# *Evaluating the Impact of Economic Empowerment Policies on the South African Rural Elderly-A Sustainable Livelihoods Approach*

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The European Conference on Aging & Gerontology 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**
Following both international and local waves of criticism due to overwhelming high rates of youth unemployment, the South African post-Apartheid government has passed several economic empowerment policies to address the challenge. In addressing the youth unemployment and sustainability of livelihoods, institutions and their policies availed resources to the youth and left a gap in responding to the elderly's livelihoods. The purpose of this is to evaluate the impact of economic empowerment policies on the South African rural elderly and suggest a framework to respond to the challenge. A qualitative, inductive, interpretative approach was used to achieve the research objectives. Data were collected from 34 purposive (social network analysis group) interviews and 35 snowballing (semi-structured one-on-one) interviews with selected participants from the Jozini and Matatiele municipalities. Data were analysed using Nvivo 12. The findings reveal a lack of institutions and policies that focus on the sustainability of rural elderly livelihoods. It is recommended that policymakers collaborate with the rural elderly with the view to ensure economic empowerment policies respond to their economic empowerment and sustainability of livelihoods beyond retirement. The contribution of the article lies in the use of a sustainable livelihoods framework and Institutional Theory to suggest a solution.

Keywords: Economic Empowerment, Policies, Elderly, Impact, Sustainable Livelihoods, Rural, Policymakers

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## Introduction

The battle against unemployment and poverty has been taken by global bodies such as the United Nations and appears in many pledges from various international conferences around the globe. Cimadamore (2016:131) corroborate and assert that "During the past decades, … the international community has consolidated a discourse on the eradication of (extreme) poverty that has been articulated in various international commitments (such as the United Nations Decades for the Eradication of Poverty, the Millennium Declaration, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)/Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiatives)". Farisani (2022a) and Mazibuko (2013) affirm and argue that despite the criticism, the South African government understand their role in ending global poverty. They understand that they need to find a way to employ most of the population that remains unemployed.

Khomo, Farisani and Mashau (2023); Ssekitoleko and du Plessis (2021); Mahadea and Kaseeram, (2018) point out that the South African government has proceeded to pass several empowerment policies meant to empower their people. Bhorat, Asmal, Lilenstein, and van der Zee (2018:2) affirm and state that "SMMEs have been identified as a key component to advancing inclusive growth and development in South Africa's National Development Plan, with government highlighting the importance of these businesses for job creation, innovation and competitiveness". National Development Plan is meant to fast-track other empowerment policies. Empowerment policies such as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) legislation of 2004, the National Strategy on the Development and Promotion of Small Business (NSDPSB) in South Africa (1995), the National Strategy for the Development and Promotion of Franchising (NSDPF) in SA (2000) and the National Informal Business Upliftment Strategy (NIBUS) (2013). BBBEE and NSDPSB were passed to empower previously disadvantaged communities to participate in the local and national economy while NSDPF and NIBUS were passed to avail opportunities for new markets and important business equipment to rural informal businesses.

Farisani (2022a) and Mazibuko (2013) concur and argue that nowhere is inequality more visible than in rural areas where the design of Apartheid laws remains largely intact. While unemployment and poverty amongst the rural youth are common, there are pockets of South Africa that show the resilience of rural elders in sustaining local livelihoods and creating jobs through farming-related businesses. This study aims to evaluate the impact of economic empowerment policies on the South African rural elderly. i.e. light is shed on the impact of economic empowerment policies on the elder's efforts to sustain the rural local livelihoods using farming-related SMMEs. Critical aspects of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) and the Institutional Theory are relied upon to achieve the aim of the study. The study is conducted in the Jozini and Matatiele rural municipalities due to the active pockets of various elderly-owned farming-related SMMEs there.

## Literature Review

To fully appreciate the impact of empowerment policies, we define public policy and discuss the relevant aspects of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the Institutional Theory i.e. relevant aspects to this article such as resources/asset base (SLF) and policies (Institutional Theory's regulative element).

