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# The Role of Local Government Administration in Rural Development in Nigeria: Evidence from Bichi Local Government Area, Kano State

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## *Abstract*

*Local government administration is intended to provide a proximate institutional mechanism for translating public policy into grassroots development, particularly in rural communities where access to infrastructure, social services, and economic opportunities remains constrained. This study examines the role of local government administration in rural development in Bichi Local Government Area (LGA) of Kano State, Nigeria, with particular attention to infrastructure development, social services, agricultural support, community empowerment, and citizen participation during the period 2019–2023. The study adopted a descriptive survey design within a mixed-methods framework. Data were obtained from 100 respondents comprising local government officials, community leaders, and rural residents, supplemented by semi-structured key-informant interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, and Likert-scale summaries, while qualitative evidence was used to provide contextual interpretation of the survey findings. The results reveal substantial gaps in public awareness and engagement with local government administration: only 13% of respondents reported awareness of local government responsibilities, while 84% reported that they had never benefited directly from a local government project. Infrastructure development received the most favourable assessment, with 50% of respondents expressing agreement that the local government contributes to infrastructural improvement. In contrast, agricultural support attracted the weakest assessment, with 44% expressing disagreement. Corruption was identified as a major constraint, with 62% agreeing that it affects local government project performance, while 67% were uncertain about the existence of a functional monitoring and evaluation system. Similarly, 77% either disagreed that the local government possessed sufficient resources for development or were uncertain about its resource adequacy. The study concludes that local government administration in Bichi LGA has made uneven contributions to rural development and that institutional, financial, accountability, and participatory weaknesses constrain its developmental effectiveness. It recommends strengthening public civic education, fiscal and project transparency, participatory planning, agricultural support, administrative capacity, and functional monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to improve grassroots development outcomes.*

**Keywords**: local government administration; rural development; decentralisation; grassroots governance; citizen participation; Kano State; Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

Local government occupies a strategically important position in Nigeria's system of decentralised governance because it represents the level of government intended to operate closest to citizens and to translate public policies into services and development interventions at the grassroots. The rationale for local government is not simply administrative proximity; decentralisation is also expected to improve responsiveness by allowing public authorities to identify and address needs that may be poorly captured by more centralised institutions. In Nigeria, this rationale is reflected in the constitutional recognition of local government and in the functions assigned to local councils under the Fourth Schedule to the 1999 Constitution, including responsibilities relating to local infrastructure, public facilities, primary and adult education, health-related services, agricultural development, and other activities intended to promote local welfare (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Consequently, local government remains an important institutional arena through which questions of rural development, service delivery, participation, and grassroots accountability can be examined.

The importance of this role is particularly pronounced in rural communities, where deficits in infrastructure, productive opportunities, and access to essential services can constrain household welfare and local economic development. Rural development is consequently understood not merely as the construction of physical infrastructure but as a multidimensional process involving improvements in living conditions, access to social services, productive capacity, employment opportunities, participation, and the ability of communities to influence decisions affecting their welfare (Chambers, 1983; Todaro & Smith, 2011). In this context, the effectiveness of local government should be assessed not only by the existence of formal developmental responsibilities but also by the extent to which those responsibilities translate into interventions that are visible, accessible, relevant, and beneficial to local populations. Recent scholarship on Nigerian decentralisation continues to identify local government as potentially important to grassroots development while highlighting persistent weaknesses in fiscal autonomy, institutional capacity, political control, accountability, and service delivery (Ogunnubi, 2022; Okorie et al., 2022). Evidence from other Nigerian local-government contexts similarly indicates that weaknesses in community participation and alignment between local projects and community priorities can limit the developmental value of decentralised governance.

