

Local Leadership to Local Ownership –

An Essential Element for Effective Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention

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This is a short policy note explaining some of the core issues surrounding the concepts of local ownership and local leadership in peacebuilding and peacemaking processes. The note covers three key questions:

- Why is local ownership important for peace?
- What is 'Local Ownership' and 'Local Leadership' in the context of peacebuilding?
- Why is local ownership hard to foster and enable?

It also provides:

- Brief examples of tools and approaches that enable local leadership and local ownership onthe-ground.
- A summary of key recommendations from the UN -World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report that relate to enabling greater local leadership. (Appendix A)



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Key points

- Local ownership is a critically important principle and goal to enable successful peace processes. Local ownership is fostered by a commitment to build the capacity of local actors through inclusive participatory processes that are accompanied by international partners. It is a guiding principle for peacebuilding processes and a critical part of restoring trust and consolidating peace and preventing conflict.
- Operationalising local ownership remains a challenge. The importance of local ownership has been widely recognised by peacebuilding practitioners and by scholarly research for many years and increasingly, policy makers. While local ownership is often recognised as an important goal by international actors, often the problem is a failure to implement and operationalise processes that result in actual local ownership on-the-ground.
- Local leadership is a practical lens to operationalise and ground the concept of local ownership. Local leadership is a more tangible programmatical level concept to demystify and realise the broader goal of local ownership. At a programmatic level it is possible, at any stage of a peace process, to measure, map and identify the extent of local leadership and further understand the impediments, challenges and the resources required to improve the capacity towards it. Enabling local leadership is about empowering social and political actors to engage in deliberative processes, supporting social and political institutions that permit collaboration and dialogue, and providing assistance in a way that ensures technical knowledge takes root in society and is shared by actors across the social and political divides.
- Enabling local ownership is hard but progress is being made through new partnerships. Almost always, locally-led peacebuilding work is complex, non-linear, difficult to monitor and learn from. It requires a long-term commitment and flexible partnerships between different sectors of the international community, i.e. across humanitarian, diplomatic, development and peacebuilding actors as well as with local and national actors. Together, they can help strengthen local capacities and facilitate stronger local processes that will build the trust and institutions that will address grievances in a non-violent way.
- The Sustaining Peace reforms are an opportunity to positively refashion the way peacebuilding work is delivered but there is a need to move beyond rhetoric. Informed by flagship research such as the UN-World Bank Pathways for Peace report and its call for peacebuilding actions that are more inclusive, representative, equitable, participatory and long term, the international agenda has taken a step in the right direction. The challenge going forward will be to go beyond rhetoric to make local leadership a reality on-the-ground. That will require new partnerships and programmatic learnings that sustain and enable positive and constructive local ownership that will be key to prevent conflicts and sustain long-term peace.

Why is local ownership important for peace?

A key feature shared by the most peaceful societies in the world is the presence of a social contract that legitimises political authority and enables different groups in society to resolve their differences without resorting to violence. The trust that underpins that social contract - between people and their institutions but also among different groups in society - does not emerge spontaneously, nor can it be 'built'. It is rooted in the historical experience of a society, shaped by the values and patterns of behaviour of individuals and institutions over time. This trust is key to foster peace and prevent conflict from becoming violent.

To foster this trust in fragile and conflict affected countries and communities, there must be local leadership and ultimately, *local ownership* of the peacebuilding processes, from inception to implementation. This is based on the self-evident fact that while international efforts to build peace may grant short-term stability, long-term peace rests on key stakeholders in society having local ownership of their own peacebuilding processes. As has been shown over the course of history, without sufficient local agency and ownership of the process, even the most robust international efforts to consolidate peace will crumble as soon as external pressure and control eventually subside.

The hard-learnt experience of many years of peacebuilding research and practice is that peace needs to emerge from within a society and cannot be 'imposed' by external actors, nor can it be 'imported' from other experiences. Local ownership does not simply mean government ownership, but rather evolves through process-oriented and inclusive peacebuilding strategies that engage with all levels of society. This approach seeks to not romanticise local ownership under the assumption it is by nature 'good' and external or international influences 'bad' but rather emphasizes the key is inclusive processes that enable the emergence of legitimate, positive and constructive forms of local agency. Without, doing so, it is possible to foster and enable negative and potentially violent forms of local leadership.

