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# The Dynamics of Poverty in Senegal: Chronic poverty, transitional poverty, and vulnerabilities



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This study was conducted by the Research Laboratory on Economic and Social Transformations (LARTES-IFAN) with support from CPRC, UNICEF, IRD, and the Ministry of Family and Early Childhood. It is the first study of its kind in Senegal, in terms of its dynamic approach, which enabled us to capture 80 years of social history through the individuals surveyed. It has also allowed the identification of situations whereby individuals enter, exit, or remain in, a state of poverty.

The study takes a two-pronged approach, drawing on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative data (i.e. through analysis of biographies). In doing so it places events in an individual's life in the context of their socio-economic condition and so analyses the impacts of these events on the ways in which individuals experience poverty. Through the use of quantitative and qualitative data (which provides rich context) this study seeks to explain the dynamics of poverty and its impacts.

## Sources of the study and methodology

The quantitative component of the study used various data collection tools. First, a household survey was conducted in 2008 using a sample of 1,200 households representing three strata of Senegal's population (Dakar and its outskirts, rural areas, and other urban areas in Senegal). Altogether 10,104 individuals were surveyed.

Then, a biographic survey was conducted in 2008/2009 with a sample of 2,400 individuals from the household survey and representing the head of the house, as well as the principal breadwinner.

The second section, more qualitative in its outlook, consisted of 300 biographies with 100 stories collected for each of the three main issues of interest:

- the inter-generational transmission of poverty
- evolution of family structures within the context of chronic poverty
- relationship networks

The data was analysed in NVIVO 8.

The first step of the research was to explore: the inter-generational transmission of poverty, poverty and the evolution of family structures within that context and the nexus between poverty and social networks.

After this, we conducted more in-depth analyses into: education, health and chronic poverty as well as comparative studies of urban and rural poverty. The results obtained informed us about the context of poverty in households for 2008/2009, the dynamics of poverty and suggested variables to look for; chronic poverty and transitional poverty, the poverty profile in Senegal in 2009, the determining factors to explain entry into poverty, poverty transmission processes and evolutions in family structures.

## Coming up with proxy data on poverty

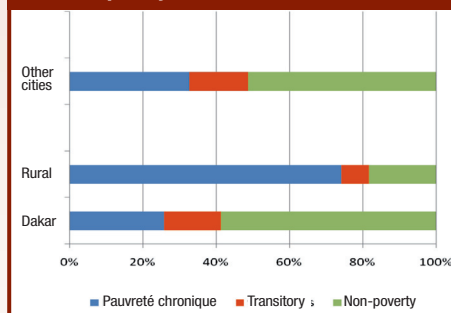
In order to come up with proxy data on poverty, we have to work with variables that allow us to position individuals on a spectrum ranging from poor to well-off. These variables must be present across the stages of the life-course of all individuals and reflect their poverty status. Poverty will be the dependent variable.

Hence, in its construction, we cannot include independent variables such as education levels, migration, or age. A composite indicator of non-monetary poverty was thus used, based on housing condition and materials, an estimation of income and holdings for each stage in the individual's life, as well as perceptions of their own living conditions.

## What shape do households take in Senegal?

A 2008/2009 poverty profile of Senegalese households shows that 60.4 per cent are poor. In other words, six out of every ten households are considered either poor or vulnerable. Among these six households, four are currently poor, while the remaining

Figure 1: Distribution of households according to level of poverty and area of residence



Source: Vulnerabilities and chronic poverty Survey in Senegal, 2008/2009

two are vulnerable to an external shock (e.g. economic, health-related or environmental) that can rapidly force them into poverty. In Senegal, poor households are primarily located in rural areas, followed by the outskirts of Dakar, other urban settings and finally within Dakar itself. Of poor households, 66.9 per cent live in a rural setting, 19.0 per cent in Dakar and its outskirts, and 13.0 per cent in other urban areas.

As shown in Figure 1, nearly 75 per cent of households in rural areas are considered chronically poor, while only 18 per cent have never experienced poverty. In other cities, chronic poverty affects 37% of households, while 50 per cent of people there have never lived in poverty. In the capital, the situation improves with more than half the households never having experienced poverty. However, 27 per cent of households in the capital live in chronic poverty.

