



YONECO VOICE

Monthly Newsletter

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Our Programmes

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About Us

Our Vision

A self-reliant, healthy, empowered, resilient, responsible, and inclusive society that respects democratic values and principles.



Our Mission

We are committed to empowering the youth, women and children, promoting good health, human rights and democratic culture, adapting and mitigating the impact of climate change and conducting research for evidence-based programming and advocacy



Our values

Integrity
Teamwork
Confidentiality
Respect for human dignity
Transparency and Accountability



Executive Director's Note...



with MacBain Mkandawire

Dear Esteemed Readers,

As we bid farewell to December 2023, we find ourselves in reflection, contemplating the impact of the year that has passed. In this edition of the December 2023 Corner, we dedicate our focus to the profound messages delivered by three remarkable women during a high-level meeting on ending child marriages worldwide and in Malawi. Michelle Obama, Melinda Gates, and Amal Clooney, who graced Malawi with their presence from November 13 to 16, 2023, left an indelible mark on the younger generation, providing inspiration and fostering meaningful dialogues with influential civil society leaders on the critical issue of ending child marriages. Their visit prompts us to assess the implementation of laws concerning the welfare of children in Malawi.

These influential women emphasized the pivotal role of political will in eradicating child marriages, challenging stakeholders to approach the issue with utmost seriousness. It is disheartening to note that despite commitments made a decade ago, we have seen only a 10% reduction in child marriages. This mere 1% annual decrease is a pressing concern for the well-being of the girl child. It compels us to reflect on the effectiveness of the investments made—financial, temporal, and human—in responding to the issue. A call for a budget vote on child marriages raises questions about its utilization and warrants a rigorous analysis.

Delving deeper into the discussion, the women inquired about the enforcement of laws, revealing a striking revelation that the Child Care, Justice, and Protection Act (2010) has lacked regulations for 13 years. The recent National Child Justice Forum meeting in Blantyre echoed this concern, questioning the commitment to justice for children when essential laws are not effectively implemented. Government Ministries responsible for guideline development must be tasked with ensuring operational guidelines. Addressing the implementation challenges of laws in Malawi is imperative, echoing the women's message: let us consolidate our gains through focus, political will, and a commitment to ending child marriages, recognizing education as a key driver in this endeavor.

Turning our attention to other significant matters in December 2023, we acknowledge World AIDS Day on December 1. This annual event, themed "Let Communities Lead," prompts reflection on communities as potent agents of change within systems and structures. Empowering communities to take responsibility requires available resources and places accountability at the forefront. Recognizing communities and their members as assets in HIV and AIDS management processes is crucial. As we commemorate World AIDS Day, health specialists and stakeholders gather in Harare, Zimbabwe, for the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) under the theme "AIDS is not over: Address inequalities, accelerate inclusion, and innovations".

Executive Director's Note...

with MacBain Mkandawire



Continuing with this reflection, we must place a special emphasis on innovation, recognizing the challenge of competing funding priorities, particularly with climate change and disasters taking center stage. While these issues demand resources, the reminder that "AIDS is not over" underscores the importance of sustained investment in HIV and AIDS processes.

Our contemplation extends to the recently launched 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Despite the progressive and colorful launch, we challenge ourselves with a critical "So What." Launches and celebrations often take precedence, but our focus needs to shift towards meaningful actions addressing the critical aspects of GBV processes. We must invest time in implementing programs that respond effectively to GBV, covering areas such as mitigating the impact on survivors, preventive services, and evaluating the effectiveness of implementers in these processes.

Turning our attention to the Malawi government's initiative to export labor to Israel, we acknowledge the public backlash it has received. While labor exportation has historical roots, transparency around this recent scheme is crucial. While providing job opportunities, we suggest reconsidering and exploring more sustainable solutions to address internal economic challenges. Rather than exporting labor, a focus on exporting value-added commodities and supporting initiatives like mega-farms, commendable for absorbing young people into the job market, may contribute to a more robust economy.