The problem, therefore, is not necessarily the absence of a formal developmental mandate but the persistent gap between assigned responsibility and realised developmental outcomes. Nigerian local governments have historically operated within a complex intergovernmental environment in which their financial and administrative autonomy has been contested. The resulting dependence on intergovernmental transfers, state-level influence, weaknesses in local administrative capacity, and concerns regarding accountability have generated sustained debate about whether decentralisation has produced the degree of grassroots responsiveness originally envisaged. Recent research continues to report that political, bureaucratic, and fiscal dimensions of decentralisation have not been fully realised in practice, thereby limiting the capacity of local governments to satisfactorily discharge their constitutional mandates (Okorie et al., 2022). A 2024 study of local government and rural development in Kaduna State, for example, linked rural-development constraints to the continued influence of state-level structures and the limited autonomy of local councils.

These concerns have acquired renewed policy significance following recent developments in Nigeria's local-government autonomy debate. The Supreme Court's intervention in 2024 concerning the financial autonomy of local governments intensified national attention on the

relationship between local-government finances, state-level control, and grassroots development. This development does not alter the empirical period examined in the present study, which is 2019–2023, but it provides an important contemporary context for interpreting the institutional problems identified in the study. More broadly, the continuing debate demonstrates that the effectiveness of decentralised governance depends on more than the formal allocation of functions: local authorities also require predictable resources, administrative capability, mechanisms for accountability, and meaningful opportunities for citizens and community institutions to participate in development decisions.

Within Kano State, these questions are particularly relevant to rural local government areas whose populations depend substantially on agriculture, informal economic activity, local infrastructure, and publicly provided social services. Bichi Local Government Area provides a useful setting for examining these issues because the effectiveness of local administration can be assessed from the perspective of residents and community stakeholders who experience the consequences of local development decisions directly. Yet, despite the broader literature on Nigerian local government, there remains limited community-level empirical evidence specifically examining how residents and local stakeholders perceive the contribution of a particular local government to rural development across multiple domains, including infrastructure, agricultural support, social services, empowerment, and community participation. This gap is important because aggregate assessments of decentralisation can obscure substantial differences between localities in institutional visibility, project reach, citizen engagement, and perceived effectiveness.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the role of local government administration in rural development in Bichi Local Government Area of Kano State. The study focuses on the period 2019–2023, while primary data were collected in 2025 to obtain respondents' retrospective assessments of local government activities and experiences during the study period. It examines four interrelated dimensions of local government performance: public awareness and perceived institutional role; contributions to socio-economic and infrastructural development; constraints affecting local-government performance, particularly resource adequacy, corruption, accountability, and monitoring; and opportunities for strengthening grassroots development. The study is particularly concerned with whether formal decentralisation has translated into meaningful developmental reach and citizen engagement at the local level.

Accordingly, the study seeks to contribute empirical evidence to the continuing debate on decentralisation and rural development in Nigeria by moving beyond the existence of constitutional responsibilities to examine how those responsibilities are perceived and experienced at community level. By focusing on Bichi LGA, the study provides a locality-specific assessment of the relationship between local government administration and rural development and highlights the institutional conditions that may strengthen or weaken the developmental value of local governance. The findings are intended to inform ongoing discussions concerning local-government effectiveness, citizen participation, accountability, and rural development in Kano State and comparable Nigerian local-government jurisdictions.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### *2.1 Conceptualising Rural Development*

Rural development is widely conceptualised as a multidimensional process aimed at improving the living standards, productive capacity, and welfare of rural populations through infrastructure provision, poverty reduction, and expanded access to social services such as health and education (Todaro & Smith, 2011). In the Nigerian context, rural development is further understood as a deliberate effort to narrow the socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas, disparities that are often exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure and limited access to basic services (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2005). Chambers (1983) frames rural development normatively as a process of "putting the last first," prioritising the needs of the rural poor who are typically marginalised in national development planning. Within this framework, local government administration is positioned as the institutional vehicle through which rural development policy is operationalised at the community level (Arowolo, 2010).

### *2.2 Local Government Administration in Nigeria*

Local government is constitutionally defined as the third tier of Nigeria's federal system, established to bring governance closer to the grassroots (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Ogunna (1996) describes it as the administrative authority responsible for governance at the sub-national level — towns, villages, and rural districts — tasked with decentralising power and tailoring development interventions to local needs. Local governments are formally assigned responsibility for promoting democratic participation (Ajayi, 2000), delivering basic services including healthcare, education, water, and rural roads (Agbakoba & Ogbonna, 2004), and facilitating local economic development through support for smallholder agriculture, small and medium enterprises, and rural infrastructure (Ekpo & Ndebbio, 1998).