## Definition and Use of Public Policy

According to Fowler (2013:5), public policy is “the dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem. It includes a government’s expressed intentions and official enactments, as well as its consistent patterns of activity and inactivity.” Jackson and Allen-Handy (2018) affirm and add that from public policy, the government’s future and current actions in addressing certain public concerns or problems could be stated and understood. Also corroborating, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) assert that public policy is often framed in a manner that addresses public concerns in a way that gives them clarity as to who exercises what authority and for what reason. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) further argue that pre-policy discussions often give hope to all to take part in the discussions and the implementation of the agreed public policy. In affirming, Jackson and Allen-Handy (2018) observe that public policies are originally designed to be a process that has the public good as its outcome.

Researchers such as Ngorora and Mago (2013), Chimucheka and Mandipaka, (2015) and Dubihlela and Van Schalkwyk (2014) are among the researchers who have laid the blame on both the national and local government institutions for unclear procedures that rural SMMEs can follow to access institutions meant to support SMME in their areas. Bhorat et al (2018:46) also observed that "the majority of SMME owners did not participate due to lack of information — either because they did not know the programme existed or because they did not know whom to contact." Nel and Rogerson (2016) agree with this view and further quote Turok (2010:268) who states that “a development state needs to harness the collective power of institutions at every level to alter the growth path and enable all areas to reach their potential." From these researchers' remarks and findings, one can deduce that policies and strategies alone do not translate into problem-solving. Supportive institutions are equally important. Hence the relevance of the Institutional Theory in this article.

## Institutional Theory

Scott (2013) posits that Institutional Theory (see Table 1) has three elements i.e. regulative, normative and socio-cognitive elements. Only regulative and Socio-cognitive elements are relevant to this article. That is because the regulative element’s focus is on the institution’s policies, legislation and rules, while the cultural element’s focus is on the institution’s shared values, beliefs and assumptions.

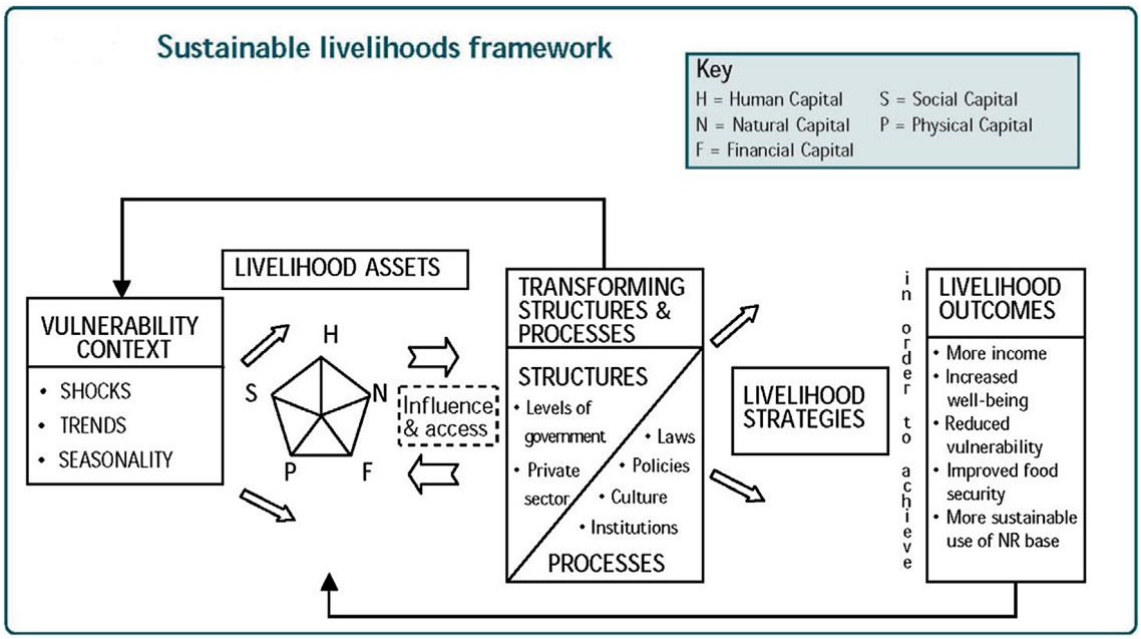
| | Regulative | Normative | Cognitive |
|---|---|---|---|
| Legitimacy | Legal systems | Moral and ethical systems | Cultural systems |
| Central Rudiments | Policies, legislation, and rules | Work role, habits and norms | Values, beliefs and assumptions |
| System Transformation Drivers | Legal obligation | Moral obligation | Transformation values are internalized |
| System Transformation Sustainers | Fear and coercion | Duty and responsibility | Social identity and personal desire |
| Behavioural Reasoning | Have to | Ought to | Want to |

Table 1: Comparison between regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements of Institutional Theory (adapted from Palthe, 2014).