The households surveyed are large, reflecting a composition based around extended family ties (95.0 per cent). Only one in every 50 individuals shares no family ties with the head of the household. While half the households are made up of five to nine members, a quarter of them are much larger, consisting of between ten and 14 people. The nuclear household (father, mother, and children) represents a third, or roughly 34 out of every 100 households in Senegal. The nuclear family, as a sign of "modernization" is gaining ground in Senegalese society. However, the composition of households remains complex and those households with more than one core family unit represent the majority (56.5 per cent).

The number of female headed households in urban areas is greater than in rural ones. In Dakar, four out of ten households are headed by women, while in rural areas this figure falls to one in every ten. Altogether, women head a quarter of all households. Expenses are often shared between household members, with this being the case in 60 per cent of households surveyed. At the national level the number of breadwinners in a household ranges from two to five individuals. However, in the capital city, households generally depend on the income of just one person.

We found that four per cent of households do not count on any of their members to contribute to food expenses. In other words, someone outside the household is entirely responsible for these expenses, or else each member is responsible for their own food security. This is especially the case with households that function like dormitories and where individuals eat at their place of employment or with neighbours. In terms of health related expenses nine per cent of households do not count on any of their household members to contribute to these, showcasing the extreme vulnerability of these households. A strong relationship exists between a household's level of poverty and the extent to which children enter the informal sector of the economy. In nearly five per cent of households considered poor, the children work in the informal sector. This figure increases to 6.5 per cent in the most vulnerable households. This nexus between poverty and informal sector employment increases in households where there are children. The need to increase household financial resources

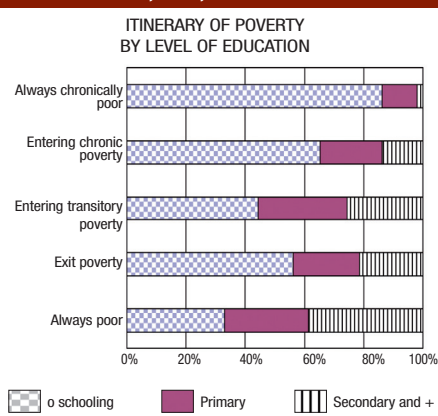
remains one of the main causes of premature employment for children, who are thus forced to contribute to household expenses. Child labour often occurs immediately after the child stops going to school or during a transitional period where s/he has had to work during school holidays and after school hours.

Children in poor families work at a huge cost to their education and capacity to develop professional skills that would yield greater economic benefit in later years. One coping strategy of poor households then, is removing children from school to increase household income. However, we find that those who do not receive an education are unable to escape rural poverty (Figure 2).

## Chronic poverty: very ruralised and very present amongst the non educated

As Figure 2 shows, 84 per cent of all chronically poor people have not received school education. Among

**Figure 2. Poverty path with respect to education level, EVPC, Lartes 2009**

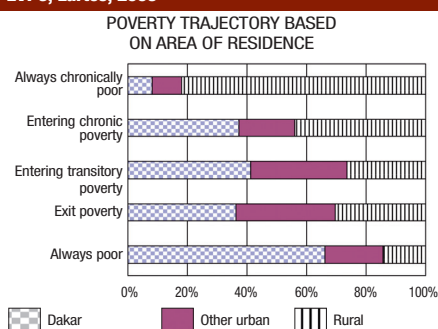


Source: Vulnerabilities and chronic poverty Survey in Senegal, 2008/2009

those who become poor at a later stage the proportion not receiving a school education is 62 per cent. Lack of schooling exacerbates vulnerability with 42 per cent of those experiencing transitional poverty not having gone to school. Among the 58 per cent who received an education, 36 per cent reached primary education level and 22 per cent have gone to secondary school and beyond. This suggests the importance of post-primary education to escaping poverty.

Education provides an important means of exiting poverty, with more than half (52 per cent) of those

**Figure 3: Poverty path based on area of residence, EVPC, Lartes, 2009**



Source: Vulnerabilities and chronic poverty Survey in Senegal, 2008/2009

who were able to exit poverty having some level of education. Similarly, 70 per cent of those who have never experienced poverty are educated. Amongst the latter, 38 per cent reached secondary school and beyond. In addition to poverty being related to education it is also related to area of residence. Among individuals classified as poor, 82 per cent live in rural areas, eight per cent live in the capital Dakar, and ten per cent in other cities (Figure 3).