As an agrarian economy, it becomes imperative to diversify from our major forex earner, tobacco, which is diminishing in global value. Exploring alternative sources of foreign currency is paramount. The youth working in Israel could redirect their energy towards enhancing productivity in the local agricultural sector. In essence, Malawi's economic improvement hinges on importing less and exporting more.

In concluding our reflections, we acknowledge December as a festive season with Christmas and New Year celebrations. We urge everyone to celebrate responsibly, safeguarding our children, and maintaining continuous engagement with the youth to prevent drug and substance abuse during the festivities. Wishing you a Merry Christmas and New Year blessings for 2024.

TITHANDIZANE HELPLINE'S FESTIVE RESOLVE

By Gracium Mkonda
Chithonje

In the festive air, thick with the scent of the season,
A resounding whisper echoes,
Emerging from the halls of liberty,
A whisper laden with care and compassion.

Like resilient buffalos on the battlefield,
Their determination rings clear and strong,
Committing their lives and comfort,
To combat child abuse with unwavering resolve,
To obliterate GBV cases without relent,
To address alcohol abuse without compromise.

Their whisper carries a note of hope,
In this festive season, they forsake merriment and revelry,
Declining the allure of retreat,
Finding comfort and joy in the community's well-being.

They are the tithandizane helpline counsellors,
Nestled within the embrace of YONECO's national offices,
Their hands reach out wide,
Pleading for support and collaboration,
Ensuring populace's untampered care and support,
In this festive season and beyond.





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YONECO Inspires Rumphi Secondary School Students

By Wanangwa Kalua



Insert: Some of the students from Rumphi Secondary School who took part in the session and officers from YONECO, Rumphi District Hospital as well as Rumphi Police.

Secondary school represents a critical juncture in a student's educational journey and it is at this point that many young people reflect and plan for their future endeavours. YONECO in Rumphi took time to inspire and motivate students at Rumphi Secondary School (RUSESCHO) at a school open day which was held on November 3, 2023. The session served as a platform for addressing the unique challenges faced by secondary school students and providing them with the guidance and motivation needed to navigate this crucial phase successfully.

The session's primary focus was on serving as a model for students, offering career guidance and mentorship. Understanding the financial constraints that often accompany educational pursuits, YONECO addressed this issue directly, with emphasis on the importance of perseverance even in the face of limited resources. The influence of peers in the context of sexual relationships was another prevalent

challenge that was also highlighted which then provided strategies to overcome these obstacles.

The interactive nature of the session which incorporated activities such as drama, poetry, and freestyle lyrics, ensured active participation from the students. Role models from various professions, including a nurse and a police officer, contributed to the session, providing real-world insights and lessons. The Jaghala youth club further enriched the event with a dramatic performance centered on ending child marriage.

The positive response from the students, coupled with the encouragement from the headteacher, cemented the impact of such events in fostering a positive and motivated mindset among secondary school students.

YONECO Trains Peer Mobilizers to Improve Access and Retention of Youth Friendly Health Services



Insert: Programmes & Project Committee Chair of the Board with the Peer Mobilizers

YONECO has trained 30 peer mobilizers in a bid to improve the quality, access, and retention of Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services for Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) in some parts of Lilongwe City.

The trained cadres are expected to enhance the agency and efficacy of their fellow AGYWs in the targeted communities towards health-seeking behaviours and contribute towards positive health outcomes.

The peer mobilizers were trained for five days with technical support from the Ministry of Health through the Reproductive Health Directorate (RHD). On the last day of the session, the peer mobilizers were introduced to key healthcare workers who will be providing support to the cadres in ensuring that young people are able to access Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS).

The trained peer mobilizers were awarded certificates by the Reproductive Health Directorate of the Ministry of Health. The ceremony was presided over by Samuel Botha, a member of YONECO's Board of Trustees.

In his remarks, Trustee Botha described the training as a demonstration of YONECO's commitment to complementing government efforts towards improving access to quality health services among young people.

The training is one of the interventions that YONECO is implementing under Connect Malawi Plus – Action for AGYWs Project which is being funded by ViiV Healthcare.