Table 1 provides us with a summary and deeper understanding of regulative and cultural cognitive elements and enables us to understand how policies, legislation and rules impact the behavioural reasoning of subjects as compared to the cognitive elements. Thus, the distinction between regulative and cultural cognitive elements assists in understanding why empowerment policies fail or become successful. Farisani (2023) point out that policies will only be successful if government departments and other relevant institutions responsible for the implementation want to accommodate all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of such policies. To determine whether the government departments and institutions want to support the elders in their SMMEs we look at the resources they avail to such rural-owned businesses. Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is well placed to assist in that path.

**Sustainable Livelihoods Framework**

Smyth and Vanclay (2017:68) argue that Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is well-placed to guide the process that government departments and relevant institutions ought to embark on to support rural SMMEs with relevant resources. Smyth and Vanclay (2017:68) argue that successful livelihood strategies such as SMMEs need key resources such as financial, physical, social, human and natural to actively participate in empowerment policies passed to fight poverty and create jobs in rural areas. In their own words, Smyth and Vanclay (2017:68) state: “In its simplest form, the framework views people as operating in a context of vulnerability. Within this context, they have access to certain assets or poverty-reducing factors. These gain their meaning and value through the prevailing social, institutional and organizational environment. This environment also influences the livelihood strategies – ways of combining and using assets – that are open to people in pursuit of beneficial livelihood outcomes that meet their livelihood objectives”. Farisani (2022b) attest and credit well-maintained rural networks with successful rural businesses in South African rural SMMEs. Well-maintained networks ensure that empowerment policies by the government department lead releasing relevant resources to deserving rural SMMEs directly and through rural SMMEs' supportive local institutions.




Source: DFID (1999-2001)

Figure 1: The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

A careful reading of Figure 1 shows that there is a direct path from institutions and their policies to the provision of resources to livelihood strategies. That path needs the direct collaboration of relevant stakeholders in a particular locality to lead to sustainable rural SMMEs and sustainable livelihoods.

## Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this article. An interpretive paradigm was considered relevant and used in this article due to its ability to provide an understanding of people's lived experiences (Chilisa, 2011 Mertens, 2009). In line with the interpretive paradigm, a Social Network Analysis (SNA), together with one-on-one interviews, were chosen as research instruments for the collection of data from two rural municipalities. Both primary and secondary data were collected.

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Due to the nature of rural areas whereby institutions are not properly documented and are scattered, it was important for the snowball sampling to be carried out to supplement purposive sampling. Snowball sampling assisted in identifying institutions that could give further corresponding information, or other rural SMME-supportive institutions that the researcher was not familiar with, but which other participants knew as they worked together for local SMME sustainability. Both papers of Jaja et al (2017); and that of Ennis and West (2010) agree in pointing out that the SNA tool is instrumental in identifying existing and potential institutions' connections. SNA was particularly important in that it allowed the researcher to go further than with a semi-structured interview tool. SNA go further because it allowed the participants to correct and remind each other (cross-check) important aspects of policies/rules and assets. A total of 69 participants that represented all stakeholders in the study areas were interviewed. 18 of such participants were interviewed from MLM using SNA and 16 of such participants were also interviewed from MLM using SNA. The balance (69) of the participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. All institutions and structures were represented in line with

Jensen and Jankowski, (1991) guide. i.e. all stakeholders who availed themselves to represent their institutions were interviewed in both municipalities.

