

Exploring the Effects of Cultural Norms of inheritance On Women's Access to Family Resources in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract: Achieving women development and equality in the access and control of family/community resources is pertinent goal of human development. However, women often suffer from exclusion in the access to household resources, which vast body of literature on women development have attributed to patriarchy and all its adjoining structures, such as the cultural norms of inheritance. Using a cross-sectional research design, this paper, investigated the effects of Cultural Norms of Inheritance on women's access to family resources in South-South Nigeria. The paper employed the Normative Social Behaviour Theory as its theoretical framework, and through it, created reoccurring themes that buttressed the position of the paper. In the course of research, it was found that women are denied access to family and household resources through socio-cultural givens embedded in inheritance norms. This restriction in access to rights to properties constrains the abilities and potentials of women, affects their abilities to fend for themselves and their dependents after the death of her spouse, and also limits their contributions to the development of their societies. Through this study, it was discovered that government programmes aimed at addressing poverty among women often end in failures. On this backdrop, this paper among other things, recommended that the government and local community leaders must implement social investment programmes aimed at women development in their areas of influence and increase the participation of women local politics, so as to enable them influence norms that affect their lives.

Keywords: Access to resources, Cultural norms, Inheritance, Social risks.



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Introduction

Cultural norms are shared ideas or beliefs that influence how people behave in a culture, making them the accepted norm and eliciting positive or negative social reactions. The expectations of a

society are mirrored in the attitudes and behaviours of a group of individuals as cultural norms and values. While beliefs are frequently referred to as values, a norm is defined as the attitudes and behaviours that are deemed usual or average for a social group. Norms assist with values. Norms are picked up by what other people say, believe, and do. People are exposed to cultural norms and values through their families, friends, and acquaintances with the hope that they would adopt them; this shapes society as a whole. These norms are crucial to the society for a variety of reasons, and they provide the standards for allocating social statuses and resources from the commons.

Cultural norms are described by Richard A. Shweder (1991) as the unspoken laws of a culture that dictate what is and is not acceptable behaviour in various contexts. They are described as the "collective expectations about appropriate behaviour for a given identity" by Katzenstein (1996). Shared expectations, according to Sandholtz (2017), are a result of standards rather than an inherent trait. Instead, he emphasizes the "oughtness" of norms by defining them as "standards of appropriate behaviour for actors." Hechter and Opp (2001) offered another perspective on norms, viewing them as cultural forces that dictate and proscribe behaviour in particular situations. The unwritten principles that direct social behaviour are referred to as social norms. These are moral guidelines that are universally accepted by those who belong to the same culture (Schacter, 2012).

The social norms of any particular civilization have an impact on how people transfer wealth and pass down inheritance. Inheritance is a tradition that is strongly rooted in many societies throughout the world, especially African cultures, claims Moahi (2023). Inheritance in Africa is a complex and varied custom that involves passing down social standards, spiritual beliefs, and cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. It goes beyond simply passing down monetary wealth. Dr.Oluwaseun Afolabi, a cultural anthropologist with a focus on African studies, asserted that inheritance in African culture encompasses everything that is valued to a particular group and goes beyond just wealth. It is a way of keeping culture alive and passing it on to the following generation. It serves as a means of guaranteeing the protection and preservation of the knowledge, traditions, and values of a specific group of people (Moahi, 2023).

There are certain commonalities among the many African communities' inherited cultures. Inheritance is typically given from the father to the son. However, in some communities, the daughter or other family members may get an inheritance. The inheritance may consist of real estate, buildings, animals, and other tangible goods. The partition of property was supervised by an uncle in front of elders when someone passed away because there were no wills in the past, according to ThoboMotsei, a farmer in Kenya: "Especially if it was the head of the home who passed away. If there are no sons to inherit the property, the same uncle is named guardian of the property instead of the oldest boy child, as previously customary. Regardless of her relationship to the deceased, it was improper for a woman to execute or receive property (www.africarebirth.com).

