

# Planning and organising challenges in the management of universal primary education

## Experiences in Uganda

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Existing literature asserts that there are continuing challenges towards the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda which include: inadequate capacity for effective accountability of financial resources; inadequate basic infrastructure; inadequate community support; limited communication amongst stakeholders; poor school management and poor teacher management. This article will examine the challenges within the management framework encountered during the implementation of the Universal Primary Education in order to assist via better comprehension of the nature of the Universal Primary Education policy in Uganda. Specific focus will be placed on the planning and organising challenges which hinder the successful management of Universal Primary Education in Uganda, and suitable solutions to the planning and organising challenges will be proposed in an effort to enhance the successful implementation of the Universal Primary Education in Uganda. The results generated from this article could contribute to the knowledge of the educators on the planning and organising functions and also forecast policy outcomes and probability for policy makers on the implementation of UPE. This in turn could contribute to the realisation of the second Millennium Development Goal by 2015.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today's fast-paced world is increasingly recognising the importance of basic education and its contribution to capacity development. This has led many countries to encourage more children to enroll in primary school, under the umbrella of Universal Primary Education

(UPE). The aims of increased focus on education include support of the required human resource growth, eradication of poverty, and provision of the basic skills and knowledge, for every individual with which to exploit the environment to the advantage of both individuals and national development (Ministry of Education & Sports 2008:1). This increased focus on education has been publicised by the recent Global enrolment figures, which indicate that 570 million children are now enrolled in school, with enrolment rates of approximately 88% on average reported in developing countries, in comparison to the enrolment rates of 83% in 2000 (United Nations 2010).

However, although extensive academic research has explored the implementation challenges of UPE in Uganda (Aguti 2002:15; Bitamazire 2005:12; AVSI 2007:13; IOB 2008; Ministry of Education & Sports 2007b, 2009:7 Nishimura & Ogawa, 2009:115), little research has investigated the link between the planning and organising functions, and the challenges related to these management functions faced during the implementation of UPE. The implementation of Universal Primary Education is still constrained by the inadequate capacity for effective accountability of financial resources; persistent shortages in the infrastructure implementation; inadequate community support; limited communication amongst stakeholders; limited delegation of authority; and poor teacher management thereof (AVSI 2007:13; Ministry of Education & Sports 2007a:4, 2007b:7, 2007c:4). All of the aforementioned can be a result of various factors. It is against this background that this article aims to discuss the planning and organising challenges impacting on the successful implementation of Universal Primary Education in Uganda. If the planning and organising challenges are identified, the information generated from this article could assist in:

- forecasting policy outcomes and probability of successful implementation of UPE given Uganda's context of planning and organising, and
- providing educators with a greater understanding of the planning and organising functions as well as their effects on the implementation of UPE.

Divided into three sections, this article *firstly* reviews the theoretical background of the planning and organising functions as applicable to the implementation of Universal Primary Education. *Secondly*, the planning and organising challenges faced during the implementation of UPE are presented, as gathered from qualitative interviews from three stakeholders at national, district, and school levels respectively. *Lastly*, recommendations are proposed for educators and policy makers.

## **PLANNING AND ORGANISING OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Given the fact that the planning and organising of UPE involve both human activity and structuring respectively, the successful implementation of UPE needs to take cognisance of these two concepts. To justify this statement, this section will first define planning and organising as management functions related to the implementation of UPE. Secondly, the background, aims and objectives of UPE in Uganda will be described and the three structural levels that is national, district and school level, described with the aim of highlighting the roles of the various stakeholders at these levels.



## Planning and organising

Planning is the first step of management that exists on all levels of the management ladder, and requires support from all the other management functions (Erven 2008:1). Furthermore, planning necessitates a variety of processes such as the analysis of the external environment, the allocation of resources, the setting of objectives, the development of plans, implementation of these plans, monitoring and evaluation of the policy, and eventually, redefinition of a new policy cycle (Fox, Schwella & Wissink 1991:49; Cronje, Hugo, Neuland & Van Reenen 1994:88; Hitt, Black & Potter 2009:146).

