
CROWDING OUT WOMEN: THE EFFECT OF POVERTY ON MEN IN NIGERIA

Christopher Nyong Ekong

Department of Economics

University of Uyo, Nigeria

chrisnekong@gmail.com

Abstract

Gender discrimination had made the female gender in Nigeria to even accept their position as inferior, weak, and subservient to the male gender. Cultural issues had made people to disaggregate job types into females' and males'. The males' types of job are mostly formal and lucrative, while that of the females are mostly informal and less lucrative. A downturn in the Nigerian economy, especially occasioned by the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986 had caused serious job loss and unemployment in the male dominated sector. The scenario bred serious poverty among the male gender. This situation forced the male gender to migrate to earlier sectors seen as women's. The energy and dexterity brought by these men to 'women's' work environment, caused enormous loss of jobs by women. The migrant men started crowding-out women from their traditional work sanctuary, because of their strength and dexterity. This created serious poverty issues among women in the economy. Since women are the bastion of the family in Nigeria, their poverty becomes the family poverty. This paper goes on to show the consequence of this poverty on women and concludes by suggesting ways out.

Keywords: Crowding-out, Poverty, Unemployment, Women

Introduction

Gender related issues have been very topical in world economic and political affairs. Gender equality activists have recently deepened their activities. The various advocacies and call for gender balance and equality would not have been necessary if there was no imbalance in the first instance. Gender issue activists have argued vehemently the relegation of the female gender and the obvious adoption of policies, the world over, that tends to further marginalise the female gender.

It is interesting to notice that the World is mostly male-dominated. This is notwithstanding the fact that in some countries, female population and participation in political and economic activities is more than the male gender. From religious to secular life in our societies, women have long been suffering relegation, sometimes in utter forms. They are always seen as the weaker sex and therefore as ones that should neither be seen nor taken seriously. Key religious groups of the world, for instance, bar women from ministering in religious services, giving instructions in their gatherings, seeking to be heard or even understood. Traditions and cultures are even more discriminatory on women, the world over. In many cases, countries and authorities draw instances and inspirations from the various religions and add with their anti-women draconian rules to perpetually keep the female gender away from notice, recognition, hearing and public.

It must be noted that women and women activists over time have variously reacted and fought this discrimination the world over. Such struggles for women liberation could be traced to the middle ages where the laws and rules against women were most draconian. Even the Church perpetrated this inhuman treatment on the women. Reactions arising from the various strands of protests and advocacies resulted in the Beijing Women Conference of 1998. This Conference led to the unearthing of several atrocities against women and the oneness of opinion in asserting women's rights the world over. Policies which, however, have not been able to pass through as UN Protocol which would have made it binding on all stakeholders and committers to the Protocol, were raised and agreed to at the Conference: the major and striking being, the affirmative action, which kicked against the discrimination of women from governance. The 30% women participation in government from the Beijing Policies declaration is very indicative of the actions to restore women and protect their rights. Also important to note was the issue of female gender

mainstreaming into all sectors of countries' economies. This also goes to prove the assertion of women discrimination in the world and indeed Nigeria.

In Nigeria for instance, it is rare to see women in prominent government employment and roles. Political offices are a reserve of the men who are strong and mighty to pull through the vagaries and hurdles of electioneering to get into political office. It is most difficult for women in a situation where thuggery, rigging, fighting and even adultery must be condoned to get a political office. It took some form of uncommon efforts coupled with divine charisma for such important women leaders in Nigeria as Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransom Kuti, and Queen Amina to emerge and be in Nigeria. The story of their struggles depicts the tortuous route to relevance and, maybe, success. To emerge in a men dominated Nigerian world, these amazons sifted through uncommon routes. The torture and dehumanization of Queen Amina can be easily seen. The murder, by aggravating violence and torture of Funmilayo Ransom Kuti goes ahead to explain the intolerance of Nigerian men to women's ascendancy in Nigeria. It is even the affirmative action which draws from the Beijing Declaration that have forced Nigeria to recognise women into political posts and offices as Women Leaders, Ministers for Women Affairs, Deputies, and Treasurers (because they can be trusted to keeping the men's monies).

