

A Case Study on Leepuram Gram Panchayat

Best Practices of Panchayats

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Centre for Budget and Policy Studies

1st Floor, Maitri Bhavan
(Above United Lodge of Theosophists)
#4, M.N.Krishna Rao Road,
Basavanagudi
Bangalore -560004
Telephone: +91-80-65907402
Fax: +91-80-26560734
Website: www.cbps.in

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Ms Kavitha Narayana has documented the case study under supervision of Mr Srinivas Kumar Alamuru and Dr Jyotsna Jha.

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Case Study of Leepuram Gram Panchayat, Karnataka

1. Introduction

In 2005-06, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India introduced the Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) to incentivize States and UTs to devolve powers to local bodies. Under this scheme, the best performing State/UT is awarded Rs 2 crore every year. Further, the Ministry also announces awards for the best Zilla Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats and Gram Panchayats for their performance in implementation of flagship schemes and execution of welfare programmes.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) developed a Devolution Index to measure the State/PRI's performance on the basis of devolution of three F's viz. finance, functions and functionaries. The assessment is carried out in two-stages with the first stage examining whether the State/UT has created a conducive environment that enables the transfer of powers to the local bodies. Accordingly, the first stage checks whether the States have setup the District Planning Committee, established State Election Commission and State Finance Commission, and held PRI elections every five year. The Devolution Index is calculated for those States which have satisfied the criteria specified in the first stage. The three pillars in the Devolution Index capture either directly or indirectly the level of financial discretion, transfer of functions and steps taken to develop the capacity of functionaries of PRIs.

As for deciding the best panchayat at all the three levels i.e. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti (called Panchayat Union in Tamil Nadu) and Zilla Parishad, it is done through a process of scoring based on the devolution index and responses to a questionnaire that capture important aspects relating to activities of a model Panchayats. Some of the parameters used include – regularity of panchayat meetings including those of gram sabha and standing committees, attendance in these meetings particularly the representation of SC and STs in the Gram Sabhas, discussions held and issues discussed, resolutions undertaken on various development works, identification of various beneficiaries, implementation of the State and Central Government schemes, efforts for achieving total sanitation, development of effective plans for raising own resources, systems for effective tax collection, strengthening of local institutions, capacity building of the elected representatives and the staff and having mechanism for transparency and accountability and so on. Leepuram Gram Panchayat in Kanyakumari District is one of the eight panchayats from Tamil Nadu selected for award under the Panchayat Empowerment & Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) 2011-12.

2. Profile of the Gram Panchayat

Leepuram is located in Agastheewaram Block in Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. It is about 5 kilometers from Kanyakumari town and 25 kilometers from Nagercoil, the district headquarters. It is well connected to Kanyakumari, Thiruvananthapuram and Nagercoil. It is

also located in the vicinity of Tirunelveli district, because of which buses heading to Tirunelveli pass through it.

The GP is spread over 2.23 square kilometers. It has 1753 households with population of 8462. It has a literacy rate of 85 percent. It has two primary government schools; two anganwadi centres a post and a Primary Health Centre.

The Bay of Bengal borders it on the eastern side and Kanyakumari on the other side. Due to its close proximity to the sea, fishing is a common occupation of the people. Agriculture is also practiced with the main crops grown in the Panchayat being paddy, banana and coconut.

The Vattakottai Fort is located within the GP. The Vattakottai Fort (Circular Fort) is a seaside fort which was built in the 18th century as a coastal defence-fortification and barracks in the erstwhile Travancore kingdom. It was constructed under the command of Captain Eustachius De Lannoy during the reign of Travancore King Marthandavarma. It is currently maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India.

Leepuram was severely damaged during the tsunami of 2004. It received a lot of funds from the state and international donors for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami.