Stoner (1982:101–131) categorises planning into two types:

- Strategic planning—referred to as the process of selecting institution goals, determining the policies and strategies necessary to attain these goals, and establishing the methods necessary to assure that the policies and strategies are implemented.
- Operational planning—focusing on carrying out tactical plans to achieve operational goals, narrowing the scope carried out by middle and lower level managers, represented in form of single use plans and standing plans such as budgets, policies, procedures and rules respectively.

Planning is a vital function for the successful implementation of UPE as it addresses all the organising questions regarding how the organisation must move forward in terms of what, how and when; promotes future oriented and hands-on management; facilitates control, creates certainty and promotes coordination (Fox *et al.* 1991:49; Smit & Cronje 1992:91; Cronje *et al.* 1994:88).

Planning is referred to as the distribution of tasks among employees, the allocation of resources to both the human component and departments, and allocation of the necessary authority to specific persons to ensure that tasks are completed (Cronje *et al.* 1994:100). Organising is comprised of six basic principles namely specialisation, delegation of authority, coordination, communication, decentralisation/centralisation, span of control, and division of labour, all of which are critical for the successful implementation of UPE. According to Cronje *et al.* (1994:100), structure follows strategy, which dictates that the development of a structure includes the organising function. Therefore, the organising function is fundamental to the success of an institution, since roles and responsibilities, and level of authority imply being accountable, and are established and known to all involved in the functioning of the institution (McCorkle *et al.* 2010). As such this affirms that planning is just one of the management functions in that its existence alone, without organising, cannot guarantee success in an institution. Therefore, the following section will, *firstly* describe the background of UPE in Uganda and, *secondly*, examine the planning and organising challenges faced during the implementation of UPE in Uganda.

## The background of Universal Primary Education

With the growth of democracy in Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni believed that it was time for every Ugandan child to receive free education. The President propounded transformation and modernisation of society through the elimination of illiteracy and the provision of education for all (Ndeezi 2000:1). The main components of free primary

education, announced in 1996, included: the provision of free education for a maximum of four children per family, and the scrapping of school fees in primary schools from grades one to seven. The main goal was to provide the minimum facilities and resources necessary to enable all Ugandan children of school going age to enroll, and remain in school until completion of the primary cycle (Ministry of Education & Sports 2008:1). This was aimed at transforming society in a positive and fundamental way through the provisioning of minimum facilities and resources to boost enrolment and completion of the primary cycle, assuring affordable education to all, and eradicating poverty by equipping every individual with basic skills (Ministry of Education & Sports 1999:10). This was advanced in the Government White Paper on Education, 2000's timeframe which stated that UPE was to be achieved by the year 2000 for grades 1 to 5, and for the entire primary cycle by the year 2003 (Ministry of Education & Sports 2004:9).

In Uganda UPE is managed in a decentralised system with various stakeholders playing a role in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policy, as provided for in the *Local Government Act, 1997*, and article 176 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, Act 21 of 2005*. However, regardless of the fact that the *Local Government Act, 1997*, greatly emphasises the role of the district in the implementation of UPE, the planning of UPE as management function remains the responsibility of stakeholders on all three levels, as will be discussed below.

At the national level the Ministry of Education and Sports' structure comprises eight departments namely Finance and Administration, Education Planning, Pre-Primary and Primary Education, Secondary Education, Teacher Education, Business Technical Vocational Education and Training (BTVET), Special Needs Education, Career Guidance and Counseling, and Higher Education, all headed by a commissioner (Bitamazile 2005:12). A policy analysis unit and a resource centre were established in 1998 as a result of the post-constitutional restructuring of the Ministry of Education and Sports. In addition three other units were approved as part of the Ministry's establishment, including the Procurement Unit, the Construction Management Unit, and the Instructional Materials Unit (Bitamazile 2005:12). These units are responsible for planning, financing, organising, monitoring and evaluating the entire Education sector, including UPE.