Poverty can be more easily addressed in the cities, with 42 per cent of individuals in transient poverty living in Dakar, 32 per cent in other cities, while 26 per cent live in rural settings. On the other hand, data on poverty exit provides a more balanced picture. Our research shows that residents of Dakar are more likely to get out of poverty, with 36 per cent of individuals exiting poverty. In other cities this figure is 32 per cent and in rural areas it drops to 26 per cent.

We witness a similar trend when considering people who have never experienced poverty. 66 per cent of these individuals are concentrated in Dakar, with the other cities following with 19 per cent. In rural settings on the other hand, only 14 per cent of the population has never experienced poverty throughout their lifetime. Vulnerabilities are more structural than they first appear and circumstance-based vulnerabilities act as an exacerbating factor.

## Analysis of inter-generational poverty

At each stage of life, transitional poverty appears less important, but we noted that from one stage to the next, many individuals transit from one category to the other. Figure 4, above, presents the different "poverty transitions" occurring between early childhood and youth, youth and adulthood and finally adulthood and old age. Within these different

transitions many people who were chronically poor at one life-stage remain so at the next stage. Similarly, the majority of those not affected by poverty remain shielded from poverty at the next stage.

Individuals are even poorer than households with, at the time of this study (2008/2009), only 26 per cent of people never experiencing a state of poverty. The percentage of poor persons is about 74 per cent (transitory poor and chronically poor). On the other hand, people in transient poverty represent 40 per cent of the sample and the chronically poor stand at 34 per cent (figures taken from 2,048 individual biographies from the initial 2,400 individuals selected).

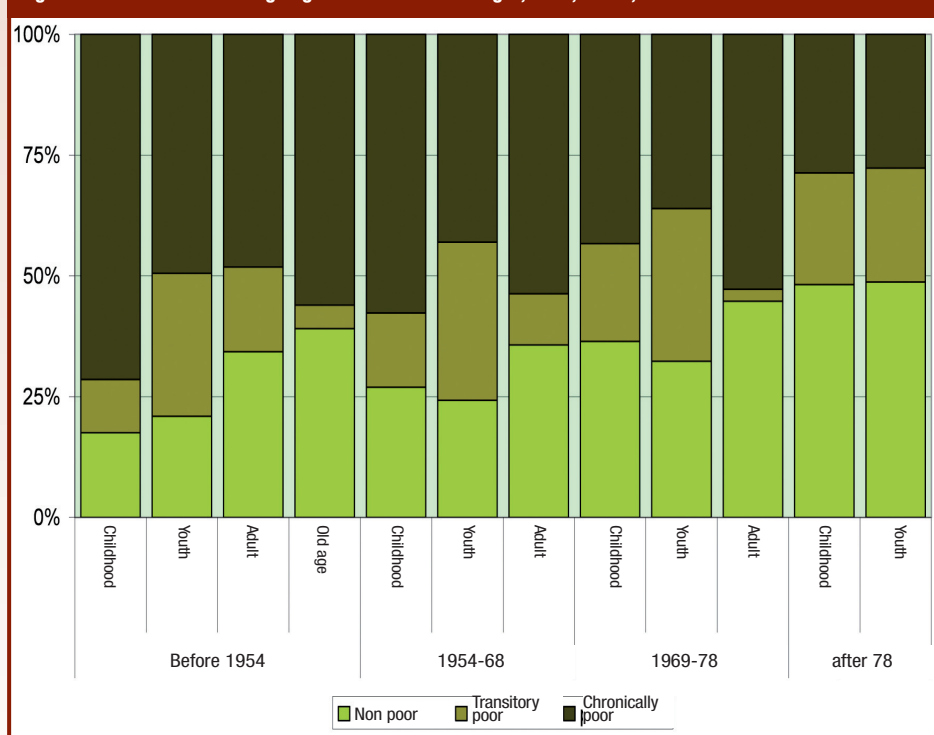
Overall, this study demonstrates that little mobility exists within the poverty spectrum, as well as the dominant presence of chronic poverty in each stage of life. Moreover, poverty is more evident among rural populations and those lacking education. In rural settings, only 22 per cent of the surveyed population qualifies as "not poor", while the remaining 78 per cent are all poor. In cities outside Dakar the non-poor represent the majority (60 per cent), while the poor stand at 40 per cent. Residents of the capital fare better with only 32 per cent of the population considered poor and 68 per cent are not in a state of poverty.