This growing interest in the literature and research on property inheritance, particularly as it relates to Africa, shapes a larger agenda for property reforms and, as a result, characterizes inheritance as both a human rights issue and an economic concern. It has mainly concentrated on the content of so-called family laws as well as land rights. As attention has turned to the economic and human rights effects of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, another policy stream has emerged that addresses inheritance as a dual human rights and economic concern. Izumi (2006), conceptualize inheritance as a means by which the further vulnerability of HIV-affected households or individuals may be either exacerbated or prevented. This conception is situated within a broad range of policy concerns related to the epidemic's socioeconomic effects. The majority of HIV/AIDS policy attention on inheritance has been devoted to protecting the property rights of widowed women and orphaned children. Thirdly, reform objectives for land policy and administration have sparked interest in inheritance policy (IIED, 2006; Cotula, Toulmin & Hesse,

2004; Deininger, 2003). Initiatives concerning land tenure and titling in particular may have an impact on potential inheritance claims.

As a result, it is frequently ingrained in local culture to deprive and, in some cases, overtly alienate women and other vulnerable groups from their husbands' or parents' possessions. Primogeniture and patriarchy are unreservedly observed in African communities, which contributes to the continuation of poverty, insecurity, and misery among women and children. From the aforementioned, it is clear from the literature that has already been written that the culture of the people greatly influences what parents pass on to their children as well as the laws of inheritance and succession that are followed in the community. In order to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on property inheritance worldwide and to fill the gap caused by the dearth of these studies in South-South Nigeria, this study examines cultural norms and inheritance in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State. The following goals were set forward for this study in order to:

1. Analyse the connection between cultural expectations and women's inheritance in the Rivers State locale of Obio-Akpor.
2. Analyse the impact of cultural norms on women's inheritance in the Rivers State local government of Obio-Akpor.
3. To find ways to lessen the impact of cultural norms on women's inheritance in the Rivers State local government of Obio-Akpor.

Cultural norms in Africa and women's access to family resources: A theoretical framework

Every human society depends on the transfer of wealth since it signifies the passing of a legacy from one generation to the next and assures a society's survival. According to Cooper (2010) and UN Habitat (2006), inheritance is a significant method of property transfer in many Sub-Saharan African nations. An individual's or group's amassed physical assets (or rights of access to these assets) are allocated in accordance with social customs, individual preferences, and sometimes strategic plans during key life course transitions including death, birth, marriage, and retirement. This asset redistribution may have beneficial or negative effects on different people's economic paths (Carter & Barrett, 2006). Either through the acquisition of new assets or the confirmation of their ownership rights to assets they had previously accessed, property heirs experience an increase in financial stability. If inheritance decisions leave them out, other people can lose their prior rights to assets (Cooper, 2011).

The main premise of the Normative Social Behaviour Theory is used as the foundation for this study's theoretical framework. According to the idea, the relationship between descriptive norms and behaviours is moderated by group identification, result expectations, and injunctive norms. By conceiving peer communication as an additional mediator in the relationship between descriptive norms and behaviours, researchers have expanded the scope of the theory. Normative influence can come via social exposure to a behaviour, which is defined as the sum of how people experience that conduct in their social, physical, and symbolic settings. To better comprehend and influence situations that promote public health, it may be helpful to understand social exposure as a source of norms (Cooper, 2011).

Nigerian society places a high value on inheritance, and the family group plays a particularly significant role in distributing wealth in the event of a person's passing. Primogeniture and the distribution of money to the male offspring of deceased males are two cultural conventions that have a negative impact on women and their claims to a necessary means of subsistence. Since preference is given to male offspring in patrilineal communities in Nigeria, such as the Igbos of southeast, women without male children are frequently denied social protection and aid by the kin-group (Okafor, Akinwale&Doyin-Hassan, 2007). Cultural significance of having access to

resources like lands depends heavily on an individual's capacity for decision-making. Since lands are a major source of wealth and the foundation for food, shelter, and economic activities as well as a significant source of employment in rural areas, particularly for women, they serve as both a source and an outcome of social status as well as power (FAO, 2002). As a result, the kin-group serves as the most significant agent in the distribution of wealth.