3. Performance and Functioning of Leepuram Gram Panchayat

There are nine wards in the Leepuram Panchayat. All of them belong to the General category (due to a low SC population) with three of them being reserved for women. The members of the Panchayat and the President enjoy a good working relationship. Some of these members have been elected to a second term, which has enabled them to contribute in a better manner since they are more experienced and acquainted with the functioning of the GP. The members and the President enjoy strong support from the people of the Panchayat. The District Officials were very appreciative of the transparent manner in which the Panchayat functions.

Figure 1: Score of Leepuram GP on PEAIS indicators

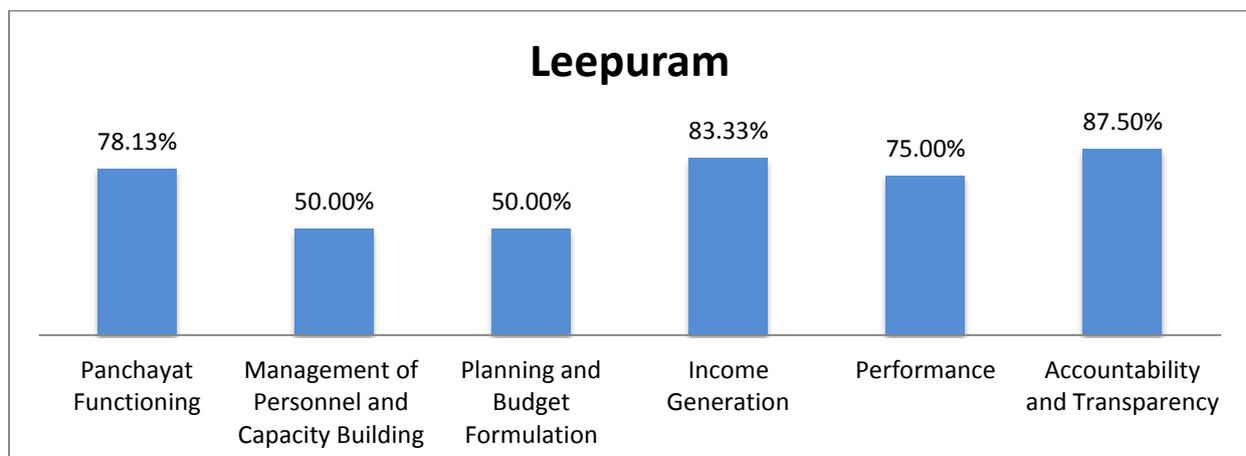


Table 1: Performance of Leepuram GP as per PEAIS indicators

Indicator	Remarks
Panchayat Functioning	<p><u>Panchayat Meetings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has held 13 meetings when the mandated is 12 • No meeting was cancelled due to lack of quorum • Agenda and minutes circulated • All the meetings had more than 50% attendance • Good attendance of women members <p><u>Gram Sabhas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 meetings held against the mandated 4 • No adjournment due to lack of quorum • Sufficiently attended by women • Minutes maintained • Social Audit of MGNREGA and PDS conducted • Selection of beneficiaries under schemes <p><u>Standing Committees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing committees formed on appointment/welfare/health,water and sanitation/PDS/works/ agricultural products/ Education • Meetings are conducted as per need
Management of Personnel and Capacity Building	<p><u>Training of Elected Representatives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All elected members of the Panchayat have attended training sessions conducted by Dept. of Rural Development and NGOs. • These training were related to issues of sanitation, health, environment etc <p><u>Officials at Panchayat Meetings</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attended by officials of Rural Development/Revenue/Health/Fire Services / social welfare/ Police <p><u>Review of Work of Officials</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work and participation of these officials in the development of the Panchayat is reviewed
Planning and Budget Formulation	<p><u>Preparation of Annual Plan:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual plan prepared and submitted <p><u>Process of Preparation of Plan:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed in Gram Sabha and suggestions of various stakeholders, CBOs and NGOs were incorporated <p><u>Budget</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget prepared as per norms and discussed in the Gram Sabha • Budget was submitted to higher authorities by due date
Income Generation	<p><u>Planning for own income</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toll tax on the road leading to Vattakottai Fort initiated • However no new assets for income generation created