This study ascribed to the Grounded Theory (GT) analysis as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990:7). Envivo 12 was used to analyse the vast data collected due to the software's ability to analyse different types of data. Bazeley and Jackson (2007:22) corroborate by pointing out that, "The efficiencies afforded by software release some of the time used to simply 'manage' data and allow an increased focus on ways of examining the meaning of what is recorded".Envivo 12 made it possible to import and analyse and present the data collected during fieldwork using semi-structured interviews, social network analysis, pictures and secondary data.

This study complied with the University of KwaZulu Natal's ethical clearance policy; therefore, all the participants signed the consent form and participated voluntarily. The respondents were assured of anonymity and that the information gathered was for research purposes only. To ensure validity and reliability in this study, the researcher followed Bougie and Sekaran (2009)'s guide. Bougie and Sekaran (2009) point out that the validity and reliability of a study depend heavily on two aspects: how the tools of collecting data were administered and whether the tools chosen can capture the relevant data that the researcher is looking for. The researcher ensured that two different types of tools were used to collect data and that one tool was used to follow up and validate the findings of the first tool. Triangulation was therefore used to validate the collected data repeatedly during the fieldwork.

## Findings and Analysis

The findings and analysis are presented in line with the study's objective. The objective is to evaluate the impact of economic empowerment policies on the South African rural elderly. i.e. light is shed on the impact of economic empowerment policies on the elder's efforts to sustain the rural local livelihoods using farming-related SMMEs. As such, three policies are presented: the National Strategy for the Development and Promotion of Franchising (NSDPF) in SA (2000) and the National Informal Business Upliftment Strategy (NIBUS) (2013), and the National Development Plan (NDP). These policies are divided into two to allow NSDPF and NIBUS to be presented together while NDP is presented alone. The policies are grouped as such to allow the analysis of the impact they have on elders' business crucial resources in line with SLF and Institutional Theory.

## NSDPF and NIBUS

NSDPF and NIBUS are critical pieces of legislation in that they enable rural SMMEs to access the market regardless of size or previous economic participation record. Thus, small informal businesses are not only recognised but assisted to thrive.

## NSDPF and NIBUS's Impact on Rural Elderly-Owned Local SMMEs

The respondents have credited NSDPF and NIBUS with the development and acquisition of expensive machines in JLM. The respondents in MLM struggled to find good examples of how the strategies have impacted them. As an example, the JLM respondents have acknowledged the role of DSBD in providing critical resources in the form of tractors and other farming equipment. DSBD provides such critical resources as it strives to implement

the NSDPF and NIBUS. The machinery and other resources (already discussed above) provided under the NSDPF and NIBUS are particularly critical as the rural farmers could not afford such much-needed resources.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of NSDPF and NIBUS**

The findings reveal a general agreement among the respondents from both the MLM and JLM concerning the fair implementation of NSDPF and NIBUS. The SMME representatives interviewed are of the view that only a handful of farmers gain from the implementation of the two national strategies mentioned above. Challenges associated with politics and lack of knowledge in assessing the resources made available through such strategies seem to be a shared opinion among the respondents. The respondents from the local municipalities do acknowledge the lack of own resources such as staff and funding to share the knowledge about the policies with all the local stakeholders.

The respondents in both municipalities have also acknowledged some opportunities for themselves and others they know. These are opportunities for regional new markets and important business equipment. Local municipalities in both MLM and JLM have, in the implementation of the strategies, successfully concluded franchising arrangements with retail giants such as Cambridge, fruit spot and local butcheries. To further elaborate on the opportunities mentioned above, the implementers of the strategies are identified and the working relationships between the stakeholders are further analysed below.

| Policies, rules or regulations | Impact on Rural SMMEs | Weaknesses | Strengths | Leading Institutions and Organisations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NSDPF and NIBUS | NSDPF and NIBUS are widely credited with the development and acquisition of expensive machines in JLM. Minimum impact of the above-mentioned strategies at MLM. | Challenges associated with politics and lack of knowledge to the elders in accessing the resources made available through such strategies | Opportunities for new markets and important business equipment. Local municipalities in both MLM and JLM have, in their implementation of the strategies, successfully concluded franchising arrangements | DTI, DSBD, SEDA, SEFA, MLM, JLM, SMME representative institutions, NGOs and local retailers. |

Table 2: Summary of NSDPF and NIBUS, leading institutions and organisations, and their impact, weaknesses and strengths

## NDP

The analyses of the respondents' views and opinions are based on their experiences as far as the sustainability of rural SMMEs is concerned, that is NDP's position on issues such as job creation, growing the economy and reducing the impact of inequality on the sustainability of rural SMMEs.