The three-year project is aimed at promoting peer-led interventions in addressing HIV amongst adolescent girls and young women residing in peri-urban communities that are serviced by Bwaila Hospital as well as Area 18, Kangoma, and Kawale health centres.



Youth Net and Counselling

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

We wish you all a Merry Christmas. May the joy of the season fill your hearts with goodwill and cheer.

May you take extra caution as you celebrate the day, remain protected and safe during this festive season.

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LET'S GROW WITH US

YONECO Conducts Sexual Rights Awareness Campaign session in Chitipa

By Dennis Luhanga



YONECO Field Officer for Chitipa, Dennis Luhanga, captured in action during the session

The World Health Organization (WHO), estimates that 333 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections occur worldwide, with the highest rates among individuals aged 20-24 years, followed by those aged 15-19 years. One of the contributing factors to this concerning trend, particularly among the youth in developing countries, is the lack of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information.

In an effort to provide the youth with essential information to address social injustices, particularly those related to health matters, YONECO Chitipa office organized a session on November 22, 2023, at Chitipa Academy Private Secondary School, engaging 69 boys.

During the session, participants highlighted the behaviour of young people's involvement with "sugar mummies" and "sugar dads" as a prevalent factor leading many youth to engage in risky behaviors, increasing their vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases. The participants emphasized that this phenomenon is common, especially in

boarding schools, where students, driven by financial challenges, engage in unprotected sex with individuals much older than themselves. One participant shared, **"Most students in boarding schools accept to have sex with people even older than their parents so that they can solve their financial problems. This increases their chances of getting STDs as they cannot manage to say no to unprotected sex."**

YONECO Field Officers encouraged the participants to focus on their goals and resist engaging in activities solely due to peer pressure.

In the end, teachers from Chitipa Academy Secondary School expressed gratitude to YONECO for organizing the informative session. They believed that the discussions could positively impact some students' behaviors, redirecting their focus towards education. The headteacher stated, **"We thank you a lot for coming up with such a session because whatever you have addressed here is the same as what is happening on the ground, so hopefully, some will change. You are more than welcome to come whenever you feel the need to come."**

YONECO Addresses Youth Development in Mangochi



By Grant Dulla

Insert: YONECO District Manager for Blantyre engaging with the learners.

In response to the growing concern of idle youths in Mangochi, YONECO has taken proactive steps to address the issue through comprehensive sessions on youth development at Kachere Youth Club.

The session, which goes beyond just mere encouragement, was aimed at inspiring the youth to take tangible steps toward self-development and improvement. The session specifically highlighted the need for young people to establish small-scale businesses in order to elevate their livelihoods. During the session, YONECO underscored the practicality and impact of such ventures in keeping youths occupied and economically self-sufficient.

Part of the session involved participants sharing their business plans, a crucial step in transforming aspirations into actionable steps. The interactive nature of the session ensured that participants were not only absorbing information but actively engaging with the material, thereby fostering a sense of ownership in their developmental journey.

Addressing the challenges faced by the youth, particularly forced early marriages, the session provided essential education on legal rights.

Empowered with this knowledge, participants stated that they were better equipped to navigate societal pressures and make informed decisions about their lives. The session served as a catalyst for positive change among the youth and offered practical guidance and motivation for sustainable self-development.

YONECO Facilitates a Session to Prepare Girl's Transition to Secondary School

By Mary Chimenya



Insert: YONECO staff engaging with the learners during the drug and substance abuse session.

On November 21, 2023, a session on drug and substance abuse was conducted by Mwanza staff at Kaware Full Primary School, reaching a total of 347 pupils (196 females, 151 males).

During the session, the facilitator defined drug and substance abuse as the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including illicit drugs and legal substances like alcohol and prescription medications. It was explained that this involves the excessive or inappropriate consumption of these substances, leading to negative physical, psychological, and social consequences. The facilitator emphasized that drug and substance abuse can have severe negative impacts on physical and mental health, potentially leading to addiction, organ damage, cognitive impairment, and an increased risk of accidents. Additionally, it was highlighted that substance abuse can strain relationships, hinder academic or professional performance, and contribute to legal issues. The facilitator pointed out the societal consequences, including the burden on healthcare systems and law enforcement, underscoring the far-reaching consequences on both individuals and communities.