Education is a key component in the debate over family resource availability. Another factor limiting women's access to resources is their poor educational backgrounds. According to Nwokoro and Ogba (2019), women with little or no formal education frequently choose lower-paying occupations or careers including prostitution, hawking, food vending, and subsistence farming. These employments pay poorly and are frequently unable to maintain family resources or finance their full usage, deterring women from even setting out to pursue family resources. Ezeakor (2001) bemoans the fact that this issue is worse for rural poor women because they have a lower skill set, less education, and jobs that pay less than equivalent jobs in urban areas. As a result, they are frequently caught in a cycle of deprivation, leading to a pattern of living hand to mouth without any savings, which some scholars have referred to as the "culture of poverty" (Henslin, 2002).

The Normative theory becomes crucial due to the complicated dynamics of cultural norms and their impact on women's access to family resources. An example of a social influence that results in conformity is normative social influence. It is described as "...the influence of other people that leads us to conform in order to be liked and accepted by them" (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005) in social psychology. Because humans are social beings with a need for companionship and company, normative social influence has significant power (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2013). A behaviour change that is thought to be required in order to fit in with a certain group is referred to as normative social influence (Reiss, 2012). Conformity is a result of our desire to have a good relationship with others around us (DeWall & Bushman, 2011). This reality frequently causes individuals to demonstrate public conformity with the group's social standards (but not necessarily private acceptance) in order to fit in.

Normative social influence frequently works to strengthen social bonds. In general, a group becomes more stable when the majority of its members follow social standards. This consistency results in social cohesion, which enables group members to collaborate to achieve a common understanding, or "good," but it has the unintended effect of making group members less individualistic (Heuser, 2005). For actions carried out in public, the pressure to submit to normative influence is greater than for those carried out in private (McLeod, 2008). After all of the confederates had publicly declared their answers in a different Asch study variation, the participant was given the opportunity to privately record his response. This change decreased participant compliance (Asch, 1956). In addition, the Asch study's control condition showed that participants' independent responses were virtually always accurate.

Women's lives are impacted by resources in a variety of ways. According to Mbuga, Nzuma, and Muange (2019), women in developing nations like Nigeria are susceptible to both idiosyncratic (household-level) and covariate (community) hazards. These idiosyncratic risks frequently result from the breadwinner's death or acute illness, job loss and unemployment of the breadwinner or the women, and cultural restrictions on access to family resources and family decision-making. Covariate risks are brought on by outside forces that have an impact on the family, such as natural disasters, inclement weather that could negatively affect business operations, and price changes brought on by inflation or stagflation. According to Mbuga, Nzuma, and Muange (2019), the two main forms of social hazards have a significant impact on women's income, health, assets, access to food, and sense of overall self-worth.

As a result, addressing women's empowerment in Nigeria would require a multifaceted framework of social capital growth and social protection (both state and indigenous), which would identify

and reconstruct the underlying reasons of poverty and social exclusion that affect women. Even though it is undoubtedly difficult to conceptualize poverty within a theoretical framework, sociological tales cannot be dismissed as meaningless examples of poverty. In actuality, there are many layers to poverty among women, and some circumstances (traps) only serve to exacerbate it. In the Obio-Akpor local government area of Rivers State, this study aims to assess the linkages between cultural inheritance norms and women's access to family resources. In this study, the following hypotheses were investigated:

H0: In the Rivers State locale of Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, there is no discernible connection between cultural expectations and women's inheritance.

H1: In the Rivers State locale of Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, there is a considerable correlation between cultural expectations and women's inheritance.

H0: In the Rivers State local government of Obio-Akpor, cultural norms have no appreciable impact on women's inheritance.

H1: In the Rivers State local government area of Obio-Akpor, cultural norms have a substantial impact on women's inheritance.