## Getting out of poverty: what are the odds?

The point of this study is not only to collect data on poverty, but also to offer analysis of its dynamics. By combining analyses of households and individuals we can put poverty into context and can highlight the evolution of poverty, or its regression, with respect to generation, gender, area of residence and the events of an individual's life.

From one stage of life to another very few changes

**Figure 4. Distribution according to generations and life stages, EVPC, Lartes, 2009**



Source: Vulnerabilities and chronic poverty Survey in Senegal, 2008/2009

occur in an individual's poverty status, with the exception of the young whose chances of exiting poverty are greater. There is very little mobility within the poverty spectrum and the situation worsens with age. Women are more likely to free themselves from poverty. Rural residence and a lack of education are key factors that maintain people in poverty. In addition to these structural causes, we note that circumstance-based factors, such as shocks or disasters (e.g. divorces, or the death of a spouse), keep people in poverty.

Many believe that access to employment can be accelerated through using social connections. However, it is beneficial for jobseekers to develop greater autonomy in securing employment, rather than remaining indebted to whoever provided help in accessing the job. More autonomy increases the chances of exiting poverty.

Individuals from minority ethnic groups are more likely to experience chronic poverty, regardless of their age. Members of the Wolof community, for instance, seem to access more opportunities, and are less likely to plunge into chronic poverty (83 per cent greater risk for a Pulaar or a Sereer and 80 per cent

shocks including divorce or widowhood, as well as having children living in the household (after the adult is 40 years old) are all factors that determine their chronic poverty status.

As senior citizens women are less likely than men to live in chronic poverty. This could be explained by the greater dependence of men on cash income, arising largely from onerous, manual labour. Women, meanwhile, are generally more dependent on physically less-demanding homestead-based activities.

We also note that where an individual has not received an education by the age of 25, their chance of being chronically poor increases fourfold as compared to a person having benefitted from a secondary school education.

As mentioned earlier, chronic poverty is disproportionately experienced by people of minority ethnic groups, and this also applies to senior citizens, particularly those among Pulaar, and Sereer. Individuals from these ethnic groups are 3 times more likely to experience chronic poverty in old age than a Wolof senior citizen. As expected, older people

(friendship, employer, NGO, association etc.), sees their odds of escaping poverty in old age multiplied by 12. Many people, though, remain poor their entire life and then transmit this poverty to their descendants.

## How is poverty transmitted?

In revisiting theories of transmission we find a gradual shift in paradigm, marked by a departure from deterministic and objectivistic connotations, towards an acknowledgement of individuals' apacity to act and overcome the odds. The results of our study confirm this and also reach two main findings. First, poverty is experienced across a long period within the lifetime of an individual or household. Second, poverty is not an irreversible situation. Many factors can contribute to the interruption of its transmission from one generation to the next. For example, international transfers of resources, better education, and improved professional qualifications.

From a time perspective, we identify two types of poverty-transmission between generations, an active transmission and a gradual one. While analyzing the direct factors of transmission between generations, the "economics" variable (parents' employment and income) clearly stood out as a critical factor.

The mechanisms whereby deficits in material resources are transmitted to the next generation though, are not solely accountable for the transmission of chronic poverty. Further analysis shows that other mechanisms of transmission may operate at a slower rate, while the deficits accumulate. When collecting biographies we noted that in several cases individuals devise and implement strategies to retain and build on their existing resources.

However, retaining or increasing material resources is sometimes done in an unsustainable manner and does not always prevent new deteriorations in living conditions and well being. It seems that even in cases where adequate material resources are transmitted, the possibilities of new deficits remains a threat. Limitations in the transmission of non-material and social resources also mean that individuals are not able to take the types of choices and opportunities that will enable an autonomous exit from poverty.

For younger generations (essentially children), the consequences of weak family social resources are less clear. Here, we witness different forms of integration (social, religious and through sport) which act as resistors to increasing social isolation and the breaking-down of social networks. While we acknowledge that social isolation contributes to assigning a "space" and a "culture" to poverty, because it is accepted and internalized by the individual, we also note that younger generations are not as negatively affected by a feelings of inferiority or helplessness and do not feel as restricted from participating in community life.