In conclusion, the national toll-free number 6600 was publicized as a reporting mechanism, encouraging individuals to report instances of drug and substance abuse. This initiative aims to promote a collective effort in addressing and combating this significant societal issue.

Intern Profile

Wanangwa Kalua

Wanangwa Kalua is a third-year student pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Social Science with a major in Social Work at the University of Malawi. He joined YONECO as a Programs Intern at the Rumphi district office on September 4, 2023. In his role as a Programs Intern, Wanangwa has exhibited innovation, creativity, diligence, and a keen ability to articulate issues affecting youth, women, and children. He has actively contributed to the implementation of various programmatic interventions encompassing child protection and development, youth development, women's economic empowerment, gender issues, governance and human rights, as well as climate change and disaster management activities. Additionally, he has played a crucial role in networking and collaborating with stakeholders.

As his internship at YONECO approaches to an end, he reflects on the significant importance of practical experience and the invaluable learning opportunities offered by the organization. This experience has played a crucial role in applying the Professional Capability Framework (PCF) domains, including professionalism, values & ethics, diversity, rights, justice & economic wellbeing, knowledge, critical reflection & analysis, intervention & skills, contexts & organizations, and professional leadership. It has provided him with practical insights into the real-world application of law, social work principles, theories, skills, and models.

"I extend my gratitude to the District Manager for the guidance and supervision provided throughout this internship. His insights and feedback have been invaluable, shaping my approach and refining my practice as a social work intern. My appreciation also goes to the entire team for their collaborative spirit, support, and encouragement. The collective efforts have undoubtedly contributed to a positive and enriching internship experience."



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YFM and UNESCO Join Forces to Enhance Education and Cultural Awareness in Malawi



In a significant step towards enhancing education, science and cultural awareness in Malawi, YONECO FM and the Malawi National Commission of UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) at the prestigious Water Edge Court in Lilongwe.

This historic event solidifies a promising partnership that aims to boost the visibility and publicity of UNESCO's programs and projects.

Under this MOU, YONECO FM will play a pivotal role in raising awareness about UNESCO's initiatives throughout the nation. The collaboration promises to have a profound impact on education, science, cultural preservation, and sustainable development in Malawi.

This partnership marks a vital stride towards achieving UNESCO's goals and underscores the power of collaboration in promoting education, culture, and the values of UNESCO in Malawi. It's a promising alliance that holds great potential for the nation's future.

Insert: YONECO Board member, Mr. Samuel Botha and a representative from UNESCO during the MoU signing.

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BEFIT Prepares District and Zonal Leaders for Phase 2 Launch



In preparation for the second implementation phase of Building Education Foundation through Innovation and Technology (BEFIT) Programme, YONECO, from 16 and 17 November, 2023 participated in a two-day training of trainers (TOT) in Mzuzu which was organised by Imagine Worldwide.

The training was organized to equip various district education officials with technical skills and knowledge about the programme. The trained participants are expected to drill primary school teachers in the schools that will be targeted in the second phase of the programme which will commence in January, 2024.

The training session was attended by Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), Zonal Education Managers and Inspectors (ZEMISOs), Area Coordinating Centre Officers (ACCOs) and Implementation Supporting Field Officers (ISP Field Officers).

The BEFIT Programme is being led by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in collaboration with various partners including YONECO. The project aims at enhancing learning outcomes in reading and numeracy by utilizing tablets as supplementary tools to facilitate accelerated learning among students in Standard 1 to 4.

Phase one of the programme successfully commenced in September, 2023 and it has proven to be a success.

Centre for Human Rights Challenges Activists to Propel SRHR Advocacy in Africa

By Sewenthe Mahwayo



The Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria organized a workshop on the utilization of General Comments of Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol as tools for advocacy on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in Africa.