Coming from this global discrimination of women in Nigeria is another very intriguing one that has to do with the major concern of this paper: the poverty of men. This paper sees the poverty on men as being on the increase in recent times. Poverty here being defined in the manner of Burkey (1993) as a condition where there is inability to meet perceived needs and desires in addition to basic needs (food, safe drinking water, suitable shelter, clothing, basic household equipment, sanitation, public transport, health and educational facilities). Men's poverty in Nigeria has been increased due to the shrinking in the formal sector, where many men were employed, which had caused increasing rates of unemployment (Table 1). The post Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) period (post 1986) in Nigeria saw unusual increase and sustenance of increase in unemployment rate far above the natural rate of unemployment. The high rate of unemployment would have informed the huge migration of men from their traditional formal employments to the women's 'weak' and informal sector business. This paper discusses poverty trends in Nigeria which can come from four perspectives: rising poverty amid economic reforms; economic growth with persistent poverty; monetary poverty estimates; and multidimensional poverty insights.

a. 1986 – 2004: Rising Poverty Amid Economic Reforms

During this period, Nigeria experienced significant economic changes, including structural adjustment programs. These reforms led to increased poverty levels, with estimates suggesting that the poverty rate rose from approximately 27% in 1980 to over 65% by 1996. The economic adjustments, while aiming to stabilize the economy, often resulted in reduced public spending on social services, adversely affecting the poor.

b. 2004 – 2010: Economic Growth with Persistent Poverty

Despite recording high economic growth rates averaging 7.4% during this period, poverty remained pervasive. In 2001, it was reported that 63% of Nigerians lived on less than \$1 per day, highlighting the disconnect between economic growth and poverty reduction (en.wikipedia.org)

c. 2010 – 2019: Monetary Poverty Estimates

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) conducted the Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS) between September 2018 and October 2019. The survey revealed that 40.1% of Nigerians, equating to approximately 82.9 million people, lived below the national poverty line of ₦137,430 per person per year. This data underscored the persistent nature of poverty despite various intervention programs (<https://www.vanguardngr.com>).

d. 2022: Multidimensional Poverty Insights

In 2022, the NBS, in collaboration with international partners, launched the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) survey, providing a more holistic view of poverty (<https://nigerianstat.gov.ng>). Key findings include:

i. Overall Poverty: 63% of Nigerians (approximately 133 million people) are multi-dimensionally poor, experiencing deprivations in areas such as health, education, and living standards.

ii. Geographical Disparities: Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas (72%) compared to urban areas (42%). The northern regions, particularly Sokoto State, exhibit the highest poverty rates, with Sokoto having a 91% incidence of multidimensional poverty

iii. Child Poverty: Approximately 67.5% of children aged 0–17 are multi-dimensionally poor, with higher rates in the North-East and North-West regions

Culturally, men are expected to be the breadwinners of families. Once they are unemployed and poverty incidence grows, it logically would mean that the family will suffer several deprivations. In order to assert their traditional authorities and pull their families out of deprivations and sufferings, this formal sector unemployed men are forced to get themselves employed in any activity that can help them earn a living. This had led to the situation of the ‘mad’ rush by these men into areas they originally considered as women’s.

This paper is therefore coming out from the background of the bitter discrimination against women globally and Nigeria specifically. The growing incidence of men moving from their ‘cornered’ traditional employment sources to the ‘less lucrative and less-privileged’ ones they hitherto abandoned to the women adds to the worry of this paper. The work’s concern, therefore, will be the assessment of the crowding out of our women from employment sources that would have kept them out of poverty, which is the paper’s overarching goal.

Literature

This work is based on the crowding out theory in economics. The powerful nature and energy of men naturally endows them with some uniqueness to be dominant over the woman in all of the activities that both gender (male and female) undertake. Since the male gender have superior strength, especially in providing service that is tasking and strength demanding, they will always outdo the women when they are open to compete in any of such activities, and will eventually take all the available advantages and employment opportunities in such endeavour. As they do this, they continually crowd-out women from such employments as they cannot compete with the men on equal strength capacity base.