The district level, also known at the highest level of local government, is led by the district chairperson, elected by universal adult suffrage followed by the chief administrative officer (CAO), who is the head of public servants at district level including teachers; the district education officers (DEO), and the other lower local governments such as municipalities, city councils, town councils, and sub counties. However, despite the fact that the legislative and executive authority are vested in the district council, at the district level, it is the joint effort of the town clerk, DEOs, CAOs, resident district commissioners (RDCs), senior education officers, education officers, inspector of schools, assistant inspectors of schools, principal inspectors of schools, the Local Council chairman, the mayor, and school management committees to ensure successful implementation of UPE (Ministry of Education & Sports 2008b:11). For example, the *Local Government Act, 1997*, provides for pre-primary, primary, special, and technical schools to be managed by district councils with each district having the authority to formulate, approve and execute its own development plan, register UPE children, and distribute textbooks. Additionally, monthly remittances for schools, from central government are all channelled through the district education officer (Ministry of Education &



Sports 2004:12; 2008b:11–5; Nakabugo, Byamugisha & Bitheghaire 2008:60). In addition, the district education officer (DEO) is the key official the head teachers approach for salary transfers into teacher's accounts, collection of school supplies, submission of any reports, and receipt of communication from the Ministry of Education and Sports (Bitamazire 2005:11).

The school level, which is the lowest level in terms of the institutional structure of UPE, is comprised of head teachers, teachers, school management committees (SMCs), at primary school level (PTAs), and the pupils. They are authorised to control the affairs of individual schools/colleges, such as compilation of short-term education plans and study material, maintenance of discipline in schools, and motivation of parents to send their children to school (Bitamazire 2005:111; Ministry of Education & Sports 2008b:1).

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (2007a:2), effective planning requires policy dialogue, partnership, and participation by all stakeholders including the community. This is to improve the monitoring, supervision and ownership of the education programmes whilst providing an overview of the sector policy framework and outlining sector policies that continue to underpin reforms, programmes and activities of the Primary Education Sector (Bitamazire 2005:11). However, within the context of the aforementioned, it can be argued that although the Ministry of Education and Sports acknowledges what is required for the successful planning of UPE, it is contradictory to what is actually happening in terms of implementation. For example, even given the fact that half of the annual education budget is directed towards primary education in addition to the contributions from international donors, UPE's implementation remains financially constrained (Ministry of Education & Sports 2007a:4). For instance the government of Uganda spends approximately 30% of the national budget on the education sector, and 67,9% of these funds are invested in UPE, in addition to what is contributed by other funding agencies such as Save the Children from Norway, Action Aid, Irish Aid, Netherlands, and USAID/Uganda (Ministry of Education & Sports 2007a:4). According to IOB (2008:52), the Dutch government alone contributed 20 million Euros to the education budget and 10 million Euros to education projects between 2005 and 2006. However, despite this heavy investment, the levels of pupil performance in literacy and numeracy are still below the average rating 45,6% and 42,6% in grade three, and 33,5% and 30,5% in grade six respectively. This is a problem that can be attributed to a lack of planning, monitoring, supervision, and commitment by the head teachers and teachers in the implementation of UPE (Ministry of Education & Sports 2005:25).

Despite the promising policies, plans, programmes and strategies, such as the initiative to support the girl child, the initiative to provide instructional materials to schools, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan of 2004 (PEAP 2004), the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2004–2015, the Education Sector Investment Plan 2004–2015, the Gender in Education Policy 2008, the Early Childhood Development Policy, 2007 (ECD 2007), the comprehensive programme to improve quality in primary schools, and the initiative to improve education in outreach areas among others, the incidence of implementation is still glaringly insufficient (Aguti 2002:15; Ministry of Education & Sports 2007b:9; UN 2007:22; Ministry of Education & Sports 2009; Ministry of Education & Sports 2009:viii). This is mainly because primary education is still skewed towards high income groups (Higgins 2009: Online). Half the districts still lack schools within reach of children, inadequate/fixed primary education budgets face increasing demands to improve access and quality, and there is lack of coordination, participation, and insufficient technical capacity at the district level to cope with financial delays. All the

above-mentioned are indicative that planning and organising of UPE are still constrained and critically affecting the implementation of UPE.