## NDP's Impact on Local SMMEs

When analysing NDP, special interest is given to three aspects that impact on the sustainability of SMMEs. These are the promotion of the exportation of local produce, investment in the rural infrastructure and partnerships needed in the implementation of NDP. The exportation of locally produced beef from the MLM rural livestock or the exportation of vegetables produced by farmers at MLM is seen by the SMMEs respondents as a potential benefit of NDP's implementation in rural areas. Investment in rural infrastructure has also been pointed out as a rural SMME sustainability factor by SMME and municipality respondents at both JLM and MLM. Partnerships described above between MLM tourism stakeholders are seen as having a positive impact on SMMEs in the areas. At JLM, Mnothophansi's partnership with the local stakeholders including local, provincial and national government departments, NGOs and other stakeholders is seen as having an expected impact on SMMEs. That impact is largely credited to a plethora of resources donated for the local farmers' use.

## Strengths and Weaknesses of NDP

The respondents in both MLM and JLM have indicated that there are challenges despite the resources being channelled from the above-mentioned institutions, organisations and departments. These challenges impact the implementation of NDP and impact rural SMME sustainability. According to the respondents, the institutions, organizations and departments mentioned above have done little to implement important aspects of NDP, aspects that matter the most to rural SMMEs such as the promotion of local produce and investment in local infrastructure. Promoting local produce and investment in the local infrastructure is believed by the respondents to be central to NDP's goals of job creation, economic growth and reducing inequality locally and nationally.

The respondents involved in farming at JLM have indicated that they often must resort to selling their good quality products very cheaply as animal feed. If they fail to find a buyer for animal feed at a very low price, they resort to burying their produce, that is, they plough their rotten cabbages or tomatoes back into the soil because they could not transport them (lack of adequate transporting infrastructure) their produce to those who might buy in faraway places. While burying or ploughing back of vegetables is good for the soil, a lot of income is lost. Such loss of income is associated with a weak local economy, lack of new job opportunities and widening inequality that the NDP strategy is meant to address. The lack of alternative markets in MLM (i.e., where they can export locally produced meat) is another example of NDP implementation weakness.

Despite the challenges, the respondents see opportunities associated with the good implementation of NDP. Such opportunities are associated with existing public-private partnerships (Agreements between JLM and local retailers, MLM and local butcheries or even private training Institutions). The SMME owners often take pride in their resilience in

surviving in such challenging rural municipalities being plagued by an extra (unique to their municipalities) double challenge of drought and border-related crimes. The SMME owners have also pointed to their ability (expertise) to produce good quality crops and good quality meat (due to ongoing vaccinating programmes) in large amounts that are ready for exportation.

| Policies, rules or regulations | Impact on Rural SMMEs | Weaknesses | Strengths | Leading Institutions and Organisations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NDP | Mixed results on NDP's impact point to the failure to promote the exportation of local produce and investment in the rural infrastructure, although there are successes in the area of partnerships needed in the implementation of NDP. | Loss of income due to a combination of lack of new markets and poor infrastructure weighs heavily on rural SMMEs. | Ability (expertise) to produce good quality crops and good quality meat that are ready for exportation despite challenges. | DEDEAT, ECP DRDAR, KZN DARD, DSBD, MLM, JLM, local NGOs, local SMME representatives and Traditional Authorities |

Table 3: Summary of NDP, leading institutions and organisations, and their impact, weaknesses and strengths

**Discussion of the Findings**

The discussion of findings and analysis are presented in line with the study's objective: to evaluate the impact of economic empowerment policies on the South African rural elderly. NSDPF, NIBUS and NDP policies are divided into two to allow NSDPF and NIBUS to be presented together while NDP is presented alone. The policies are grouped as such to allow the discussion of the impact they have on elders' business crucial resources in line with SLF and Institutional Theory.