The crowding-out effect is an economic concept that traditionally describes a situation where increased public sector activity or investment leads to a reduction in private sector activity. The following economic theories are adopted by this paper to describe the crowding out of women in the Nigerian work environment.

i. The Keynesian Crowding Out

In Keynesian economics, crowding out occurs when government borrowing increases interest rates, thereby discouraging private investment. Analogously, in a social context, the dominance of men in employment opportunities through policies, norms, or structural advantages raises the barriers for women's entry and advancement, reducing their participation (Blinder & Solow, 1973).

ii. Classical View of Resource Allocation

Classical economists argue that resources (including labour) are limited, and any allocation towards one group or activity necessarily reduces the availability for others. In this sense, when workplaces or institutions channel resources, mentorship, leadership roles, and networks predominantly to men, women are crowded out—not because of lack of capability, but due to skewed allocation and opportunity costs (Smith, 1776).

iii. Structural inefficiencies and institutions bias

Modern economic theories recognize institutional structures and power asymmetries. When a workplace or labour market systematically favours one group (men) through hiring practices, promotion policies, or cultural expectations, it causes a non-monetary crowding-out limiting women’s access to equal economic opportunity. In the Nigerian work environment, patriarchal institutional frameworks and

informal networks that favour men can crowd women out—not through direct competition, but through structural gatekeeping. This is especially true in male-dominated industries like oil and gas, engineering, and politics (North, 1990).

iv. Labour Market Segmentation Theory

This theory posits that the labour market is divided into "primary" and "secondary" segments. Men are more often found in the high-paying, stable "primary" segment, while women are disproportionately concentrated in the lower-paying, unstable "secondary" segment. The entrenchment of men in the primary segment effectively blocks women's upward mobility, reinforcing crowding out through systemic division. (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). This segmentation is reinforced by gender stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and unequal access to education or mentorship, particularly in Nigeria.

v. Gendered Economic Power and Monopoly Behaviour

Some feminist economists argue that male dominance in the labor market functions like a monopoly, where one group controls access to economic spaces and resists competition from others (Folbre, 1994). This framework helps explain why even qualified women may find themselves excluded or side-lined, particularly in hierarchical Nigerian workplaces.

In Nigeria, the crowding-out of women by men which was earlier visible in sectors such as engineering, finance, and politics, where patriarchal norms and institutional biases still shape hiring, promotion, and wage structures had moved to areas like nursing, secretarial duties, hair making, foodstuff marketing, among others that were mostly perceived to be women's. . Using the above economic frameworks, we can understand how:

- i.** Male dominance in key sectors acts like a monopoly over prime opportunities.
- ii.** Institutional biases function like government overreach, "pricing out" women from competing fairly.
- iii.** Cultural norms and lack of structural support mirror high interest rates or barriers that discourage women's participation, just as high costs discourage private investment.

In the Nigerian context, deep-rooted patriarchal norms, limited affirmative action, and structural inertia mean that men often occupy dominant positions in influential sectors. The economic crowding-out of women is seen in:

- i.** Recruitment biases that favour male candidates.
- ii.** Workplace cultures that marginalize or penalize women, especially in leadership roles.
- iii.** Policy gaps that fail to correct historical gender imbalances.

Understanding these through the lens of the crowding-out effect allows for a systemic diagnosis of gender disparities, not merely as individual or cultural issues, but as economic outcomes shaped by power, access, and institutional inertia.

Theoretical Framework

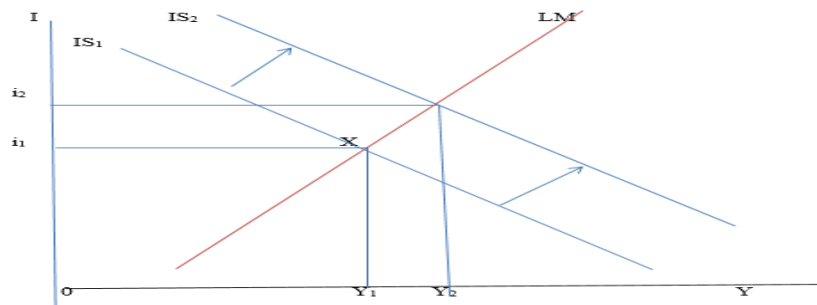
In economics, the Crowding Out theory is a phenomenon which occurs when Expansionary Fiscal Policy causes interest rates to rise, thereby reducing investment spending. Rising interest rate leads to a situation where private investors are unable to borrow from the same market with government: a situation where private fixed investment is discouraged: this movement out of the market by private investors is known as "crowding-out". That means increase in government spending crowds out private investment.