According to Murphy (2003:8), much still needs to be done in the Northern part of Uganda where the UPE does not seem appropriate, given the prevalent civil strife. Northern Uganda is still one of the underperforming regions with the highest illiteracy rate of 53%, high dropout rates, low examination scores, and the worst pupil teacher ratio in Uganda at 1:200 in Kotido, and 1:150 in Gulu respectively. Planning is further challenged due to the lack of reliable and up-to-date educational data relating to the administration of education and the optimum use of resources. Furthermore, there is a problem of gender disparity between male and female enrolment, with male learners still dominating at 774 845 learners compared to 767 698 female learners clearly indicating that more focus on planning is still needed if UPE is to meet the objective of promoting girl child education. Additionally, UPE is also faced with the challenges linked to allocation of capitation grants whereby the released capitation grants are too small to cover cost, in addition to the fact that the 50% of UPE capitation grant, ostensibly allocated for monitoring customised performance targets has not been put to use as it is meant to at district level (AVSI 2007:13; Ministry of Education & Sports 2007a:4; 2007b:7; 2007c:4). Therefore, the fact that at least 35% of the grant is spent on extra instruction/scholastic materials, 20% on co-curricular activities (Games, Sports, Music), 15% on school management (Wall clock, registers, office consumables) and 10% on administration (Imprest, Hire of transport, utilities) (Ministry of Education & Sports 2012). The mismanagement of the capitation grant heavily impacts on the planning and makes it impossible to plan in schools.

## **PLANNING AND ORGANISING CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION**

It is evident that the successful implementation of UPE is a joint initiative that stems from various sources representing each of the stakeholders involved in the planning and organising for the implementation of UPE. Based on the literature (Ministry of Education & Sports 2004:20; UN 2007:21; Ministry of Education & Sports 2009:viii), most of the blame for the failure has been directed at the school level and local government management, insufficient funds, and corruption. Limited emphasis is placed on the impact that poor planning and organising functions have towards addressing the prior mentioned challenges. This section will present the planning and organising challenges that have been identified by the study on the implementation of UPE. Qualitative research was used for the collection of data which are presented in the article. An extensive literature review was followed by data collection through interviewing of key stakeholders in the implementation of UPE at national, district and school level.

At national level the ministry of Education and Sports comprise three departments focused on the pre-primary and primary education, planning, and primary teacher training. Three commissioners (heads of departments) were purposively selected and interviewed because of their close involvement in the planning, training, organising, financing and implementation of UPE. Given the districts officials' role in the formulation of the budget for the UPE, planning, monitoring and evaluation of UPE, interviews were also conducted at the district level. Focus was placed on two districts (Kampala and Mukono), where two district



education officers, two chief administrative officers, two resident district commissioners, two local government authorities (LC. III and LC IV), and two district inspectors of schools were interviewed as per convenience and accessibility. Head teachers representing the school level who are responsible for ensuring that schools commence on time, are accountable to the districts, develop operational plans for schools, and act as a link to the community were also included in the study. In this case, two head teachers in two districts (Kampala and Mukono) were each interviewed based on accessibility, location and the schools' infrastructural development.

Since the research required the perspectives of those closely involved in the management and implementation of UPE, interview questions were structured in relation to planning and organising functions. Data was analysed by reading through transcripts, and coding themes related to planning and organising. The four main themes emanating from the research and discussed below, include:

- limited participation in policy formulation at district and school levels;
- poor communication system;
- insufficient funding; and
- poor coordination.

## **Participation in policy formulation at the district and school levels**

All stakeholders interviewed at national level were involved in the planning process of UPE initiatives, while at district level fewer stakeholders acknowledged their involvement. The level of involvement seemed to decrease as the planning process moved further away from the national levels to the school levels. For instance, at school level, headmasters who participated, indicated that they had no involvement whatsoever in the planning process of the UPE initiatives, with one in particular commenting:

*"Policies come straight from the central government as orders to local government and these are further passed on to lower local government structures such as schools for implementation while other policies are politically influenced" (interview note January 2010).*

This is an indication of limited stakeholders participation, more so at the lower level management structure of UPE as all plans, initiatives, strategies, programmes, and policies were formulated at national level, and merely sent to district and school levels for implementation. According to Haddad (1995:7–16), education success depends substantially on extensive frequent reforms and plans emanating from the interests of certain key actors such as political leaders, the government, international donors, non-governmental organisations, but specifically also from parents and teachers. Additionally, planning that is not based on a solid understanding and consideration of all the actors' interests and points of view will fail, not primarily because of any technical planning errors, but because planners fail to understand why and how these interests evolved, and how planning results should have led to new cycles of policy analysis and formulation (Haddad 1995:7–16). Therefore, for the successful implementation of UPE, it is significant to acknowledge that a variety of stakeholders are involved in the planning processes, and if their interests are not carefully assessed and taken care of, the policy, strategy, programme, or the plan itself will inevitably fail.

