Has Gender Mainstreaming Failed?

A COMMENT ON INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY EXPERIENCES IN THE SOUTH

INTRODUCTION1

2005 marks a decade since governments across the world signed the Beijing Platform for Action (PfA) that endorsed a policy to promote gender equality and empower women. Gender mainstreaming was identified as the most important mechanism to reach the ambitious goals laid out in the PfA. Following the lead set in Beijing, in 1997 the UN adopted gender mainstreaming as the approach to be used in all policies and programmes in the UN system. Throughout the next decade governments and civil society organisations across the world have sought to implement the PfA – and in so doing to develop successful gender mainstreaming policies, strategies and methodologies.

Ten years later, practitioners around the world are asking if gender mainstreaming has succeeded; indeed some sceptics are already talking of its 'failure'. This brief comment seeks to contribute to this complex debate by reviewing the gender mainstreaming experiences of a specific group of institutions, rather than one government or organisation. These are the so-called 'northern' international development agencies, both bilaterals, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and multilaterals, such as the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), that have supported the so-called 'southern' governments and civil society in the implementation of gender mainstreaming - with analytical, institutional or financial assistance. In particular, the article mentions recent experience working for the UK Government's Department for International Development. So although these are northern institutions their focus is international and on the developing world of the south. The constituencies that influence their practice and contests their decision are both northern activist and lobbying organisations (such as Oxfam, Christian Aid, and ACORD in the UK), as well as southern activist groups in civil society.

Progress in gender mainstreaming can usefully be discussed in terms of four related stages; first, embracing the terminology of gender equality and gender mainstreaming; second, getting a gender mainstreaming policy into place; third,



implementing gender mainstreaming in practice; and fourth, evaluating or auditing the practice of gender mainstreaming. The article briefly discusses each of these stages, and also flags some comparative issues that may be of relevance to those grappling with similar (and different) issues of gender mainstreaming in the north.

EMBRACING THE TERMINOLOGY OF GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

In the past decade, the majority of development institutions, national governments and international NGOs have all adopted the terminology of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. There is a general consensus that gender equality refers to both the recognition that women and men have different needs and priorities, and that women and men should 'experience equal conditions for realising their full human rights, and have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from national, political, economic, social and cultural development' (CIDA 1999).

Most definitions of gender mainstreaming across institutions adhere closely to those set out by the UN Economic and Social Council (1997: 28) as follows:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

In addition, two further aspects of gender mainstreaming appear in some definitions; first, the institutionalisation of gender concerns within the organisation itself, relating to taking account of gender equality in administrative, financial, staffing and other organisational procedures, thus contributing to a long term transformative process for the organisation in terms of attitudes, 'culture', goals and procedures; second, gender empowerment, promoting women's participation in decision–making processes, as well as having their voices heard and the power to put issues on the agenda.

The degree to which 'equality' as against 'empowerment' is emphasised by different agencies may reflect the extent to which they are focused on all women in society, or prioritising those who are poor. By their very mandate development agencies prioritise poverty reduction and emphasise empowerment as much as equality as a mechanism to achieve poverty reduction.

GETTING A GENDER MAINSTREAMING POLICY INTO PLACE

The same institutions that have agreed on common definitions have also developed and endorsed gender mainstreaming policies. Table 1 provides a

Table 1 Components and associated activities of gender mainstreaming policy

Components	Activities	Bile	Bilaterals	s	IFIS	S		UN S	UN system	u		NGOs	so	- 1	%
		DŁID	CIDA	nbi2	IDB Asian DB	MB	NNIEEN	tatidaH	NNICEE	Ω ND $_{f b}$	biAnoit2A	aə motx0	souiH	ACORD	
Dual strategy of	Mainstreaming into policies, projects and	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	100
manisticalining and targeting gender equality	Ψ	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	100
Gender analysis		$\times \times$	××	×	××	×	××	\times		× ;	×	×		×	43
Internal responsibility	Gender sensitive budget analysis Responsibilities shared between all staff	×	×	×		×		×	×	××	×	×	×	×	79
Gender training	and gender specialists/local points Understanding and implementation of gender nolicy for staff and counterparts	×		×							×	×	×	×	43
	Staff/counterpart gender sensitisation Staff/counterpart gender training/skills	××	×		××	× >	×	××	××	\Join	×	\bowtie	×	×	93
Support to women's	Strengthening women's organizations through consolity building and training	4		×	4		×	4	4	4	×	×	×		36
and empowerment	Support to women's participation in	×	×	×	×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	98
	decision-making/empowerment Working with men for gender equality		×	×					×			×	×	×	43