This perspective raises questions in the context of developing countries, where massive pauperization is reaching more strata of society. We need to look at different research theories which focus on the impacts of deprivation in the household for children.



Floods in the outskirts of Dakar, 2010

Source: Vulnerabilities and chronic poverty Survey in Senegal, 2008/2009

for a Diola compared to their Wolof counterpart). Some shocks experienced during early childhood (e.g. fires, loss of harvest, flooding, theft, insecurity, conflict, social unrest, or loss of capital) also exacerbate vulnerability to chronic poverty.

Although individuals have more opportunities to escape poverty in their youth, 39% of the young people surveyed live in chronic poverty. The geographical setting and the level of education, both of the individual and that of the person responsible for their upbringing, are factors determining the likelihood of an individual experiencing chronic poverty during their youth.

For adults (35-54 years old), besides living in a rural area and lacking education, having to cope with

of rural populations are more exposed to chronic poverty than older city dwellers. Spouses who look after one another are less likely to enter suddenly into a state of chronic poverty. Savings and material assets are an indication of "non-poverty". Having support systems and social networks (whether on a regular basis or for exceptional circumstances) help senior citizens to avoid chronic poverty.

The importance of social networks is relevant to all ages and plays an important role in enabling exit from poverty. For example, a 25 year old with a regular family support system is 2.5 times more likely to escape poverty than their counterpart who does not enjoy the same privilege. The 40 year old who can benefit from a network outside their family

For, the duration of time people spend in poverty can become the critical factor determining the extent to which individual resilience increases or decreases.

We also witness initiatives developed to deal with adversity. The “banlieusard” identity (populations living in the outskirts of Dakar) is now worn as a badge of honor by the residents themselves, in a bid to publicly acknowledge their atypical life stories. It also reflects vividly the challenging environment in which they live, whereby exiting poverty is considered a miracle. This symbolizes a new popular type of urban creativity in response to poverty.

## What changes within family structures in a situation of ever present chronic poverty?

We have noted changes in what were previously considered to be “common paths”. Family structures adopt new arrangements and different generations coexist to a greater extent than we could have predicted, including in cities. The extended household form also shows signs of changes in its organisation and function, both within family nuclei and between them.



Slums housings in Senegal, 2010

Source: Vulnerabilities and chronic poverty Survey in Senegal, 2008/2009

Solidarity remains in general, but it has become more selective and circumstance-based. For instance, when a distant relative suffers from a shock (as a health shock), help is not provided on a permanent basis. Rather, people often commit resources for the circumstance (which in itself is considered a sacrifice), but do also leave open the possibility that the transfer of these resources could be renewed.

The original social networks maintain their integration role, although the lack of relationship networks is one of the first forms of isolation that migrants to the city suffer from. Paradoxically, migrants in the city act less and less as points-of-contact for new arrivals. In some cases, relationships with the home environment become strained and grow more distant.

Resource-sharing has become a security-net, as seen in the case of “satellite households”, whereby married sisters share the kitchen of their mother’s

home and take turns managing it. This arrangement operates in a similar way to collective kitchens that have separate residential quarters. Caring for the ascendants, especially the mother, is imperative for city dwellers, regardless of family composition. Women, meanwhile, are more active in mobilizing resources for the home, while retaining their prerogatives on how these resources are managed.

Community support groups in both rural areas and cities also provide an important source of security and enable communities to improve their situation. Living conditions are worsening with negative impacts on the futures of children. These children are increasingly left to the care of “marabouts”, master craftsmen, distant relatives, or other intermediaries. We also note a new but growing interest in occupations that do not necessarily require many skills or qualifications.

In an environment where scarcity is the norm, people do not show much concern for low productivity in the workplace. Children leave school prematurely, resulting in their entering employment early and also contributing to early marriages. Meanwhile, among the middle classes, some hope of social mobility exists because individuals invest in their descendants.

## The fight against poverty: policy implications

1. Chronic poverty, transient poverty and vulnerability predominantly affect rural areas and those lacking education. This calls for a departure from previous policies, and a need to **refocus efforts on developing human capital, agricultural investments and food security, especially in rural areas**
2. Poverty is the direct consequence of weak capitalization of national resources, as well as weaknesses in social policy formulation.