The function was held from 13 to 14 November 2023 at the University of Pretoria, Hatfield Campus in the Republic of South Africa.

One of YONECO's Programme Support Manager, Sewenthe Mahwayo Chipofya, attended the workshop that was organized to empower non-state actors working within the human rights system to adequately ensure the domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol nationally.

During the workshop, participants were equipped with information on the African Human Rights Systems approach to women's rights normative standards as well as enforcement mechanisms on soft laws, overview of article 14 of the Maputo Protocol, advocacy on SRHR for adolescents and best

Insert: Programme Support Manager, Sewenthe Mahwayo during the SRHR workshop in Pretoria

practices for domestic protection of rights in Africa.

The participants were challenged to utilize various opportunities for advocacy work such as the availability of legal frameworks in their designated countries, donor co-funding, digital spaces, good collaboration with gatekeepers, and vast experience in advocacy work among CSOs.

The way forward for Malawi includes the following agenda items; resource mobilization for SRHR work, Creation of safe spaces for dialogue on various SRHR issues including the Termination of Pregnancy (TOP) Bill and rights of the LGBTI community as well as development of a national plan of action for the promotion of SRHR.

In total, the workshop was attended by 16 participants from Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi.



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Rumphi Conducts BEFIT Awareness Meetings with Community Stakeholders

By Larah Mbewe



Insert: Members of school management committee and other community leaders during the BEFIT community sensitization meeting in Rumphi.

As January approaches, YONECO actively gearing up for the second phase of the BEFIT Program in Rumphi. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach, YONECO initiated community sensitization meetings, laying the groundwork for a successful program rollout.

These meetings targeted key stakeholders such as Parent Teacher Associations, Mother Groups, School Management Committees, Community Police, ADCs, and VDCs. The primary objective was to introduce the BEFIT Program at both community and school levels, foster a deep understanding of its goals. This community-oriented approach was aimed at ensuring that the program aligns with the needs and expectations of the local population.

The meetings, which were participatory in nature, involved practical demonstrations of tablet usage, allowing stakeholders to familiarize themselves with the technology.

Importantly, these gatherings served as an opportunity for open dialogue, dispelling misconceptions, addressing security concerns, and encouraging active engagement from the community.

At the end of each session, participants were encouraged to contribute to the success of the program by developing action plans. This collaborative effort sets the stage for a harmonious and effective implementation of the BEFIT Program during the upcoming four-day activity.

YONECO Organizes PSEA Training Frontline Social Protection Workers in Mulanje



Insert: YONECO Programme Support Manager, Hughes Munthali, facilitating the PSEA training in Mulanje district.

After benefiting from a capacity-strengthening exercise by the United Nations through the Coordinator for Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (#PSEA), YONECO is now ensuring a ripple effect by using the skills and knowledge to train various district and community protection structures. In light of the recent natural disaster, Cyclone Freddy, which caused widespread destruction in southern Malawi, adolescent girls and women have become more vulnerable to various forms of violence and abuse.

In response, YONECO is being supported by UNICEF to strengthen community and district systems to enhance the process of preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in disaster-affected areas. This week, YONECO is facilitating a PSEA capacity-strengthening session in Mulanje after conducting similar training workshops in Blantyre, Nsanje, Chikwawa, Zomba, and Phalombe.

Among others, the #PSEA training targets various social protection frontline workers including officials from Police Victim Support Units (VSUs), District Social Welfare Offices, education authorities, and District Disaster response and management teams.

After Malawi was hit by Cyclone Freddy between February and March this year, YONECO partnered with UNICEF to implement various humanitarian response interventions under a project called 'Strengthening Child Protection and Accountability to Affected Population through the National Helpline Services.'

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Empowering a Safer Digital Future for Children

By Enallah Msukwa



Insert: YONECO staff captured in this file photo during the child protection training in Blantyre.