Local leadership is an important concept because it is a practical lens by which international actors can understand whether their interventions are moving peace processes towards the goal of local ownership. This is critical as the primary challenge is at the operational level – often, even well-intentioned actors with local ownership as a strategic objective fail to properly track and support local initiatives or adequately build their capacity to ensure they can meaningfully lead or be credible in the eyes of the local populations. Local leadership is thus an important programmatic level concept to demystify and realise the broader goal of local ownership. At a programmatic level it is possible – at any stage of a peace process –, to measure, map and identify the extent of local leadership and further understand its impediments, challenges and the resources required to improve the capacity towards it. It is also the important juncture at which positive and constructive forms of leadership can be fostered as opposed to conflictive and negative forms of local leadership. By tracking whether local actors have leadership of peace processes, groups and institutions, it is possible to understand the extent to which broader society is likely to view those processes as legitimate and representative of the local interests.

Through the Sustaining Peace reforms, the international community and the United Nations are reorienting and refocusing its institutions toward improving the effectiveness of peace and security interventions to prevent the conflicts and crises of the future. Strengthening the capacity of society and enabling local ownership in peacebuilding will be critical. It will not only be important to reaffirm the importance of local ownership in peacebuilding as a guiding 'north star' for international peacebuilding

efforts, but also develop coordinated partnerships based on this shared understanding.

The challenge going forward will be to go beyond the rhetoric of past years to operationalise local leadership on-the-ground. This will require new partnerships and programmatic learnings that can sustain constructive and positive forms of local ownership that will prevent conflicts and sustain long-term peace.

What is 'Local Ownership' and 'Local Leadership' in the context of peacebuilding?

In fragile and conflict affected settings, local ownership of a peace process is the outcome of sustained local leadership that usually occurs when international actors recognise local actors need to have leadership of peacebuilding processes, from inception to implementation. Local ownership is fostered by a commitment to build the capacity of local actors through inclusive participatory processes that are accompanied by international partners. It is a goal rather than an input and requires sustained and long-term commitment. Local leadership on the other hand is the tactical means by which local ownership can be pursued and operationalised by all actors.

'Local ownership' is certainly not a new paradigm and has, at various times, been a buzz-word in international development and peacebuilding policy rhetoric. Despite this, the discourse on local ownership has been problematic for at least two primary reasons (1) there are different interpretations of its meaning according to different audiences in the international community, and (2) there exists a perception that while it is inherently desirable, it is impossible to achieve.¹ As with many broad concepts, there are narrow and wide interpretations of the term. Three common misconceptions of local ownership that explain why international actors fail to realise it on the ground are framed here as either superficial adoption of local leadership, instrumental implementation of local leadership or essentially well-intentioned but local leadership that is flawed in implementation:

• Superficial adoption of local ownership. Limited consultation with local actors with the aim to internalise international goals and aims through local actors. For some international actors, local ownership is essentially not desirable, not seriously implemented and only about allowing local actors to 'buy-into' the goals, strategies and plans designed for them by the international community. There is no real commitment to local capacity building and international actors do not see it as an objective. The assumption underlying this interpretation is that local actors lack the political, social and intellectual capacity to define what is best for them. In this interpretation, the international community needs to show the way while making an effort to ensure local actors come to understand 'what is best for them' and adopt strategies, plans and expected outcomes accordingly, so that they can be sustainable. Aside from the pursuit of their own interests, benign paternalism underpins this approach, assuming international actors – normally Western or Western educated – 'know best': They have a better understanding of what the problem of that society is, and therefore are in a better position to identify and design strategies to address those problems. Local ownership if adopted, is only adopted as a tactic by the international actor in the belief it is a key part of 'winning-over' local actors to ensure their strategy is successful.

¹ de Coning, Cedric (2013). Understanding Peacebuilding as Essentially Local, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2(1):6, 1-2.