93 14	71	43	20	50	21 14
×	×		×	×	
× ×	×				
×	×		×	×	
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Effective systems and tools for M&E Gender-sensitive indicators	Strengthening gender equality in work with government, donors, UN, private sector and NGOs	Capacity building of civil society Support to Nat. Women's Machineries	Allocation of financial resources for staff to carry out gender policy	Publications/knowledge base on best practice and effective strategies	Networks On-line data bases
Monitoring and evaluation	Work with other organizations		Budgets	Knowledge resources	

opment; CIDA – Canadian International Development Agency; Sida – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency; IDB – Inter-American Development Bank; Asian DB – Asian DB – Asian Development Bank; WB – World Bank; UNIFEM – United Nations Development Fund for Women; UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund; UNDP – United Nations Development Programme; OXFAM UK – OXFAM Great Britain; ACORD – Agency for Co-operation and Research in Key: IFI - International Financial Institutions; UN - United Nations; NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations; DFID - UK Department for International Devel-Development.

Source: DFID (2000); Derbyshire (2002); CIDA (1999); Sida (1997); IDB (n.d.); ADB (1998); World Bank (2002); Sandler (1997); UN Habitat (2002); UNICEF (2000); UNIDP (2002); ActionAid (2000); Oxfam GB (1993); Hivos (1996); ACORD (1999).

summary of the results from a recent desk review (see Moser and Moser 2003) that tabulated the common objectives, goals and strategies of a range of institutions that focus on development assistance in the south. As Table 1 identifies, the majority share a number of critical key components that include the following: all organisations identify a dual strategy of mainstreaming gender equality issues into all policies, programmes and projects, combined with supporting targeted actions for gender equality (100 per cent). The majority mention the need for gender training (93 per cent) and for systems and tools for monitoring and evaluation (93 per cent). Some form of gender analysis is identified by 86 per cent, as is support to women's active role in decisionmaking processes and empowerment. Finally, a combined approach on the issue of responsibility for gender mainstreaming is advocated. All staff share responsibility, but are supported by gender specialists. Institutionally, gender specialists are often located within a centralised team, as well as 'embedded' in decentralised departmental and regional offices. Dubel (2002) notes that this structure allows for top-down (policy development and programmatic support), and bottom-up (policy operationalisation) processes. Other gender mainstreaming components less frequently cited include the need to identify the roles and responsibilities of staff (57 per cent), and strengthening gender equality in cooperation with other organisations (71 per cent).

In the case of UK DFID, such policy, or strategy as it is defined, is set by its Policy Department located in London. Not unexpectedly, DFID's development of a gender policy was also the outcome of the Beijing Conference PfA. DFID's Target Strategy Paper (TSP), Poverty Elimination and the Empowerment of Women (DFID 2000) locates gender equality and the empowerment of women as a key component of its strategy aiming to contribute to the elimination of world poverty.

It identifies a twin-track approach which combines focused actions aimed at women's empowerment and gender-aware actions in the mainstream of development work.² DFID's (2002: 9) subsequent gender manual, while not further elaborating on the TSP 'twin-track' approach, provides a more detailed definition of mainstreaming:

A commitment to ensure that women's as well as men's concerns and experiences are integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all legislation, policies and programmes so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. Gender mainstreaming is integral to all development decisions and interventions; it concerns the staffing, procedures, and culture of the development organisations as well as their programmes: and it forms part of the responsibility of all staff. (DFID 2002: 9)

DFID's gender manual identifies four key steps in gender mainstreaming. These comprise sex-disaggregated data and gender-analytical information; women as well as men influencing the development agenda; context-specific action to promote gender equality; and organisation capacity-building and change.