	<p><u>Collection of Dues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • House tax and professional tax was collected <p><u>Voluntary Contributions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No local donations were raised or received
Performance	<p><u>Physical Achievement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical targets set under KHS/ IAY/RIS and MGNREGS were successfully met <p><u>Expenditure against allotment:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocated amount under various schemes was spent <p><u>Expenditure on SC/ST</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earmarked allocation was expended <p><u>Expenditure on Women:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil <p><u>Expenditure of Untied Funds:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Untied funds were spent on streetlights, sanitation, extension of pipelines and road maintenance <p><u>Civic Duties:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 100% streetlight coverage 2. 100% safe drinking water 3. Nirmal Gram Puraskar awardee (2005-06) 4. 100% registration of birth and death <p><u>Panchayat and Local Institution:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of schools, PDS shops, Health facilities and Anganwadis • Decoration of walls of anganwadis by painting by small kids initiated <p><u>Community Groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHGs. Women groups, minority groups, youth groups, SC/St groups • A building owned by the GP was handed over to the Panchayat Level Federation. <p><u>Special Initiatives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differently abled, HIV+, sex-workers, lepers. • Special steps taken for welfare of HIV positive persons <p><u>IEC Initiatives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social issues such as disposal of wastes, segregation and pollution discussed. • Training organized at the Arockiapuram community hall for the same
Accountability and Transparency	<p><u>Maintenance of Accounts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GP accounts are maintained in prescribed format, updated and authenticated and have been placed before the Gram Sabha. They are however not computerized. <p><u>Audit:</u></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 25 out of 26 paras have been complied with <p><u>Grievance Redressal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 grievances were received and all were addressed <p><u>Compliance to RTI Act:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two applications were received and replied. Not sent to appeal. • Public display of information
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Source: Leepuram Proposal for PEAIS

4. Management Practices

The Panchayat meetings are well attended by all the members, especially women members. These meetings serve as a site for discussion of local issues, passing of resolutions, approval and review of plans under various schemes etc. Similarly, the Gram Sabhas are well attended in the Panchayat. They are organized at different sites to encourage attendance. The Sabha acts as the site for social audit; discussion of social issues; creating awareness; and future planning of the Panchayat. The standing committees have been established and meet as per need. The Gram Sabhas are also attended by local officials who share their experiences and have their work reviewed by the people of the Panchayat. The Annual Budget and Plan are presented to the Gram Sabha and the feedback sought and incorporated. Initiatives have been taken to increase own source revenue of the village. The Gram Sabha also helps decide the probable sites of MGNREGS work in the Panchayat. All the targets set for schemes have been met.

5. Engagement with the community

Various initiatives have been taken to strengthen community and groups within the Panchayat. The Panchayat Level Federation was provided a building with water supply, electricity and sanitary facilities which has been well received and appreciated by the members of Self-Help Groups in the area. An intensive awareness campaign on environmental issues was undertaken with focus on disposal of waste and making the Panchayat plastic free. Information is displayed at the Panchayat Office and other public places. The high level of transparency maintained by the Panchayat has limited RTI applications to two cases and four cases of grievances .

Thus, the GP has been making efforts to engage with the community, which has led to improving the democratic experience of the people. It has also made the public more aware of their rights, provisions under various schemes etc. Due to open and free communication between the Panchayat and the public, the latter feels at ease to raise issues of concern or highlight their problems. Since these concerns are brought to the attention of the GP in a timely fashion, the GP finds itself better equipped to resolve these issues.

6. Good Practices

a. Social Audit of Public Distribution System

An innovative practice that has been practiced in Leepuram is the extension of the process of social audit to the Public Distribution System shops, which was initiated about four years ago. There are three PDS shops in Leepuram.