- Instrumental implementation of local ownership. Consultative international actors with limited commitment or belief in capacity building. Some international actors interpret local ownership as desirable but inherently not possible to implement. In this approach, international actors may prioritise consultation with local actors about their needs, expectations and perceptions in order to inform their own peacebuilding strategies and plans. However, the core peacebuilding strategy, approach and resources remain in the control of the international actors and institutions. In this case, international actors recognise that local actors in state and society possess critical knowledge that is necessary to underpin peacebuilding plans and strategies, but doubt they have the capacity to effectively and concertedly act upon such knowledge and therefore decide to do it for them. Furthermore, international actors only make limited or piecemeal investment in capacity building activities either due to a perception of a lack of absorptive capacity of the local actors or due to limited funding windows that demand results in short, mostly one to two-year, time periods. Many international actors, especially humanitarian actors, working in crisis settings whereby they are forced to make urgent decisions to address immediate needs with little time and ability themselves to consider local capacities and agency fall into this category. In these situations, local ownership is considered as something that is desirable but does not really figure in the day-to-day outcome level objectives of the international actors.
- Local Leadership that is flawed in implementation. Local actors are allowed to own the implementation of peacebuilding strategies and programmes but are not involved in the overarching strategy or mandate. In this more advanced version of local ownership, participation of local actors is allowed in the implementation of peacebuilding strategies designed by international actors. This is based on the important recognition that only through actual and pro-active engagement of local actors in state and society in peacebuilding activities, can local capacities for peace be fostered and nurtured. Participation of local actors in operationalising peacebuilding strategies takes place mostly at the implementation phase, with local teams assuming the responsibility to manage peacebuilding initiatives, but it can also take place during the phase of design. The participation of international actors is then limited to one of supervision or co-direction, in which they however retain final control over the process, sequencing and timeframes while recognising the importance of local agency not only as an output of the process but as a necessary input for its effectiveness. However, the parameters of the overarching strategy and pre-determined mandate ensures local ownership is not truly realised.

Then there is the best-practise approach to peacebuilding whereby sustained international commitment to local leadership at every stage of the peacebuilding process enables and facilitates the outcome of local ownership. Where there is true local leadership that leads to *ownership* of peace processes, international actors assume not only that knowledge resides in local actors, but that only they can and should responsibly and legitimately take decisions regarding their own future. Here, the role of international actors is to facilitate and accompany local processes and be advisors to local actors, assuming a 'back seat' role to a local agency they enable and nurture, but above all, that they respect.

Operationally, this means international actors support and facilitate the creation of spaces for multiple voices to converge around common principles, goals and procedures. It is about empowering social and political actors to engage in the deliberative processes; about supporting social and political institutions that permit collaboration and dialogue; about providing assistance in a way that ensures technical knowledge takes root in society and is shared by actors across the social and political divides. This is critical to ensure the local actors that take leadership are representative and legitimate in the eyes of the local population. Often, to achieve these intermediate outcomes, international actors need to invest in the development of capacities of citizens to have access to information and have access to

mechanisms to monitor and understand the actions and role of different institutions across society. It is also about long term approaches that do not impose arbitrary fixed timeframes and predetermined mandates. Almost always, this work is complex, non-linear, difficult to monitor and learn from.

Examples of tools and approaches that enable local leadership and ownership on-the-ground

- Develop participatory approaches and research that collects a representative view of the conflict and peace dynamics of a setting. This includes conflict analysis that incorporates systems analysis of resilience and the positive peace of a given setting. Interpeace tools and programs such as the Frameworks for Assessing Resilience (FAR) and peace mapping research are examples of this.
- Commission participatory research aimed at understanding the capacity of key local actors. Identify and develop partnerships with local partners that are able to reach out to different groups and levels in society and create representative and inclusive space.
- Plan for those partnerships to be designed with a long-term perspective that provide time and space for capacity development. Fixed time mandates often run counter to this principle and is a key reason why local leadership is not able to emerge.
- For development and humanitarian actors, develop a more holistic vision of the mandate as responsible for enabling greater local ownership.
- Engage in multitrack diplomacy and peacebuilding. Very often in peacemaking processes, elite political processes at the Track 1 level are disconnected from local peacebuilding processes. Interpeace 'Track 6' programming specifically aims to connect the different levels of peace processes to ensure they are coordinated and do not undermine each other.
- Facilitate participatory dialogues in communities and across a country to garner a wide spectrum of voices and opinion and enable local actors to legitimately convene that space.
- Develop bespoke partnerships to ensure they facilitate local agency and leadership, reinforce existing capacities, and ensure programming is in line with negotiated solutions. This requires moving beyond aid provider-beneficiary relationships and making different kinds of roles available to be played by local actors as well as shared/participatory decision making throughout the humanitarian response or peacemaking and peacebuilding cycle.
- Deploy standard measurement frameworks, such as result based management, surveys of local populations and outcome mapping focused on local leadership outcomes. By tracking whether local actors have leadership of peace processes it is possible to continuously evaluate whether partnerships are making concrete contribution to the end goal of local ownership.