Table 1 shows the remarkable consensus across such institutions in the components of their gender mainstreaming policy. Slight differences in emphasis exist. Bilaterals, for instance, report more activities concerned with strengthening civil society and working with national women's machineries; the United Nations agencies have an extensive system of gender focal points within the agency, as well as several agencies or divisions dedicated to gender equality – including UNIFEM, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) – which provide support and coordination for the UN system.

This significant level of agreement among northern development agencies raises interesting questions. Was this the result of an extensive consultative process or did leaders in the field first draft policy papers that were then copied by others? Was there a similar level of agreement among northern governments focusing on gender mainstreaming within their countries? Has there been collaboration between feminists working on gender mainstreaming in the north and south? Certainly, to my knowledge, there would appear to be little synergy between these two very different institutional worlds, with a tendency for those working within their own national and cultural boundaries to view as the 'other' the south, as well as those feminists who work on development issues (Moser 1993).

IMPLEMENTING GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PRACTICE

Putting gender policies in place has been an important achievement. Yet this does not mean that there has been successful implementation. Noaleen Heyzer, head of UNIFEM has noted that through regional and international conferences far-reaching agreements on gender equality have been achieved. The challenge now is holding stakeholders – governments, UN agencies, the private sector, civil society – accountable for implementation. Additional challenges relate to the development of appropriate methodologies to translate policy documents into operational strategies and implementation procedures. Here the experiences of development agencies may differ. In a recent gender audit undertaken for DFID, for instance, it was useful to start by providing a context-specific working definition of gender mainstreaming that avoided many of the semantic and associated analytical confusions in many gender mainstreaming documents (Moser et al. 2004; Moser 2005).

Gender mainstreaming was defined as a twin-track strategy, comprising the following two components (see Figure 1): first the integration of women's and men's concerns (needs and interests) throughout the development process (in all policies and projects); and, second, specific activities aimed at empowering women. The required outcomes relate to both increased equality and empowerment. While Figure 1 shows in diagrammatic form what is defined in many gender policy documents, a visual representation assists practitioners

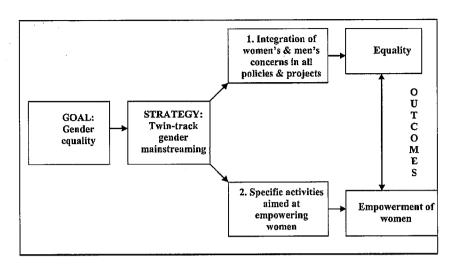


Figure 1 DFID gender mainstreaming strategy

to distinguish between overall goals, strategies and associated actions to achieve outcomes.

The outcome of PfA-instigated mainstreaming policies and strategies has been an extensive range of interventions globally in conventional social and economic sectors such as health, education, employment and welfare, as well as addressing more complex concerns such as gender-based violence, reproductive health and gender rights. Their scope goes way beyond a brief comment such as this. Nevertheless the conclusions reached in a recent UN Expert Consultation on the Beijing PfA with representatives from Asia/ Pacific, East and Central Europe, the Middle East and Latin America/the Caribbean provide a partial insight into current assessments. The group identified the seven principal achievements as follows: first, there is far greater public awareness today than a decade ago of gender inequality and women's capabilities to overcome it; second, there has been a significant strengthening of women's organisations with an important advocacy role; third, women's machineries within government are now firmly in place; fourth, resource allocations to social sectors have improved the status of women; fifth, legal reforms, as well as legal and policy frameworks for gender equality on a range of gender-related issues, are now in place in countries across the globe; sixth, in many regions women's human rights now provide the women's movement with an important peg or framework for advocacy; and, seventh, there have been considerable improvements in sex-disaggregated data at international and national level (Moser 2004).