**NSDPF and NIBUS**

NSDPF and NIBUS are critical pieces of legislation in that they enable the rural elderly's SMMEs to access the market. Accessing the market is crucial for the business' sustainability. Sustainable businesses create sustainable jobs and livelihoods for the locals (Farisani, 2022; Smyth and Vanclay, 2017). Palthe (2014) attest and points out that the government and local relevant stakeholders' behavioural reasoning is crucial for the successful implementation of policy. The findings show that most relevant national stakeholders are falling short in their responsibilities to assist local elders' businesses in the implementation of NSDPF and NIBUS in both municipalities, especially the elder businesses in the MLM. Key institutions such as

DTI, SEDA and SEFA are not doing their part in supplying relevant resources according to the mandate given to them as far as NSDPF and NIBUS are concerned. DTI is responsible for assisting businesses to gain access to market while SEDA and SEFA are responsible for financial resources.

The findings at JLM show a rare example of what is crucial for the sustainability of rural elders' businesses. DSBD is amongst those few institutions that provide critical resources as it strives to implement the NSDPF and NIBUS at JLM. Such resources are critical for farmers to comply with the individual standards of retailers who buy their products. The first targeted local market was the nearby retailers that would buy bulk products and resell them at their supermarkets or stores. The findings show that local butcheries and rural-based stores such as Spar and Boxer stores are some of the retailers targeted by local meat and vegetable farmers. The reason for such focus is that they can meet their regulations on the standard of meat and vegetables such customers need for their customers. While relevant national government institutions seem not to be doing enough to support the rural elders' businesses to sustain themselves and their local livelihoods, LG and local retailers behaved differently. LG and local retailers behaved differently and worked together with the elders' businesses to sustain local livelihoods and jobs by creating local opportunities. Creating local opportunities between farmers and local butcheries and retailers. Such finding is consistent with Institutional Theory's regulative element and socio-cognitive element as presented by Palthe (2014) and Farisani (2023).

**National Development Plan (NDP)**

Special interest is given to three aspects of NDP that impact the sustainability of rural elderly's SMMEs. These are the promotion of the exportation of local produce, investment in the rural infrastructure and partnerships needed in the implementation of NDP.

While NGOs such as Technoserve assisted to sell the elder's produce to other regions within the country, the full implementation of the NDP to enable the exportation of the elders' products never materialised. The elders did not get such assistance from national institutions tasked with such responsibility as the government and policymakers intended. Thus, the goal of the government to create jobs and sustain livelihoods through the elders' businesses did not materialize. It did not materialize because such businesses were not reaching their full potential due to the lack of external markets and financial resources that come with that. Such finding is consistent with Smyth and Vanclay (2017); and Figure 1. Smyth and Vanclay (2017); and Figure 1 provide a guide on how the sustainability of livelihoods depends on the implementation of policies by the relevant institutions.

Relevant national institutions and structures were also found to be wanting when expected to provide infrastructure and partnerships. Relevant national institutions were too far removed from the rural elders' businesses and did not get to understand the need or urgency of critical infrastructure and partnerships needed to grow the elder's businesses. The very elders' rural businesses the national government and policymakers intended to use to create jobs and sustain local rural livelihoods. Such a finding is consistent with Khomo, Farisani and Mashau (2023) and Scott's (2013) linking of institutional Theory with the implementation of policies by fostering impactful partnerships between relevant institutions.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to evaluate the impact of economic empowerment policies on the South African rural elderly. i.e. light was shed on the impact of economic empowerment policies on the elder's efforts to sustain the rural local livelihoods using farming-related SMMEs. Critical aspects of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) and the Institutional Theory were relied upon to achieve the aim of the study.

The findings reveal a lack of national institutions, policies and the implementation process that focus on the sustainability of rural elderly livelihoods. It is recommended that policymakers collaborate with the rural elderly with the view to ensure economic empowerment policies respond to their economic empowerment and sustainability of livelihoods in rural areas. The contribution of the article lies in the use of a sustainable livelihoods framework and Institutional Theory to suggest a solution.

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