## Poor communication system

According to Brynard, Botes and Fourie (1996:86) lines of communication form a vital component in the organising function. Communication occupies the innermost role in any institutional structure, and is considered the unifying factor in combining several disorganised activities into a meaningful whole. Thus, reinforcing the importance of enlisting genuine interest and the participation of parents and the community will require effective communication, requiring a greater effort in raising awareness and building local capacities, as well as strengthening partnerships and networks.

Stakeholders were assessed to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of communication in the organisation of UPE. The interviewed stakeholders representing all levels indicated that long distances, lack of proper communication channels and limited facilitation resulting from limited finances and inadequate flow of information were the most common communication challenges they faced during the implementation of UPE. Furthermore, all of the stakeholders both at school and district level cited irregular feedback from the national government as another challenge. These responses indicate stakeholders expressing their concern regarding the inefficient and ineffective communication system during UPE implementation. This implies that the Ministry of Education and Sports has not adequately explored the organising activities besides interpretation of the goals and objectives for the management of UPE.

Communication plays an important part in the success of any institution, especially in the decision making process. For instance, it is only through adequate communication within the institution that information is transferred and processed correctly and in a meaningful manner. Stakeholders should, therefore, pay critical attention to both the quality of communication, and the volume of information before making decisions given the decentralised manner in which UPE is managed as well as the various stakeholders involved.

## Insufficient funds

With regard to funds at national level and district level, school level head teachers were asked to indicate the financial challenges they face during the implementation of UPE. All of the stakeholders cited delayed release of UPE funds, fluctuation of actual budgets, and poor implementation of budgets as challenges largely contributing to meeting school expenditures. To worsen matters, the stakeholders also noted that the fact that the education budget at both district and school levels are heavily dependent on the national budget and lack of parents' willingness to make contributions to schools is a major challenge. These responses indicated stakeholders' awareness of, and familiarity with, the identified financial challenges faced during the implementation of UPE.

To overcome some of the financial difficulties, the Ministry of Education and Sports implemented the School Facilities Grant (SFG). This is a programme implemented to provide funds for infrastructural needs such as classroom construction, desks, and latrines in needy school communities, with the aim of meeting the preferred classroom: pupil ratio of 1:55, desk: pupil ratio of 1:3, latrine: pupil ratio of 1:40, and at least four teachers' houses per school (Bitamazire 2005:8). However, based on the responses from the stakeholders, it is apparent that even the disbursement of SFG funds was problematic, with less funds reaching





the schools, and some schools not receiving any aid. This is supported by the statement made by one of the stakeholders at district level who stated:

*“If UPE funds and SFG were disbursed in full amount and on a regular basis, UPE implementation would be swift. Much as government has tried to solve the financial challenges by introducing the SFG strategy to help in the infrastructural development, for the past 2 years this district did not receive any SFG until the year 2008 when the government sent 1 billion Ugandan shillings for the construction of latrines, money only enough to provide 20 latrines for the entire district made up of 380 government aided schools” (Interview note January 2010).*

## Poor coordination

Most stakeholders at all levels cited limited facilitation, and feeble linkages between national and lower local government structures as coordination challenges. Besides the decentralised UPE policy operating in a centralised fragment as another challenge. Stakeholders at the district and national levels also indicated that poor coordination is exacerbated by the scattered nature of schools worsened by the poor road network.

The fact that the successful implementation of UPE globally works towards specific objectives is limited due to the lack of funding. Specific objectives to be reached through the implementation of UPE include (Ministry of Education & Sports 2007b; UNESCO 2000:8):

- the provision of the minimum necessary facilities and resources required to enable all children of school going age irrespective of the ethnic background, gender, and disability to enter and remain in school until the primary cycle is completed by 2015;
- attempting to meet the objectives of poverty eradication by equipping every individual with the basic skills and knowledge with which to exploit the environment, for both the individual and for national development; and.
- achievement of a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, as well as equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.