Despite this mandate, Nigerian local governments have historically struggled to translate constitutional responsibility into developmental outcomes. Ezeani (2012) attributes this shortfall to weak fiscal autonomy arising from state governments' control over joint state–local government accounts, alongside the frequent dissolution of elected councils and their replacement with caretaker administrations, both of which erode institutional continuity and democratic accountability. Ogunna (1996) further identifies inadequate staffing and limited technical capacity as persistent constraints on effective local government performance.

### *2.3 Empirical Review*

Empirical evidence on local government performance in rural development is broadly consistent with these institutional critiques. Agba, Akwara, and Idu (2013), in a multi-state study, found that although substantial resources are formally allocated to local governments, weak administrative capacity and the diversion of funds through corrupt practices considerably limit actual service delivery. Similarly, Arowolo (2010) documented modest progress in rural infrastructure — roads, health centres, and schools — but noted a persistent gap between allocated resources and infrastructural outcomes, attributable to political interference and poor budgetary management. From a fiscal perspective, Ekpo and Ndebbio (1998) argued that greater fiscal decentralisation could improve local government efficiency but cautioned that continued over-reliance on statutory federal allocations undermines financial autonomy and constrains locally driven development. Collectively, this evidence suggests that Nigerian local governments possess a well-defined developmental mandate that is persistently undermined by governance, capacity, and financial constraints rather than by an absence of formal responsibility.

### *2.4 Theoretical Framework: Decentralisation Theory*

This study is anchored on Decentralisation Theory, which holds that the transfer of authority, resources, and responsibility from central to local levels of government enhances administrative efficiency, accountability, and citizen participation by situating decision-making closer to those it affects (Rondinelli, Nellis, & Cheema, 1983). Smoke (2003) similarly argues that decentralisation fosters more responsive governance by empowering local authorities to tailor interventions to the specific needs of their constituencies. Within Nigeria's federal structure, decentralisation underlies the constitutional rationale for local government as an instrument for equitable, grassroots-driven development (Ekpo & Ndebbio, 1998). The theory is analytically useful here because it directs attention not only to the formal transfer of developmental responsibility to Bichi LGA, but also to whether the resources, administrative capacity, and participatory mechanisms that decentralisation theory identifies as necessary conditions for effective grassroots governance are actually present — an empirical question this study investigates directly.

## 3. Methodology

### *3.1 Research Design*

The study adopted a descriptive survey design within a mixed-methods framework, combining structured questionnaires with key-informant interviews (KIIs) to capture both the breadth of resident perceptions and the depth of administrative insight from officials and community leaders. A descriptive design is appropriate for studies seeking to document social phenomena — such as perceptions of institutional performance — as they naturally occur, without manipulation of variables (Creswell, 2014).

### *3.2 Study Area, Population, and Sample*

The study was conducted in Bichi LGA, Kano State, which had an estimated population of 277,099 as of the most recent national census (National Population Commission, 2006). Fieldwork was carried out in 2025 and examined local government performance over the immediately preceding period, 2019–2023. Given the impracticality of surveying the entire population, a sample of 100 respondents was drawn using a combination of stratified random sampling, to proportionally represent key population strata, and purposive sampling, to target officials and leaders with direct administrative knowledge. The final sample comprised 20 local government officials, 20 community leaders, and 60 rural residents (including farmers, traders, artisans, and unemployed residents), the latter group selected to represent the wider resident population.

### *3.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection*

A structured questionnaire, administered in English with oral Hausa translation for respondents with no formal education, served as the primary quantitative instrument. It comprised four sections: demographic information; awareness of local government functions; perceived rural development outcomes, rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree; and perceived challenges and recommendations. This was complemented by semi-structured KIIs with local government officials and community leaders, providing qualitative context for the quantitative findings. Secondary data were drawn from government reports, the National Population Commission, and relevant academic literature.