Methods and materials

Study Design

For this article, a cross-sectional survey design was chosen. An observation of a sample or cross-section of a population or phenomenon made at a particular period is called a cross-sectional study. This methodology was chosen because it enables the researchers to quickly collect useful data from a sample of the study population and then extrapolate the findings to the entire population. The cross-sectional form of this study allowed the researcher to look at cultural traditions and inheritance in the Rivers State locale of Obio-Akpor Local Government Area.

Study Area and Population

In Rivers State's Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, this study was conducted. Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, established on May 3rd, 1989, is located in Rivers State, one of the States in Nigeria's South-South Geopolitical Zone. Elelenwo, Nkpelu, Rumueme, Rumuokoro, Woji, Trans-Amadi, Rumuoji, and Choba are among the districts that make up Obio-Akpor LGA, which has its administrative center in the Rumuodomaya area of Port-Harcourt City. Ikwerre ethnic nationals make up the majority of the population of Obio/Akpor. The Local Government Areas are specifically made up of the four well-known Ikwerre Kingdoms of Akpor, Apari, Evo, and Rumueme.

Obio-Akpor is surrounded by Port Harcourt (local government area) to the south, Oyigbo and Eleme to the east, Ikwerre and Etche to the north, and Emohua to the west. The location is reachable by road, sea, and air transportation. The entire population of Obio/Akpor LGA in Rivers State is included in this study's research population. Obio/Akpor LGA has 462,350 residents, according to the 2006 census data. This is used as the study's population.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for this paper was determined through the Taro Yamene's formula for sampling finite population, because, according to Ezugwu & Akubo (2014), it ensures a satisfactory degree of representation and removal of bias.

A sample of 400 participants was drawn from communities in Obio-Akpor L.G.A. using the Taro Yamane's formula thus:

$$n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$$

Where n = Sample size sought

N = Population study

1 = Constant, and

e = Acceptable margin of error at 5% (0.05). With an acceptable margin of error of 5% (0.05), the confidence level is 95%.

Following from the above, the sample size was determined thus:

$$n = 462,350/1 + 462,350 (0.05)^2$$

$$= 462,350/1 + 462,350 (0.0025)$$

$$= 462,350/1 + 1,155.875$$

$$= 462,350/1,156.875$$

$$= 399.65$$

$$= 400 \text{ (approximated)}$$

Sampling Techniques

In this study, the purposive sampling approach was used. This made it possible to choose samples based on the researchers' opinions rather than by chance. This method does not give every member of the population an equal chance to be chosen for the study. Thus, the researchers only considered applicants who had a college degree, were working, and were older than 18. This sample strategy implies that 400 respondents were purposefully chosen for the study from Obio/Akpor LGA in Rivers state based on the researchers' own preferences.

Instrument for Data Collection

The survey (questionnaire) was the main tool utilized in this study to collect data. The use of questionnaires is useful for gathering data that is not readily apparent due to people's sentiments, motives, attitudes, accomplishments, and experiences. The researcher was able to quickly contact the respondents thanks to the use of a questionnaire as the main source of data in this study. A letter of introduction and two parts evaluating respondents' sociodemographic information and problems with cultural norms and inheritance in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, made up the questionnaire. The purpose of the covering letter was to identify the researcher, explain the goals of the study, encourage participants to submit honest responses, and reassure them that all information they supplied would be kept confidential.

Methods of Data Analysis

The findings and hypotheses of this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (frequency analyses, percentages, mean analyses, standard deviations, and chi-square statistical test). The phenomena of interest are described by descriptive statistics. They involve analyzing data with frequencies, dispersion of dependent and independent variables, measurements of central tendency and variability, and getting a sense of (sympathy with) the data. The data collected from the participants about their views on cultural norms and inheritance in Obio-Akpor LGA, River State, were principally described using the mean and standard deviation.