It is upon these aforementioned objectives, that this article attempted to gauge the extent to which UPE has been implemented through an appropriate management framework focusing on the planning and organising functions. Although Uganda was used as a case study, it is against these findings that other countries could extract ideas on how to successfully implement UPE. In turn, this could contribute towards the attainment of the second Millennium Development Goal by 2015, as was initially proposed by the United Nations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE PLANNING AND ORGANISING CHALLENGES

Increasing education delivery and improving the quality and efficiency of education with adequate maintenance of the planning and organising functions is an on-going and long-term process. The process requires communication, institutional liaison, policy consultations, systems adjustment and scrutiny of various perceptions using a sector wide approach.

Therefore, the research recommends a number of critical short term suggestions considered realistic for effective implementation of UPE based on the findings.

According to McCorkle *et al.* (2010) organising dictates the flow of information and without proper organising, even given the necessary resources, it is difficult to attain the goals. Based on this argument, and keeping the successful implementation of UPE in mind, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Sports takes specific steps.

The Ministry of Education and Sports should improve on the communication mechanisms for better information flow both horizontally and vertically, so as to reach all the stakeholders. Thus, the Department of Primary Education should develop a communication division to ensure sufficient information flow, make publications suitable for all the diverse languages, and publicise all vital policy guidelines on UPE for effective implementation of the policy.

Maximum communication at all levels of implementation should be promoted for successful realisation of the UPE aims and objectives, by means of developing information and education materials, promoting education campaigns on service delivery and providing adequate resources right from the national level to lower levels of government education institutions. The Department of Primary Education should develop and functionalise a monitoring and evaluation division to guide the monitoring processes for progress towards the achievement of the UPE aims and objectives; the impact of the UPE policy to the public as well as its contribution towards the development of the country; support donor assessment of the effectiveness of the policy and programmatic changes to the policy; and lastly assist to coordinate activities among stakeholders and various funding agencies besides providing clear guidance on areas that need to be changed.

The Department of Primary Education should encourage a bottom-up approach with all-inclusive consultation with all the stakeholders. The bottom-up approach could be achieved by involving more stakeholders at district and school levels since they are conversant with the problems affecting schools as well as the needs of the schools and the community. The Department of Primary Education should create a division of finance planning and economic development at district level to decentralise disbursement of UPE funds as a way of minimising consistent delayed releases and budget fluctuation.

A further recommendation includes that the Ministry of Education and Sports should ensure that the Department of Finance and Planning provides actual, realistic figures representative of the national budget allocated towards the Department of Primary Education sufficient enough to cater for all the requirements needed for the successful implementation of UPE. This recommendation is crucial given the fact that financial resources are vital to the overall functioning and efficiency of UPE activities including the inspection of schools, organising briefings, seminars, monitoring, equitable distribution of scholastic materials and infrastructural development.

## CONCLUSION

The planning and organising functions come into sight as important aspects which need careful forethought and consideration during the implementation of UPE. Planning is the initial step of management, found on all levels of the management and it is the support for all the other management functions making it very significant for institutional success.



Without planning, organising would be unsystematic, it would be extremely difficult to lead stakeholders and explain to them the purpose, goals and intended future objectives of UPE. Therefore, considering the aims and objectives of UPE, the institutional structure, as well as the various stakeholders involved in the implementation of UPE it is vital to pay most attention to the planning and organising functions. Limited participation in policy formulation at district and school levels, poor communication systems, insufficient funds and poor coordination are key planning and organising challenges faced during the implementation of UPE.

The implementation process of UPE in Uganda needs to be revised and it is imperative for policy makers and educators to strongly consider planning and organising functions as fundamental elements for the successful implementation of UPE. For future purposes in-depth research could be carried out based on a comparative study of other developing countries where UPE is being implemented to identify a range of planning and organising challenges in the various contexts. Subsequently based on the outcomes of the research, strategies could be put in place to improve the planning and organising of UPE which in-turn could contribute to the realisation of the second Millennium Development Goal by 2015.

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