Consider a two sector economy (goods and monetary). Let the sectors be represented by their linear equilibrium condition, the IS and LM curves. The IS curve is a locus of points that describe the equilibrium in the goods market. Also, the LM curve is a locus of points that define the equilibrium in the money market. The economy will attain equilibrium at the point where both curves intersect each other (Gordon, 2009). In Diagram 1 below, the initial intersection is defined at point X, where IS_1 intersects LM_1 .

Changes in fiscal policy always directly affects the goods market equilibrium by shifting the IS curve. A fiscal expansion shifts the IS curve to the right from IS_1 to IS_2 . That fiscal expansion also

increases equilibrium income from Y_1 to Y_2 and interest rates from i_1 to i_2 . At unchanged interest rate i_1 , the higher level of government spending increases the level of aggregate demand. This increase in demand must be met by rise in output. At each level of interest rate, equilibrium must rise by the multiplier times the increase in government spending.

In the economics case, as government enters the market with its strength, which is more than that of the firms, meaning that they can afford to pay higher interest on credit as they pressure the demand for funding expansion through deficit in the market, private businesses will leave the market or crowd-out as they cannot compete with government since their profit margin will seriously thin out if they were to compete with government by borrowing from that same money market with such increasing rates of interest.



Similarly, as men move into the labour market previously dominated by the female gender, considered a 'weaker sex', they adopt their superior strength and ability to stay focused to take over the jobs of the women. Notice that traditionally, the women have more domestic duties to perform in addition to such works. The men on the other hand have realistically no or very less amount of domestic work to perform, so they have more time and space to manoeuvre. The women cannot afford to pay the kind of attention that the men will do to work when they have to think of raising children and preparing meals for the children and their husbands.

In many cases, employers tend to skew more to the employment of men than women. Some give excuses of women's attitude to work: especially as they think of their families' upkeep ahead of work, which men do not. This they say takes up a lot of work time. Cases are even made about how pregnant women would stay out of work for long periods, on maternity leave.

Traditional Occupations of the Nigerian Women

Flowing from the traditional, cultural and religious relegation and regarding of women as weaker vessels and lesser beings to men, simple and menial duties and activities were assigned to women. Since women were traditionally and even religiously seen in principle as agents of biological production, they were expected to be only involved in vocations that would make them stay at home and continue in the baby production mill, while taking full care and paying undivided attention with full concentration for their products (the children). As such, vocations like catering, nursing, secretarial duties, tailoring, cooking, petty-trading, hairdressing, subsistence farming, subsistence fishing, informal sector activities (including but not limited to prostitution and child trafficking), among others, were considered good enough for women. Notice that activities here require low technical and financial inputs.

For the Nigerian men, the prestigious and high paying jobs are for them. These include mostly jobs in the formal sector of the economy and even some high profile activities in the informal sector like artisan and roadside auto –mechanics/technicians. Prior to the era of Austerity Measures in Nigeria (1982 -1983), it was strange to see men in Nigeria who went into hairdressing or sewing female clothing and wears. It was almost ridiculous to see men trading on food items in the open market, going into nursing, being an

Office Secretary, cooking in Restaurants to sell, and prostituting (men were only engaging the prostitutes who were wholly women).

In Nigeria, it was therefore common and expected to see women farming and fishing, selling in the open markets, dressing hair, working as office secretaries/typists, making women dresses, operating eateries and restaurants, and prostituting, to cope with the vagaries of life. It was also a taboo in many communities in Nigeria for women to lead either traditionally or politically. Women were so looked down on and ill-treated in many communities in Nigeria. In many Nigerian cases, women were and are never allowed to inherit spouses' estate in event of the demise of the spouse. They are also not entitled to have any share in their parents' properties or estates at the demise of their parents. If the Parents did not bare male children, such properties will be transferred to the relations of the parents.

Case Study

i. The typical Nigerian Women – The activities of these women are very stereotyped and common to all of them. Notwithstanding the difficulty they go through in making this lifestyle work, they see it as God's intention for them. They see their plight as a right from the Divine for them to wade through. In many cases, the women punish others of their stock that dare to complain about whatever they are going through.