Why is local ownership hard to foster and enable?

There are at least two major challenges the international community faces to improve efforts toward supporting and enabling stronger local leadership in peacebuilding. The first challenge situates itself at the level of learning and knowledge. This implies that important normative principles about the conditions that create local ownership need to be clearly understood and mainstreamed across the international development, humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors. Connected to this, is the necessity for more sustained acknowledgement and internal recognition of the political intentions of international actors themselves as they conduct peacebuilding activities. The second challenge is a multidimensional one at the operational and programmatic level.

There is an oft-cited inherent contradiction in the notion of local leadership that makes good peacebuilding practise difficult to understand and implement. Firstly, if peace is understood as something that can only emerge from within a society then any form of external influence is inherently contradictory with that premise. However, the delicate balance of peacebuilding is based on a normative belief that societies mired in violence are complex systems where imbalances in internal or external power, resources, norms, behaviours and their interaction with history need to be corrected through a realignment of these dynamics. Here, external actors have a *catalytic* role to assist local actors in reorienting the direction or path dependence of those violent social systems. This is inherently difficult for external actors to achieve when they have imperfect knowledge of the circumstances and settings in which they seek to engage in. Furthermore, given this, there is a very fine balance between the external actor 'doing harm' through further exacerbating the imbalances in a society that lead to conflict versus making the positive catalytic shift in accompanying local actors to achieve peace.

While some may argue this *catalytic role* in accompanying local actors is thus 'new' and that any internationally sanctioned direct intervention is inviting the potential for harm, it is important to note that no conflict dynamic is entirely free of at least some element of external influence. In a globalised world, it is a plain fact that geopolitical interests from larger powers or economic factors related to global trade and investments, licit and illicit trade networks, migration and conflict spill-over from neighbouring countries have direct and indirect impacts on local political economies. Thus, external peacebuilding interventions seeking to accompany and enable local actors are often rather a part of a broader *system* of actions and dynamics that govern the potential peacefulness of a given setting rather than yet another 'intervention'.²

A common barrier facing the international community is the lack of clear political structures often extant within fragile and conflict affected countries that they can engage with. Often, international actors are faced with difficult questions around whom, and where, do the most legitimate local voices in society reside, and which of those should be amplified. One reason why this is always difficult is because international actors often do not have access to adequate information to know what the correct entry points are for understanding the right actors to work with. There is also the capacity of the international actors themselves which may be limited. Often within the context of any peacebuilding process, international actors do need to 'pick and choose' which entails risk and uncertainty. That is

² There is an additional important point regarding the fundamentally problematic nature of situating external actors' own interests and orientations. Whether innocently or perversely, external actors pursue interests and goals that respond to their perceptions (if innocently) or their interests (if perversely) that normally overrule local interests. This is why external (international) actors can facilitate internal processes of 'reorientation' that follow inclusive and participatory methods and outcomes, but not themselves lead these 'reorientations' of other peace systems.

why civilian peacebuilding actors such as Interpeace emphasise the importance of participatory and inclusive processes as these are critical to lowering uncertainty, risk and the possibility of doing harm. Through participatory, representative and inclusive processes, international actors can generate the right information to facilitate deliberative space for local actors to convene in a representative, constructive and ultimately positive way.

While these are difficult concepts to understand and communicate, it is important to highlight that significant progress is being made in policy and practise. Recent international efforts in research and policy advocacy such as *Pathways for Peace* highlight this. This shows concepts of local ownership continue to gain currency in international peacebuilding policy and practice.