In Tamil Nadu, the system of universal public distribution system is being implemented under which no one is excluded on the basis of the income criterion. There are different type of cards issued such as rice cards, Antoydaya Anna Yojana (AAY) Cards, Sugar Cards, Police Cards and No Commodity Cards. These cards form the basis of entitlement for the amount that is allocated per household.

Table 3: Entitlement under UPDS in Tamil Nadu

Name of the commodity	Price per kg	Scale of supply
Rice	Free of Cost (as per Hon'ble Chief Minister's Announcement) (w.e.f 01.06.2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 Kgs per adult and 2 kgs per child per month subject to a minimum of 12 Kgs and maximum of 20 kgs per month per card• Under AAY 35 Kg. per month
Sugar	Rs.13.50 per Kg.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 500 gms per head per month subject to a maximum of 2 kgs. per month.• Additional 3 kgs. are supplied to sugar option card holders in lieu of rice
Wheat	Rs.7.50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 kgs per card per month in Chennai city and District headquarters and 5 kg card per month in other areas
Kerosene	Rs.13.60 to Rs.14.20 per litre	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ranges from 3-15 litres per card depending on the location

At the Gram Sabha, officials of the Public Distribution System such as the Tehsildar, Deputy Tehsildar, Revenue Inspectors, Salespersons working at PDS shop present the account books and records of the local PDS shop to the community. This platform is used to inform the public about the levels of stock that are available and being maintained at the PDS shop, the quantity of commodities bought or sourced¹, expenditure incurred etc. Further, it is also helps the PDS shop to communicate any changes in allotments to the community. For instance,

¹ In Tamil Nadu, since the allotment of levy sugar received Government of India is insufficient to meet the requirement of card holders, the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation is purchasing non levy sugar from open market.

when the supply of kerosene was low, the Gram Sabha was used as the platform to inform and explain to the people that they would be receiving kerosene alternative months.

The idea of social audit for PDS was borrowed from MGNREGS as it was felt that it would facilitate transparency and accountability of the system. The GP was supported by the Government in this endeavour as evident from the presence of various government officials for this purpose at the Gram Sabha. The social audit of PDS is also mentioned in the agenda notices that are distributed prior to the Gram Sabhas, thus creating an interest as well as spreading information among the people about it. The social audit of PDS systems is done at alternate Gram Sabhas, so in a year, two social audits of the PDS are conducted.

The members of the public check the presented accounts and records to see the entitlement and allocation per card and compare it with the amount that they have received. In case of discrepancies, doubts and problems, the beneficiaries raise them publicly, which are answered by the representatives of the PDS. Further, justification and explanation are provided in case someone reports a complaint. For example, when a family reported that they had been given lesser amount of sugar than what is allocated to them and than what they have traditionally received, the officials clarified that since their daughter had been recently married off, the amount of ration that they are entitled to decreases.

In addition, the GP also conducts social audits of MGNREGS as mandated at every Gram Sabha. As per the requirements of the scheme, all the accounts, records and registers related to MGNREGS are presented in the Gram Sabha. The people raise pertinent questions relating to wages, quality of work, number of days of work etc. The Social Audit Committee consists of MGNREGS labourers/beneficiaries, GP members, local SASTA members etc.

Impact

This system of social audits provides a space for healthy interactions between officials and beneficiaries helping them enhance communication, build faith and confidence which has helped improve the delivery system within the community.

This also helped the community to be more aware and knowledgeable of their rights, demand what is rightfully theirs, raise pertinent and difficult questions helping them to participate better in the democratic process. Hence, this helps build a community that is socially and politically aware as well as participative. For the elected representative and officials, it has brought in improved transparency and accountability making them perform their roles better. These measures have also helped bridge the gap and allay tensions between the community, beneficiaries and officials. It also provides a scope for new initiatives based on discussion and consensus with the community.

b: Management of Finances and Resources

The GP has taken various initiatives to improve its financial status. These include efforts to increase their own source revenue as well as measures to reduce expenditure.