A typical Nigerian woman wakes up early in the morning, say 4am, starting with task of preparing food for the children and the husband. Thereafter, she prepares the children to go to school. Before 6am she has finished all the house chores and is getting ready to either go to the farm or to the market. For those that go to the farm, they will stay working in the farm till as late as 4pm. Prior to setting out to either the farm or market, they have prepared lunch for the children and husband in anticipation of the fact they may not be back home before lunch time. As they return from the daily routine, either farm, market, or other employment, they set out to prepare dinner for the family. In many cases, it takes them a while till late in the early hours of the night. After dinner, they are confronted with the task of having to sexually satisfy the husband: something she is condemned to do even when she is not physically and emotionally conditioned for such. The typical Niger Delta woman continues in this cycle until she is demised.

In some riverine communities, the women as they finish in the farm will proceed to the river to fish for family subsistence. In other cases, according to the seasonal availability of fish, these women will set out in the night to fish to provide protein source for the family. An interesting scene in the Niger Delta is when these women sail in a canoe with their children and cooking utensils; even preparing the food their husbands will eat as they get home, while still fishing. On many occasions, these women are drowned by sea going trawlers that produce waves strong and large enough to sink these women's small fishing and farm boats. The explanation above shows the indication that majority of these women do not rest at all and are almost condemned to be used by their prevailing circumstances.

ii. The Typical Nigerian Men – For those who are employed in either the informal or formal sector, they see it as taboo to be involved in house chores like cooking, preparing the children, or doing any other house chore for that matter. He wakes up in the morning and sets for his job after he has had his breakfast that must be prepared by the women. In many formal and informal employments in Nigeria, the latest they close officially is 5pm. So at 5pm the man is already at home. He eats his food that the wife had prepared ab-initio, and sets out to rest or relax with friends drinking and chatting their lives away. He returns to his house when the wife had returned from her toil, demanding for dinner, which, if it does not come in time may fetch the wife some battering. After his dinner, he sets to his room to wait for the wife, not minding all she has to go through to prepare the children to get to bed. He preys on the woman immediately she returns to the room to sleep, not minding the state of the woman. The next day, this scenario continues, and the cycle goes on. The man believes that he is superior to the woman, while the woman accepts her subservient position.

Gender Composition in Nigeria's Public Sector (1980 – 2020)

i. 1980 - 2005

Data from the Federal Office of Statistics reveals a persistent gender imbalance in Nigeria's federal civil service during this period.

	1980		2005
Male employees	197,325	Male employees	226,825
Female employees	28,299	Female employees	36,925
Total	225,624	Total	263,750

Throughout these years, women consistently represented approximately 13% to 14% of the federal civil service workforce, indicating minimal progress in gender parity.

ii. 2010 – 2015: Civil Service Representation

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, between 2010 and 2015, women constituted about 38% of civil servants in Nigeria. However, their representation in senior roles remained limited. For instance, among high-ranking government administrators: **Special Assistants**: 30% were women, **Special Advisers**: 20% were women, **Heads of Service**: 25% were women. This data underscores the challenges women face in ascending to leadership positions within the civil service.

iii. 2010 – 2018: IMF (2018) and ILO (2018) reports indicate that the gender gap persisted: Women held about one-third of positions in the civil service as of 2016. Men continued to dominate senior cadres, with women more prevalent in junior roles. Despite some improvements, women have remained underrepresented in Nigeria's public sector over the four decades. Women's participation diminishes further in higher-ranking positions, indicating systemic barriers to advancement.

The employment situation indicates strongly that more women are thrown out of the labour market, even in the informal sector because they cannot compete with the men. This situation leads to increased level of poverty of the women, and therefore, directly, the family. Since in many cases the women are either breadwinners or responsible for taking care of their children. This can be noticed as in Table 2 – the rise in the number of people living under \$1 per day.

Women as the Bastion of the family in Nigeria

Findings from this study and literature have indicated the strong role that women play in families in Nigeria. Our Case Study report on women in Section 2 of this paper will so obviously speak for the very pivotal role of women in the Nigerian society. The fact that the woman spends almost all her time with the children and the father spending little or no time speaks volume. When the children are in want of anything, the closest person they can turn to will obviously be the mother. When they have problems and need to discuss with somebody, the closest will be the mother whom they see all the time, have confidence in, and believe these mothers can protect and respect their integrity. This act of mothers goes a long way in stabilising families.