It is thus imperative to **invest in areas with high employment potential**, including rural regions, which can act as lever for other sectors,

especially because of the high agro-production potential. The social economy, including social entrepreneurship and any **economic activity with a social end** (credit unions, associations, etc.) must act as a lever for development and should be linked with development initiatives at the local and national levels.

**It is also essential to formulate public policies that are coherent, take into account principles of inclusive growth and put the poor as well as the middleclass at the centre of wealth production and sharing.**

3. Since poverty is transmitted directly from vulnerable parents to their children any social or economic transformation must involve policies geared at enabling **upward social mobility**. The acquisition of quality education, mass and decent employment and vocational training remain **the best means to promote social mobility**. Chronic poverty has dominated the past 80 years of Senegal’s social history. The chronically poor outnumber the transient poor and the non-poor alike. **The young** have a greater chance of escaping from poverty. **It is then, on this group that we must invest most of our efforts, if we are to succeed in reversing these trends.**
4. **Shocks** such as price hikes, loss of employment, chronic illness, disasters, (e.g. floods, loss of harvest), and conflicts (e.g. armed conflict in the south and land tenure problems in other regions) **call for specific strategies that reflect these issues**. These strategies must take into account not only country planning, but also investments regarding the living environment and sanitation planning. Policies to prevent and manage **natural disasters and risks** related to other kinds of catastrophes are also wanting.
5. Families survive thanks to social solidarity, but this proves insufficient to get out of poverty. **It is necessary that help from the central and local governments complement these community support mechanisms, in a way that is more targeted, structured, and inclusive**. The future of children is threatened by abrupt changes to family structures.

The arrangements within households, whose size increases without guaranteeing stability, put children at greater risk. A reformation of the public school system to provide better quality education and greater accessibility is essential. More generally, a **strategy for child protection** is indispensable and must be formulated and implemented to deal with child abuse and give children equal opportunity.

6. The Senegalese government must pay more attention to the **coherence of policies** so as to **focus on better cross-sector integration** and the erection of economic clusters. Moreover, the government should learn from, and move towards/link with initiatives led by various stakeholders, which have proven successful, within an open governance environment.

## What is to be done?

### A. Guiding principles

1. Inclusive growth promoting participation of the poor in wealth creation and sharing.
2. Sustainable economy.
3. Actions based on human rights : decent jobs, gender equality, social cohesion, focus on the human being, social and economic justice.
4. Geographical balance and promotion of upward mobility and development.

### B. Targets

1. Integrate the poor, vulnerable people and the middle class (meaning not clear).
2. Invest in young people, while paying special attention to children.
3. Empower women in their roles with respect to entrepreneurship, and home economics.
4. Give priority to rural populations and those living in the outskirts of big cities.

### C. Priorities

1. Development of human capital and social policies: education, vocational training, widespread health services, social housing, sanitation, nutrition etc.
2. Targeted and coherent investments in agriculture and rural development.
3. Promotion of the social economy (social entrepreneurship). Mobilization of national resources and protection of means of production with respect to SMEs as a priority in wealth creation.
4. Social nets (provisions against shocks and disasters , cash transfers, community health providers, community nutrition, extension of social security , support to vulnerable groups : HIV patients, victims of conflict, displaced populations, disabled individuals etc.) ; and child protection (respect for children's rights, protection for vulnerable and malnourished children, guarantees against child abuse, and care for children who have broken the law, etc.)..

### D. Approaches

1. Adequate targeting and prioritization of groups, communities, and localities.
2. Upward bound approach: local development, collective responsibility, citizen oversight, equal access to and quality of public services.
3. Coherence in policy formulation: cross sector integration, formulation of social and political policies promoting economic growth, development of economic clusters.
4. Open governance promoting co-production of policies by the various stakeholders, accountability, and efficiency of results, scaling up of social and technical innovations.

### E. Impact

1. Increases in human capital leading to greater social mobility and a larger middle class.
2. Food security thanks to larger outputs and productivity, a diversity of sectors leading to economic growth
3. Redistribution of resources
4. Transparency, equality, and quality of public services thanks to stronger governance and more balance between geographical clusters.

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