Data Presentation and analysis

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

In Table 1, we reported the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study. These characteristics were analysed in a frequency table below, with respect to their frequencies and percentages.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Socio-Demographic Variables	Items	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gender Distribution	Male	148	39.8	39.8
	Female	224	60.2	60.2
Age Distribution	18-29	98	26.3	26.3
	30-49	222	59.7	59.7
	50-69	42	11.3	11.3
	70& Above	10	2.7	2.7
Marital Status	Single	61	16.4	16.4
	Married	273	73.4	73.4
	Divorced	11	3.0	3.0
	Separated	13	3.5	3.5
	Widowed	14	3.8	3.8
Educational Qualification	Uneducated	13	3.5	3.5
	Primary	209	56.2	56.2
	Secondary	89	23.9	23.9
	Tertiary	61	16.4	16.4
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	313	84.1	84.1
	Islam	13	3.5	3.5
	Traditional African Religion	28	7.6	7.6
	Others	18	4.8	4.8

The percentage distribution represented in table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study. The study sampled a rich variety of people that differed in age, gender, social class, education and religious belief. This was a done to sample the opinions of the various categories of people in Obio-Akpor local government. The gender distribution of respondents shows a greater percentage of female respondents at 60.2 percent. The Age distribution shows that a majority of the respondents were middle aged. A major number of the respondents was educated. Likewise, a majority of the respondents were Christians. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents is important for a number of reasons. First it paints a picture of the environment under study and secondly gives explanations to certain norms that are accepted by the population,

Descriptive variables

In Table 2, we report the descriptive variables used for this study, by sampling the questions asked the respondents and their responses. These responses are hereby presented in the frequency table with contingencies including mean/proportions, standard deviations, S.E. Mean, Standard deviation and final decision. In addition, we describe the variables in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 2: Mean Score Analysis of Cultural Norms and Inheritance in Obio-Akpor LGA, Rivers State

Item	Mean	S.E. Mean	Std Deviation	Decision
Cultural norms determine inheritance of landed property in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	1.9866	.02757	.53182	Rejected
Cultural norms determine inheritance by wealth (cash) in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.9704	.02198	.42393	Accepted
Cultural norms determine inheritance of business in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	3.0054	.02407	.46433	Accepted
Cultural norms ensure adequate protection of women's property rights in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.9785	.02494	.48098	Accepted
Cultural norms deprive women of inheriting landed property in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.9597	.02615	.50441	Accepted
Cultural norms deprive women of inheriting family or husband's wealth (cash) in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.9973	.02568	.49525	Accepted
Cultural norms deprive women from inheriting family or husband's businesses in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.0833	.02588	.49910	Rejected
Cultural norms deprive women of their rights to inheritance in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.0672	.02241	.43226	Rejected
Cultural norms do not guarantee adequate protection of women's property rights in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	1.6989	.03408	.65728	Rejected
Cultural norms contribute to women poverty in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.1505	.03505	.67606	Rejected
Cultural norms have significant effects on women's inheritance in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	1.6559	.03230	.62292	Rejected
Equitable distribution of landed property should be encouraged by the cultural norms of the people of Obio-Akpor LGA	1.9597	.02559	.49361	Rejected
Cultural norms that deprive women from inheriting their husbands' or family property and wealth should be discontinued or outlawed in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.1747	.03337	.64353	Rejected
Women's rights to inheritance should be encouraged in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.0134	.03150	.60753	Rejected
Cultural norms do not guarantee adequate protection of women's property rights and inheritance in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area and the entire Rivers State should be repealed by the State House of Assembly	3.0027	.02423	.46725	Accepted
Women education should be massively encouraged	2.9785	.02494	.48098	Accepted

and prioritized in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State				
Women economic empowerment should be massively encouraged and prioritized by the government and development agencies in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.9328	.03154	.60839	Accepted
Women participation in decision-making should be massively encouraged and prioritized in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State	2.9543	.03095	.59699	Accepted