If all or majority of the families have similar situations, then there is a synergy and bond created between the child and the mother. Since children are therefore the future of the society, it therefore follows logically that whatever mothers transfer to them in their tutelage is what they will exhibit thereafter. In cases where women are poor and the men who are supposed to be the breadwinners are not attending to the women and their children, there is a tendency for breakdown of values in the family. From the micro perspective of a family, this condition may spread to the macro perspective of the nation in general. There

have been several reports in Nigeria, for instance, linking youth restiveness to lack of parental care, in recent times.

Consequences of Women's Poverty

This section seeks to highlight the various consequences that poverty of women will bring to the nation. This paper discovered in the course of its analysis that the consequences may not be too obvious or noticeable, especially in the short-run, but portends very devastating impact on the macro-economy in the long-run.

i. Poverty in family: Since the women are the ones that spend all their time with the children, a poor mother will only breathe poverty on the children. Since she cannot provide the immediate needs of the children and hers, except they wait for the man to come and do it, the family will suffer several deprivations that can corrupt the psychological and mental balance of the children.

ii. Early Marriage: With the largely unsupportive role of men in families in Nigeria, as discussed in the paper's Case Study of men, women's poverty will result in a situation where the women who are the closest to the children are unable and vulnerable in controlling and managing decisions of children when it comes to reproductive issues. In many cases, mothers will encourage children to marry at tender ages in order to escape poverty or to reduce the number of dependents.

iii. Women Battering: Many reported cases of women battering in Nigeria results from economics. The inability of the man to meet the economic needs of the family, in many starts arguments that conflagrates to fight and severe battering. This has been attributed to the inability of the women to provide for herself and by extension her children because of poverty. A situation where the woman has to wait on the man for every provision creates friction at home and eventually creates room for battering: this is evil.

iv. Crime: When women are poor, they are mostly unable to cater for and control their children. Cases abound in Nigeria of such children, who are mostly seen as street urchins, common criminals, and thugs. These children engage in these criminal activities to provide for themselves. These children are in many cases used to perpetuate crime in the society by criminal cartels that look for such pawns to recruit for their criminal intentions.

v. Negative Impact on Society: When the sub-sets of a universal set is corrupted, the Universal set will surely be likewise corrupted. The negative tag Nigeria is wearing today as a result youth restiveness and militancy is a direct offshoot of the poverty of women in the family that made the women unable to properly control and organise their families. In searching greener pastures and where to make ends meet, the children are in many cases rendered vulnerable to vices they never intended to be part of.

Conclusion

The paper's intention was to explore issues around the crowding-out or discouragement of women from their traditional employment threshold in Nigeria. We noticed from our study that prior to the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) period (before 1986), the country experienced expansion in her formal sector. This expansion led to the creation of employment opportunities which were mostly taken by the men. The less attractive work in the formal and informal sectors of the economy, for example some activities in the Service sector of the economy were ordinarily seen as inferior and women's. However, with the implementation of SAP, the reality began to show. This culminated in the cut in employment in the male gender dominated employment sectors. Displaced and unemployed men, trying to stay out of poverty caused by unemployment, were then forced to seek employment sanctuary elsewhere. This led to a backward migration to jobs earlier regarded by the men as ordinary and women's. The men's superior

strength and endurance propelled them to crowd women out of those jobs, rendering the women jobless. This joblessness created serious opportunity for poverty of women.

As the bastion of the family, as we see and know in Nigeria, the paper saw women poverty caused by unemployment as suicidal to the goals of the country's national development. Since the woman is the closest to the children in Nigeria, as we discovered in our study, we noted that they should not be allowed to be vulnerable or poor. Instead of the government looking helplessly at the total disorientation of the women into the abyss of poverty, they should create opportunities for them alongside the men.

Women can thrive very well, even in the very formal sector employment, if they are given or allowed to have the right education to take such jobs. The population should be made to respect women and give them opportunities to compete. Also, special programs should be established to train women to take more formal sector jobs and re-orientate them to believe in themselves and their abilities to excel, even in competition with the male gender.

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