In contrast to this positive assessment of the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the south, are those of bilateral agencies that consider most efforts are inconsistent, and generally involve only a few activities, rather than a coherent and integrated process. Sida, for instance, found that interventions showed only 'embryonic evidence' of working with gender mainstreaming processes (Mikkelsen et al. 2002); similar 'patchy' efforts towards gender mainstreaming were identified by Danida (2000), UNDP (Schalkwyk 1998), and two reviews of NGOs (Mayoux 1998; Wallace 1998).

While checklists such as these, by their nature, are both broad and general, they allow for reflection on north—south similarities and differences. Are these global priorities or those of gender mainstreaming in the south, and if so what are northern priorities?

EVALUATING OR AUDITING OF THE PRACTICE OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Ultimately the real litmus test as to whether or not gender mainstreaming has 'failed' can only be proved by robust monitoring and evaluation tools. This final section briefly identifies some well-known evaluation constraints and introduces a recently developed gender audit methodology (Moser et al. 2004; Moser 2005). Although gender evaluation has evolved along with gender and development debates, it is still rudimentary by comparison with the sophistication of gender analytical debates.³ The most commonly cited constraint is the lack of effective, consistent and systematic evaluation of gender mainstreaming outcomes and impacts.⁴

Challenges in identifying assessment criteria to measure the achievement of goals include appropriate indicators. Here, it is useful to distinguish between the following: first, implementation evaluations that monitor and evaluate the implementation of gender issues into procedures; second, impact evaluations that assess or measure the impact of interventions on gender equality and women's empowerment (Moser 1995). In theory, this requires four interrelated indicators, measuring inputs, outputs, effects and impacts. In practice, however, many evaluations simply refer to impact indicators generally, without differentiating further (see Hadjipateras 1997; Mayoux 1998).

Feminist research on impact indicators has focused specifically on indicators of empowerment. Malhotra et al.'s study (2003) employs Kabeer's (2001) definition of empowerment – 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' – and synthesises a range of indicators to measure women's empowerment. It suggests that these need to occur along six different dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political and psychological. Each of these should be measured at various levels of social aggregation, from the household, to the community, to broader national, regional and global levels.

In terms of their methodology, gender evaluations include participatory focus groups as well as a heavy reliance on staff interviews for perceptions and attitudes (Derbyshire 2002). Recently, however, agencies such as InterAction and the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) have introduced

'participatory gender audits'. These focus on the central role of organisational structure and culture in the design and delivery of gender-sensitive programmes and projects. As Sweetman (1997) argues: 'working on gender issues obliges organizations to set their own houses in order, and change aspects of the organisational culture which discriminate against women staff and women "beneficiaries". InterAction defines a gender audit as 'An assessment tool and process for organizations to use in identifying how gender issues are addressed in their programming portfolio and internal organizational processes... that require consistent and demonstrated political will from senior managers in the organisation' (InterAction 2003: 1). These focus primarily on internal organisational self-assessments as against external programmatic assessments.

A participatory gender audit that sought to combine both the internal and external components mentioned above was recently developed to evaluate DFID's policies, strategies and activities in Malawi – a country in which they are the largest bilateral programme (Moser et al. 2004; Moser 2005). This comprised both an external operational assessment of DFID's development objectives in relation to gender mainstreaming in its policies, programmes and projects, as well as an internal organisational assessment of management objectives of gender mainstreaming within DFID's Malawi office.

From the comprehensive audit documentation, space only permits mentioning one or two aspects of its methodology. First was the development of a conceptual framework for assessing gender mainstreaming. The gender audit was contextualised within a wider contested debate closely linked to the Millennium Development Goals and a preoccupation with gender policy 'evaporation'. Indeed, the terms of reference referred to the fact that DFID 'has lost internal advocacy on gender, and is at risk from similar "policy evaporation" on other cross-cutting issues' (DFIDM 2004: 1). Information collected during implementation revealed a far more complex situation. Thus, the final analytical framework was broadened to contain the following three concepts as the basis for assessing the implementation of gender mainstreaming; first, evaporation (when good policy intentions fail to be followed through in practice); second, invisibilisation (when monitoring and evaluation procedures fail to document what is occurring 'on the ground') and third, resistance (when effective mechanisms block gender mainstreaming, with opposition essentially 'political' and based on gender power relations, rather than on 'technocratic' procedural constraints).