### *3.4 Validity, Reliability, and Data Analysis*

Face and content validity were established through expert review by public administration and research methodology scholars. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of ≥ 0.70 adopted as the threshold for acceptability (George & Mallery, 2003); the instrument achieved a reliability coefficient within the acceptable range. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), while qualitative interview data were analysed thematically to support and contextualise the survey findings.

Note on data reconciliation: In preparing this manuscript for publication, the percentage distributions reported in Section 4 were recalculated directly from the raw frequency counts of each survey item (N = 100 per item) to correct discrepancies present in the original field-note narrative, in which several summary percentages did not match the underlying tabulated data. Citations lacking a corresponding, verifiable reference entry in the original source material were removed rather than retained. Where the source material was ambiguous — for example, regarding the exact reliability coefficient obtained — the most conservative, literature-consistent value was assumed and is flagged accordingly.

## 4. Results

This section presents the survey findings, reconciled against the raw frequency data collected from the 100 respondents. Percentages are calculated on N = 100 for each item unless otherwise stated.

### *4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics*

**Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 100)**

| Variable | Category | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 30 | 30.0 |
| | Female | 70 | 70.0 |
| Age (years) | 18–25 | 13 | 13.0 |
| | 26–35 | 20 | 20.0 |
| | 36–45 | 22 | 22.0 |
| | 46 and above | 45 | 45.0 |
| Education | No formal education | 26 | 26.0 |
| | Primary | 17 | 17.0 |
| | Secondary | 12 | 12.0 |
| | Tertiary | 45 | 45.0 |
| Occupation | Farmer | 15 | 15.0 |
| | Trader | 10 | 10.0 |
| | Artisan | 17 | 17.0 |
| | Civil servant | 11 | 11.0 |
| | Unemployed | 47 | 47.0 |

| Variable | Category | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Years of residency | < 5 years | 22 | 22.0 |
| | 5–10 years | 16 | 16.0 |
| | > 10 years | 62 | 62.0 |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025 (percentages recalculated from raw frequencies).*

The sample was predominantly female (70%) and skewed toward older residents, with 45% aged 46 and above. Educational attainment was bimodal — 45% held tertiary qualifications while 26% had no formal education — a pattern plausibly explained by the inclusion of local government officials and community leaders (40% of the sample) alongside less formally educated rural residents. Occupationally, unemployed respondents formed the largest group (47%), followed by artisans (17%) and farmers (15%); this figure should be interpreted with some caution, as rural respondents in Nigeria frequently self-classify as "unemployed" even while engaged in informal or seasonal farming activity. The majority (62%) had resided in the area for more than ten years, lending credibility to their perceptions of long-term local government performance.

### *4.2 Awareness, Perceived Role, and Reach of Local Government Interventions*

**Table 2. Awareness, perceived role, and reach of local government interventions (N = 100)**

| Item | Response | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aware of LG responsibilities | Yes | 13 | 13.0 |
| | No | 87 | 87.0 |
| Believes LG plays a role in rural development | Yes | 13 | 13.0 |
| | No | 30 | 30.0 |
| | Not sure | 57 | 57.0 |
| Most-recognised area of LG contribution | Agricultural support | 30 | 30.0 |
| | Education | 26 | 26.0 |
| | Water supply | 25 | 25.0 |
| | Health | 19 | 19.0 |
| Overall performance rating | Poor | 34 | 34.0 |
| | Excellent | 24 | 24.0 |
| | Good | 22 | 22.0 |
| | Average | 20 | 20.0 |
| Ever benefited from a LG project | Yes | 16 | 16.0 |
| | No | 84 | 84.0 |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

Awareness of local government responsibilities was low, with only 13% of respondents reporting familiarity with them. Consistent with this, only 13% believed the local government plays a meaningful role in rural development, while a majority (57%) were unsure — suggesting a visibility and communication gap rather than outright rejection of the institution's role. Among recognised contributions, agricultural support (30%) and education (26%) were most frequently cited, while health services were least recognised (19%). Performance ratings were polarised: "Poor" was the single most common individual rating (34%), yet combined "Excellent" and "Good" ratings (46%) exceeded it, indicating divided rather than uniformly negative sentiment. Direct benefit from local government projects was rare: 84% of respondents reported never having benefited, pointing to a substantial gap between local government activity and household-level impact.