However, the second major challenge - operationalising local leadership for local ownership - is in many instances plainly at-odds with the modalities, sequencing and governance of international actors themselves. Because peacebuilding processes continuously evolve, are impossible to repaginate over different contexts, are feverously complex and difficult to acquire full information about, it poses a significant challenge to the technical modalities that functionally deliver peacebuilding assistance. This means traditional theory of change and results frameworks are often too inflexible, planning and financing mechanisms are too fixed or narrow, and political mandates with hard sequencing deadlines are fundamentally at odds with local realities. Thus, to gear international peacebuilding interventions to be more 'local ownership friendly', many of the bureaucratic and technocratic rules that govern the implementation of international peacebuilding efforts of the international community need to be fundamentally refashioned.

Unfortunately, even if many of these issues have been highlighted before and recommendations made, often there has been a failure to implement and follow through on relevant recommendations. While progress is being made in these areas and new partnerships between international actors and local partners are demonstrating new ways of working together, it nonetheless remains the case these efforts remain marginal and insufficient compared to the way in which the majority of initiatives by international actors operate. That is why the Sustaining Peace reforms are an important opportunity to develop new partnerships, consider new mechanisms and reform the incentives that govern the current modalities of peacebuilding practise.

Appendix A.

Pathways for Peace and recommendations to enable greater local leadership

Pathways for Peace provides the most detailed review in the practitioner literature of global violent conflict trends since the World Bank 2011 World Development Report on conflict security and development. The primary shift it acknowledges is the fact that while violent conflict between states has increased in the past ten years, the majority of the global uptick in violence in this period has largely been in non-state actor conflicts either between different armed groups or between armed groups and the state. One key implication is that no single policy realm can 'do' conflict prevention. The report clearly argues and demonstrates from case study research that successful conflict prevention strategies need to therefore align peacebuilding, security, development and diplomatic action over the long term. However, like several landmark reports before it, there is a perceivable gap between the logic and arguments put forth and the way in which they may or may not be implemented.

The report summarises state-of-the art evidence and research from scholars and practitioners in the field around "what-does and does-not-work" in preventing conflict and violence and building long-lasting peace. It should be stated that while much of this research and the recommendations that flow from it has been present for many years in some cases, rarely has it been consolidated so comprehensively in one place. Much of what the report essentially calls for is a *transformation of arenas* of power and governance. This calls for peacebuilding actions that are more inclusive, representative, and equitable, focused on improving community and local dispute resolution, improved participatory processes, and the redress of forms of exclusion across groups and in remote or hard to reach areas.

The report also cites strong and comprehensive evidence that supports the positive role of approaches that are inclusive, engage civil society and how informal institutions can reduce the risk of conflict recurrence.³ To a significant extent, local ownership is a cross-cutting element to achieve these ambitious outcomes and can be seen as an organising principle for many of the key recommendations which are directly taken from the report and are further elaborated below.

- The need to establish credible forums for dialogue and exchange. Pathways for Peace argues prevention efforts should focus on strengthening the capacity of society for prevention—not just the state. This recommendation acknowledges that supporting local actors' efforts and informal institutions in prevention is a critical part of better understanding and addressing local grievances. For this decentralised approach to mediation and peacebuilding to work, it is important to create synergies among various efforts at local, national, and regional levels together with diplomatic efforts and investment in multitrack diplomacy.
- The need for bottom up approaches which put people at the centre of an approach to **Prevention.** The report cites very clear evidence on the need for people-centric approaches.

³ Paffenholz, T., A. Hirblinger, D. Landau, F. Fritsch, and C. Dijkstra. 2017. "Preventing Violence through Inclusion: From Building Political Momentum to Sustaining Peace." Background paper for the United Nations-World Bank Flagship Study, Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, World Bank, Washington, DC.

"Experience shows the importance of "bottom-up," community-driven conflict mitigation strategies with inclusive approaches to defining, re-establishing, and reforming institutions of governance and economic recovery strategies predicated on addressing inequality and exclusion." Furthermore, the report recommends that national actors should seek to reorient service delivery systems to make people partners in the design and delivery of public services.