YONECO recently participated in the Child Online Protection Training for Trainers workshop which was organized by the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA). held in Blantyre, The workshop centered around the Child Online Protection (COP) strategy developed by MACRA, with technical assistance from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

This strategic framework has been crafted with the primary goal of ensuring a secure digital environment for children. As technology continues to play a crucial role in our lives, safeguarding the online experiences of the youngest generation has become an essential and shared responsibility.

Throughout the training, YONECO actively contributed valuable insights and experiences to the discussions. The organization acknowledges the evolving challenges posed by the digital landscape and remains dedicated to addressing issues related to child protection online.

Specifically, experiences related to child abuses that the organization has been addressing were shared and provided firsthand account on the pressing concerns surrounding the safety of children in the digital realm, while also emphasizing the need for proactive measures and collaborative efforts.

The workshop underscored the importance of a collaborative approach in addressing online threats to children. By participating in events like these, YONECO not only stays abreast of the latest developments in child protection strategies but also contributes to the collective knowledge pool. The exchange of ideas and experiences among participants fosters a stronger and more informed community dedicated to creating a safer digital space for children.

YONECO Raises Awareness on Men's Health

By Mary Chimenya

On November, YONECO conducted an awareness session on male involvement in health issues. at a local tavern in Mwanza district. The session, which went beyond mere information dissemination, delved into various facets of men's health and well-being, addressed common health issues affecting men, such as heart disease, diabetes, and mental health, the session provided not only information but practical guidance on preventive measures and management. The importance of a balanced lifestyle, including regular exercise and stress management, was highlighted, emphasising the significance of proactive measures for overall well-being.

The session further tackled sensitive topics such as mental health, breaking the stigma around discussing stress, anxiety, and depression. Drug and substance abuse as well as addiction were also tackled during the session including the risks associated with alcohol and drugs, and promoting a comprehensive approach to men's health.

Importantly, the session extended to cover family planning, safe sex, and reproductive health, recognizing the interconnected nature of men's health with broader societal well-being. The session further emphasized the significance of regular check-ups and screenings for the early detection of health problems, thereby promoting a proactive approach to health maintenance.



An officer from YONECO in mwanza captured here conducting the session.

In addition, officers encouraged men on the need for open discussions about health concerns and the importance of creating a safe and non-judgmental space where men can freely express their issues.

The session underscored the value of involving healthcare professionals, counselors, or community leaders in leading these discussions, promoting a collaborative and supportive community approach to men's health.

YONECO Engages Youths in Restoring Degraded Environments for Future Benefits

By Richard Nkhonjera



Insert: Umodzi Youth Club members during the climate change and environmental restoration session.

In alignment with Malawi's vision for 2063, which envisions a safe, clean, secure, and sustainable environment, YONECO has taken commendable strides in promoting community adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts. Recognizing the important role of the youth in this endeavor, YONECO has equipped Umodzi Youth Club in Ntcheu with essential skills to actively combat the challenges posed by climate change.

Through the session, the youth club has gained additional knowledge through a course project. This underscores the holistic approach YONECO takes in providing practical skills and academic insights to the youth.

For the sustainability of these activities, YONECO engaged traditional leaders through advocacy meetings, seeking their endorsement and support for such environmental initiatives. This inclusive approach ensures that the entire community is on board in addressing climate change issues. Furthermore, YONECO facilitated relationships with key stakeholders such as the District Youth Office (DYO), District Forest Office (DFO), traditional leaders, and community members. Notably, the District

Forestry Office has pledged support by promising tree seedlings for the upcoming tree planting season.

Empowered with their newly acquired skills and knowledge, the youth of Umodzi have vowed to actively be engaged in protecting existing trees through making fire breaks and preparing for tree planting in the this rainy season. Traditional leaders have also pledged their support and will ensure that every community member takes responsibility in restoring and safeguarding trees.

YONECO's commitment extends beyond Umodzi Youth Club, as the organization plans to reach out to other youth clubs within the district.

Currently located in Ntcheu district, T/A Kwataine, Dzunje area, Umodzi Youth Club boasts a membership of 54 individuals, comprising 31 males and 23 females.



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