### *4.3 Resource Adequacy, Corruption, and Accountability Mechanisms*

**Table 3. Perceived resource adequacy, corruption, and accountability mechanisms (N = 100)**

| Item | Response | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| LG has sufficient resources for development | Yes | 23 | 23.0 |
| | No | 25 | 25.0 |
| | Not sure | 52 | 52.0 |
| Corruption affects LG project performance | Yes | 62 | 62.0 |
| | No | 22 | 22.0 |
| | Not sure | 16 | 16.0 |
| Traditional/community leaders consulted in planning | Yes | 27 | 27.0 |
| | No | 18 | 18.0 |
| | Not sure | 55 | 55.0 |
| Functional monitoring & evaluation system exists | Yes | 17 | 17.0 |
| | No | 16 | 16.0 |
| | Not sure | 67 | 67.0 |
| Participated in a community development programme | Yes | 23 | 23.0 |
| | No | 77 | 77.0 |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025.*

A majority of respondents (77%, combining "No" and "Not sure") lacked confidence that the local government possesses sufficient resources for development. Corruption was the most decisively perceived constraint, with 62% agreeing that it undermines project performance — the highest level of consensus recorded on any single item in the survey. Uncertainty dominated perceptions of institutional accountability mechanisms: 55% were unsure whether

traditional leaders are consulted in development planning, and 67% were unsure whether functional monitoring and evaluation systems exist, with confirmed awareness of such systems limited to 17%. Civic participation was similarly low, with only 23% of respondents reporting having taken part in a community development programme organised by the local government.

### *4.4 Likert-Scale Assessment of Performance Across Development Domains*

**Table 4. Likert-scale assessment of local government performance across development domains (N = 100, %)**

| Domain | SA | A | N | D | SD | Agree (SA+A) | Disagree (D+SD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agricultural support | 18 | 18 | 20 | 21 | 23 | 36 | 44 |
| Youth/business empowerment | 24 | 15 | 22 | 29 | 10 | 39 | 39 |
| Infrastructure development | 30 | 20 | 12 | 23 | 15 | 50 | 38 |
| Community engagement before projects | 12 | 29 | 30 | 25 | 4 | 41 | 29 |
| Trust in LG to manage rural development | 14 | 22 | 28 | 17 | 19 | 36 | 36 |

*Source: Field Survey, 2025. SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree.*

Across the five performance domains, infrastructure development received the most favourable assessment: half of all respondents (50%) agreed that the local government is actively involved in infrastructural improvement, against 38% disagreement. Agricultural support was rated least favourably, with disagreement (44%) exceeding agreement (36%) — a notable finding given the predominantly agrarian character of Bichi LGA. Perceptions of youth and business empowerment were evenly split (39% agree, 39% disagree), as was trust in the local government's capacity to manage rural development effectively (36% agree, 36% disagree), indicating no dominant consensus on either item. Community engagement prior to project execution recorded the largest neutral response (30%), suggesting inconsistent practice or limited resident awareness of consultation processes.

## 5. Discussion

The findings offer a mixed but coherent picture of local government performance in rural development in Bichi LGA, one that is broadly consistent with, and extends, the existing empirical literature on Nigerian local governance.

On awareness and perceived role (objective i), the extremely low level of public awareness of local government responsibilities (13%) sits uneasily with the core premise of Decentralisation Theory, which assumes that bringing governance closer to citizens enhances responsiveness and accountability (Rondinelli et al., 1983). Where citizens are largely unaware of what their local government is responsible for, the accountability mechanisms that decentralisation is meant to activate — informed demand-making, electoral sanction, and civic oversight — cannot function effectively. This finding echoes Ezeani's (2012)

observation that weakened democratic linkages between local governments and citizens undermine the practical benefits of decentralisation in Nigeria.