- The process of how people are engaged is as critical as the resources they receive. The report clearly cites emerging evidence that appears to confirm the relative importance of how people are engaged is just as critical as the resources or services they receive, especially in areas of weak state presence or contested state legitimacy. This reaffirms a core Interpeace and broader peacebuilding principle that processes themselves are fundamental to a peacebuilding outcome, not just the material distribution of resources or justice outcome that a peacebuilding process will deliver.
- The need to mainstream people's engagement in community development programs and local conflict resolution. Not only is local conflict resolution important for the general population at-large but special focus is also required to engage underrepresented voices such as women, youth and marginalised groups and to increase the quality of people's engagement in those processes. Without addressing the perception of injustice across society, it is difficult for local actors to build the necessary levels of trust required to re-establish or reinforce the social contract.
- Embed and link grievance-handling mechanisms to development actions. Pathways for Peace argues that programs need to allocate resources to ensure that grievances are mediated quickly and transparently. Development actors should integrate support for national and local mediation practices as part of existing governance and economic planning and programming. This supports arguments for embedding peacebuilding practise much more thoroughly in other development and humanitarian action and supporting the need for much closer partnerships between international actors. While the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 called for closer coordination between development and humanitarian actors, there has been little progress on coordination with peacemaking and peacebuilding actors.
- Engage nonstate actors in specific platforms for peacebuilding. In many countries, prevention requires new coalitions that more accurately reflect the importance of young people, women, and representatives from the private sector, civil society and community-based organisations. Individuals and communities at the local level have the highest stakes in preventing violence and finding effective, lasting solutions must begin with them. Interpeace has for many years advocated that to foster lasting peace, it is often necessary to engage directly with violent actors themselves and engage them in participatory peace processes.
- Peace and security actors should work with development actors to incorporate longer-term perspectives. The report highlights one of the fundamental tensions between short and long term outcomes, 'by nature of their mandates, international actors engaged in peacemaking and peace operations tend to have a stronger focus on immediate needs, whether that means finding entry points for political engagement or addressing security concerns.⁶ While these efforts may

⁴ De Vries, H. 2016. The Ebb and Flow of Stabilization in the Congo. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute.

⁵ Marshak, A., D. Mazurana, I. H. Opio, R. Gordon, and T. Atim. 2017. "Tracking Change in Livelihoods, Service Delivery, and Governance: Evidence from a 2013–2015 Panel Survey in Uganda." Working Paper 59, Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, London; Mcloughlin, C. 2015. "Researching State Legitimacy: A Political Approach to a Political Problem." Research Paper 36, Developmental Leadership Program, University of Birmingham, U.K., November.

⁶ United Nations and World Bank (2018). Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, Washington, DC: World Bank, 285.

be important for short term stability, they should also assist the design of long term development strategies to build capacity and create sustainable institutions and committed citizenship. Collaboration between peace and security and development actors on long-term strategies for sustaining peace should respond to demands on the ground, supported by enhanced analysis and planning capacity. This recommendation is strongly echoed in the recent U.S. Government Special inspector General of Afghanistan report (SIGAR) on U.S. Stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan. Long term commitments are important for local ownership because only through a long-term focus is it possible to build the local capacity for local leadership and ownership.

- Create stronger bridges between diplomatic and development actions. Peacemaking has advanced beyond "state-centric" models and is increasingly engaging through multitrack (or "horizontal") strategies. Linking between mediation efforts, development assistance should be reinforced at national and subnational levels. Interpeace's Track 6 approach focused on better linking the different tracks of peacebuilding (Commonly referred to as Track 1, 2, 3), is a programmatic example of this. In peacemaking processes, there is often a broken link between track 1 processes and track 2 and 3 levels, thus undermining local peacebuilding processes that are critical to longer term peace.
- Much greater coordination and convergence needed. "Bringing the full power of international tools to bear on today's risks requires a much greater level of coordination and convergence than has been present historically. Achieving this demands a realignment of incentives to encourage greater collaboration among states and within the multilateral system." In order to develop more inclusive approaches that will lead to local leadership it will be necessary for international actors to collaborate much more closely and especially converge on their collective goals. One of these core collective goals is that of local leadership and ownership.

⁷ United Nations and World Bank (2018). Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, Washington, DC: World Bank, 262.

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