following this improved networking, the next step should be to establish a professional organisation based on EU regulations. The network could give this process guidance and eventually transform itself into a legal entity, with an office in Brussels and with national nodes in all EU member countries. The working language should be English and all languages that are spoken and understood can be used below the EU level.

So far, we have considered industrialised countries at different levels of development (EU). At



the international level, there is the US-based Association for International Agricultural and Extension Education, but membership in this is mainly limited to receiving the *Journal of International* Agricultural and Extension Education four times per year. Developing countries are one step further than Europe in this regard, as two associations have been founded and still exist. They are the sub-Saharan Africa Network for Agricultural Advisory Services (which developed into the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS)) and the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS). The next step of their development is to become more independent from donor funding by enlarging the membership base and shifting from ministries to individual advisers as members.

Establishing a civil-society structure in this field and enhancing professional self-organisation in all continents and regions of the globe, as far as this is possible, is a worthwhile activity and merits support. The framework conditions for achieving this are promising, especially given the increasing importance and prices of land-use products and the consequences of increased emphasis on rural development. Governments should promote this development by handing over tasks and responsibilities, and by supporting the set-up and development of such professional organisations.

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