Findings

In the study, two possibilities were investigated. The first hypothesis claimed that in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, there is no discernible connection between cultural standards and women's inheritance. The Pearson Chi-Square p-value (0.000) is found to be less than the level of significance (0.05) based on the results ($X^2=69.313$, $df=6$, and $p\text{-value} = 0.000$). The null hypothesis was thus disproved. Therefore, it can be said that in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, there is a considerable relationship between cultural norms and inheritance. According to hypothesis 2, cultural norms in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, do not significantly affect women's inheritance. The Pearson Chi-Square p-value (0.100) is determined to be more than the level of significance (0.05) based on the result obtained ($X^2=10.642$, $df=6$, and $p\text{-value} = 0.100$). The null hypothesis is therefore supported. Therefore, it can be said that cultural norms have little impact on women's inheritance in the Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Cultural norms influence inheritance by wealth/cash (2.9704) and inheritance of businesses in Obio-Akpor LGA (3.0054), according to the mean score study of cultural norms and inheritance in Rivers State. The analysis also showed that cultural norms have an impact on how women inherit in the Obio-Akpor community by failing to adequately protect women's property rights in that LGA (2.9785), preventing women from inheriting landed property there (2.9597), and preventing women from inheriting family or their husband's wealth (cash) there (2.9973). These results support Cooper's (2011) study, which found that in sub-Saharan Africa, cultural norms restrict women's access to money and property. Many organizations and academics have called for changes to inheritance systems as part of a broader reform agenda after observing that inheritance has contributed to the larger issue of property rights regimes that discriminate against women in Africa (UN Habitat, 2006; Jütting and Morrisson, 2005; Mutangadura, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2003; USAID, 2003). Additionally, the mean score analysis showed that the State House of Assembly should repeal cultural norms in Obio-Akpor LGA that do not adequately protect women's property rights and inheritance (3.0027); women's education should be strongly promoted and given top priority in Obio-Akpor LGA (2.9785); and women's economic empowerment should be strongly promoted and given top priority.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

From the aforementioned, it is clear that cultural norms are socially accepted standards of conduct, laws, and traditions. However, given the needs of modern society for change, some traditional standards are now outmoded and destructive. Since patriarchy dominates most kin-groups in African civilizations, some cultural practices that restrict the advancement and rights of women have persisted. Because of these patriarchal structures, women are not generally favoured by inheritance laws in most societies, particularly in Africa. It has been discovered that cultural norms have a significant impact on women's inheritance (of landed property, wealth/cash, and spouse or family enterprises) in Obio-Akpor LGA of Rivers State, where this study has been conducted. Cultural traditions also have an impact on women's inheritance in the Obio-Akpor

community by guaranteeing that their property rights are not adequately protected, preventing them from inheriting landed property, and preventing them from inheriting riches from their families or husbands (cash) in the Obio-Akpor LGA. It is unacceptable that there is deprivation, growing poverty, and hardship in today's world. The conclusions of this study call for the government, development organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and women, among others, to combat all types of oppression of women's right to property.

The paper's policy implications include the following suggestions. Communities and governments must allocate funds to support women's education. The Obio-Akpor LGA should heavily promote and prioritize women's education due to the increasing necessity for women to participate in family economy. Women's education is a tremendous benefit since it can provide them awareness of their rights and privileges as well as the motivation to fight for those rights. Women who are educated are better able to engage men in conversation about their problems and therefore lessen their suffering. Parents should make sure their female offspring have an education. In the Obio-Akpor LGA, women's participation in decision-making should also be strongly encouraged. Women may only actively support laws and policies for their healthy living when they are encouraged to engage in politics, governance, and decision-making. The government should consciously use the 35% affirmative action on women's participation in politics and governance. Finally, the Obio-Akpor LGA administration and development organizations should strongly support and promote the economic empowerment of women. Women's inheritance rights will always be violated in cultural contexts as long as they are economically dependent on or subordinate to men. Women should therefore work hard to become financially independent and vigorously defend their rights.

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