In addition it was important to identify the appropriate quantitative or qualitative indicators with which to assess progress in gender mainstreaming. Following the structure in Figure 1, these required the following: first, measurement of the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategy in terms of integration of women's and men's concerns throughout the development process, as well as specific activities aimed at empowering women; and second, measurement of outputs and impacts in terms of equality and the empowerment of women.

Finally, the gender audit provided an opportunity to introduce three indicators into its assessment of DFIDM's country programme. These included input (gender mainstreaming in programme design); output (gender mainstreaming in implementation) and approximate gendered outcome (greater equality and empowerment) indicators. Wherever possible, considerable efforts were made to provide numerical enumeration to the different indicators, as discussed in greater detail in the following section.

In analysing the DFID Malawi gender audit data, a gender audit score card provided a useful overall methodological tool to synthesise briefly the audit findings in terms of the methodology identified above (see Table 2). The score card identified the different components and activities of an institution's gender mainstreaming strategy (Column 1), detailed associated components and activities (Column 2) and then assessed their implementation in the gender audit context (Column 3). Although a score card summarises the data usefully, substantiation of the evidence in greater detail is also important.

This very brief description of the gender audit methodology illustrates the way in which development institutions working in the south increasingly are being held accountable to deliver on gender mainstreaming not only in their operations, but also in their institutional structures. Rigorous monitoring by international NGOs and in-country civil society seek to ensure not only that adequate resources are allocated to gender mainstreaming, but also that organisations move closer to achieving equality and empowerment goals.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

With hindsight, the Beijing PfA was immensely ambitious, not only because of the bold goal it set itself, but also because of the lack of real clarity or directive as to what gender mainstreaming meant in practice. The issue, therefore, is not so much one of the failure or success of gender mainstreaming, as it is of deconstructing the concept and its different stages into a viable implementation process, with appropriate indicators to monitor or evaluate it – as UNIFEM itself now emphasises, ultimately gender mainstreaming is a process rather than a goal (Sandler 1997).

Drawing on the experience of northern development agencies that are supporting southern governments and civil society, this brief comment identifies such a process of gender mainstreaming as basically comprising four related stages. The evidence to date suggests that there have been greater advances in some stages than in others. Thus widespread consensus exists on stage one, embracing the terminology, as well as on stage two, getting a gender policy in place. Progress has been less even on stage three, implementing gender mainstreaming, or stage four, evaluating or auditing the practice. At the same time success or failure are relative, nuanced terms. As the scorecard from the recent gender audit of DFID's programme in Malawi showed, policy evaporation was sometimes important, but so too was invisibilisation

Table 2 Gender audit score card

DFID gender strategy	Detailed GM component	Assessment of implementation in DFIDM
Stated twin-track gender policy	Specific country gender strategy	DFIDM resists having a specific gender policy; it endorses gender equality and GM within its country strategy
1. GM strategy in country policy	Gender equality mainstreaming into DFID country strategy	Gender equality is mainstreamed into DFIDM's country policy. Gender analysis is mainstreamed into poverty reduction focused CAP analysis: but GM evanorates in associated actions
2. GM strategy in sector programmes	GM in header sheet (PIM marker)	Only 23% of current DFIDM programme have PIM markers so widely resisted or not identified as relevant (68 programmes), of which 75% are S
a) PIM assessment of entire programme	Gender specific objectives and OVIs	Evaporation begins to occur with GA not mainstreamed into gender specific objectives (1/3), with more limited number of OVIs (especially those with quantitative targets)
	Gender analysis (GA): sex-disaggregated data	All programmes include gender analysis; in 50% this is extensive. Overall strongest component of GM strategy
b) All other components of GM strategy in 10 selected programmes	Gender sensitive budget analysis	Virtually never included even when identified as priority in objectives
	Gendered components identified in implementation GM Training GM in OPRs (Effective systems for MEE)	Mixed evidence but tendency to be invisibilized in DFID documents; more likely to be picked up in NGO annual reports and field visits Mixed results but not a prerequisite in all programmes Entirely evaporated with no mention of GM in ¹ / ₁₃ of programmes – resistance or lack of specificity in OPR TORs; other OPRs critical of GM relates more to invisibilization in documents reviewed; frequently recommended as next stage priority