On effectiveness in addressing socio-economic and infrastructural needs (objective ii), the comparatively favourable rating of infrastructure development (50% agreement) corroborates Arowolo's (2010) finding of modest but real progress in rural infrastructure. However, the underperformance of agricultural support relative to other domains, despite Bichi's predominantly agrarian economy, suggests a misalignment between local government investment priorities and the area's principal economic base — a gap not fully anticipated in the theoretical literature reviewed and one that merits specific policy attention.

On constraints (objective iii), corruption emerged as the most decisively perceived barrier (62% agreement), the strongest consensus recorded across the entire survey. This aligns closely with Agba, Akwara, and Idu's (2013) multi-state finding that resource diversion substantially limits local government service delivery, and with Ezeani's (2012) account of weak fiscal accountability arising from limited local government autonomy over its own finances. The pervasive uncertainty surrounding resource adequacy (77% combined "No"/"Not sure") and monitoring and evaluation systems (67% "Not sure") further points to an information and transparency deficit: residents are not simply dissatisfied with local government performance, but often lack the information needed to judge it at all. This is itself consistent with Ogunna's (1996) argument that limited administrative and communication capacity, not merely resource scarcity, constrains effective local governance in Nigeria.

Read through the lens of Decentralisation Theory, these findings suggest that formal decentralisation — the constitutional transfer of developmental responsibility to Bichi LGA — has not been matched by the fiscal transparency, administrative capacity, and participatory mechanisms that the theory identifies as necessary for decentralisation to yield its expected governance benefits (Smoke, 2003). The narrow direct-benefit reach of local government projects (16%) and the evenly split levels of institutional trust (36% trust versus 36% distrust) together indicate a legitimacy gap that could, if unaddressed, further weaken citizen engagement with future rural development initiatives.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### *6.1 Conclusion*

This study set out to examine the role of local government administration in rural development in Bichi LGA, Kano State. The evidence indicates that while the local government retains a clear constitutional mandate for rural development, its actual performance is uneven: infrastructure development represents a relative strength, whereas agricultural support, direct project benefit, and institutional accountability remain weak. Corruption and unclear resource management stand out as the most significant perceived constraints, compounded by low public awareness and limited monitoring and evaluation capacity. Consistent with Decentralisation Theory, the findings suggest that the formal transfer of developmental authority to the local level is, on its own, insufficient to guarantee effective rural development outcomes; it must be accompanied by fiscal transparency, administrative capacity, and genuine citizen participation.

### *6.2 Recommendations*

**1.** Strengthen civic education and communication: The local government should partner with civil society organisations and traditional institutions to raise public awareness of its statutory

responsibilities, using accessible channels such as community radio and town-hall meetings in local languages.

**2.** Institutionalise fiscal transparency and anti-corruption oversight: Budgets, project expenditures, and procurement records should be published and made accessible to residents, supported by independent citizen oversight committees.

**3.** Establish a functional monitoring and evaluation (M&E) unit: A dedicated, adequately resourced M&E function should track project implementation and publicly report outcomes, directly addressing the high level of uncertainty (67%) found regarding the existence of such systems.

**4.** Prioritise agricultural extension and input support: Given Bichi's agrarian economic base, investment in agricultural extension services, input subsidies, and market access should be increased to address the comparatively low ratings recorded for this domain.

**5.** Formalise consultation with traditional and community leaders: Development planning processes should incorporate structured, documented consultation with traditional rulers and community leaders to improve both project relevance and public confidence.

**6.** Build local government administrative capacity: Regular technical and managerial training for local government staff should be instituted to strengthen planning, implementation, and communication capacity.

### *6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research*

This study is limited by its cross-sectional, single-LGA design, which constrains the generalisability of findings to other Nigerian local governments, and by its reliance on self-reported perception data, which may be subject to recall or social-desirability bias. The pronounced gender skew in the sample (70% female) and the high proportion of respondents self-identifying as “unemployed” (47%) warrant further investigation through quota-controlled sampling in future studies. Comparative multi-LGA and longitudinal research, together with deeper qualitative analysis of key-informant interview data, is recommended to validate and extend these findings.

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