Technical support to strengthen institutional and operational capacity of the MoG in MOGCWCS drafting revised National Gender Programme. Weak status of ministry likely to result in <i>resistance</i> in its implementation; Donor harmonization through DAGG Specific 'add-on' components in some sector programmes particularly those with human rights approach, implemented by NGOs Mainstreamed within general support to civil society and also division of responsibility within DAGG	working on HIV/AIDS No gender specialists although SDA take primary responsibility. Skilled advisors very successfully include GM in their programming Less than 1/3 are technically very knowledgeable on GM; less than 1 in 5 aware DFID has GM strategy Available from DFID London but virtually none had consulted No ongoing GM capacity building in Malawi but high demand None
Strengthen gender equality in government, donors, and private sector Support to women's participation in decision-making/empowerment Strengthening women's organizations and NGOs through capacity building Working with men for gender	equality Responsibilities shared between all staff and gender specialists Internal capacity to implement GM by staff Manuals, toolkits Internal capacity strengthening Counterpart gender training Allocation of financial resources for staff for GM
3. Specific activities aimed at empowering women	4. Internal institutional responsibility and associated capacity building and budgetary resources

GM – gender mainstreaming; PIM – Policy Information Marker; OVI – Objectively Verifiable Indicator; OPR – Output to Process Review; MRE – monitoring and evaluation; NGO – Non-Governmental Organization; DFIDM – DIFD Malawi; CAP – Country Assistance Plan; GA-gender analysis; TOR – terms of reference; MoG – Ministry of Gender; MoGCWCS-Ministry of Gender, Child Welfare an Community Services; DAGG – Donor Agency Gender Network; SDA – social development adviser. (when successful gendered components implemented on the ground were ignored in monitoring and evaluation documents), as well as resistance (when powerful political interests blocked the weak Ministry of Gender from implementation of development agency supported initiatives) (see Table 2).

As much by default as design, development agencies are increasingly held accountable to deliver on gender mainstreaming. This is forcing them, sometimes reluctantly, to allocate resources and develop more robust methodologies, including those that 'empower' local women through participatory processes. Consequently recent 'best practices' from the south may provide useful lessons for those confronting problems of gender mainstreaming in the north. There are obviously differences in emphasis. In the north equality may be more of a priority than empowerment; gender mainstreaming may be seen more as the responsibility of government than other institutions (such as donors or civil society). Nevertheless, northern development agencies, straddling the north—south divide, and with a seasoned track record on gender mainstreaming, may have a useful contribution to make in shifting northern governments beyond the type of practices which either treat gender as neutral or ignore it altogether, and which have already been successfully challenged in the south.

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Notes

- 1 The article draws on four recently completed working papers on gender main-streaming (see Moser 2004, 2005; Moser and Moser 2003; Moser et al. 2004). I would like to acknowledge the collaboration of Annalise Moser, the contribution of Olivia M'Chaju-Liwewe and Naomi Ngwira and the support of Carolyn Hannan.
- 2 In the case of DFID the fact that the overall objective of the Target Strategy Paper was to make the case for women's empowerment means that the critical goals, objectives and strategies of gender equality are lost in the depth of the document and only mentioned on page 30 (DFID 2000).
- 3 The collection of essays on 'Repositioning Feminisms in Development' provides one such recent example (see IDS 2004).
- 4 See for instance Sida (Mikkelsen et al. 2002) and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida) (2000), and international NGOs such as Hivos (2001), UNIAMWGE (2001) and ACORD (Hadjipateras 1997).

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