Vattakottai Fort Vehicle Fee

The Vattakottai Fort falls within the jurisdiction of the Panchayat. Kanyakumari which is situated about five kilometers away is a very popular tourist destination attracting people from across the world. The GP has decided to capitalize on this proximity and use the Fort as a means of raising revenue for the Panchayat. The Fort is maintained by the ASI due to which

the GP cannot collect any entrance fee and neither is it responsible for the maintenance of the Fort.

The Panchayat has started imposing a toll on the road that is used to access the Fort. For this purpose it has installed a board stating the same. Vehicles that ply on the road are required to pay the fee according to the nature of the vehicle using the road to reach the Fort.



Table 4: Vehicle Fee Rates at Vattakottai Fort, Leepuram

Type of Vehicle	Amount of Vehicle Fee Collected (in Rs.)
Bus	40
Car	20
Mini-bus	25
Auto	15

Source: Leepuram GP Board at Vattakottai Road

The Panchayat issues a tender for the collection of the road toll. The highest bidder i.e who offers to pay the highest amount for the year to the GP is awarded the tender. The awarded party then pays the winning tender amount to the GP. The awarded party is responsible for the collection of the toll from vehicles and tourists. This tender is issued on yearly basis. The past winners of this tender have been people who reside in the vicinity of the Fort.

Table 5: Collection from Vehicle Fee at Vattakottai Fort

Year	Income from Road Toll at Vattakottai Fort (in Rs.)
2010-11	61,958
2011-12	68,153
2012-13	1,25,719
2013-14	1,50,000

Source: Leepuram GP Annual Accounts

To make the Fort more tourist-friendly, the GP has installed a water drinking facility at the entrance of the Fort. It is currently in talks with Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to

increase the publicity and popularity of the Fort with the intention of increasing the footfall at the Fort.

This year, a member of a household located on the road neighbouring the Fort was awarded the tender at Rs. 1,50,000. The party that is awarded the tender pays the fixed amount to the GP. The GP is also taking steps in collaboration with ASI to increase the popularity of the fort, and hence, the footfalls.

Collection of Professional and House Tax

The GP has also taken initiatives to ensure that water and professional tax are collected from the residents of the GP in a timely and regular manner. The GP collects professional tax from teachers, doctors and government staff residing within its limits. Similarly house tax is collected on the estimated value of the house on assessment. Over the past few years the GP has been making special efforts in this regard. Information and awareness is given at the Gram Sabhas. This is followed up with door-to-door campaigns and distribution of notices and pamphlets. Further, demand notes are issued to those pending payments. This has helped the GP to remove arrears on these two collections.

Table 6: Amount collected in Leepuram GP

Year	House Tax (in Rs.)	Professional Tax (in Rs.)
2010-11	2,00,000	20,000
2011-12	2,75,000	30,000
2012-13	3,00,000	35,000

Source: Leepuram GP Annual Accounts

This has helped the GP increase its own source revenue, which it has used construction of streetlights, extension of pipelines, road maintenance etc. Thus, the increased revenue has contributed to improving the available infrastructure in the GP which has led to better living conditions for the people residing in the GP. It has also facilitated community activities, such as the office of the Panchayat Level Federation (of SHGs) has been used for training purposes, conducting awareness campaigns and the regular meetings of various Self- Help Groups.

Management of Fund Schemes

Another innovative practice being followed in the GP is the combining of various scheme funds towards the building and improvement of infrastructure within the GP. Under this, the GP decides on consultation with community and officials that a particular infrastructural intervention is necessary for the GP. Then, it will split the various steps in the attainment of the selected infrastructure work. The funding of each of these steps is then sought from different schemes. Hence, funds are drawn from various scheme guidelines towards the construction or completion of an infrastructure work.



This was the method that was followed for the construction of a link road between Amanakanvilai and Samaikoil Street. The initial formation of the road was done using the labour under MGNREGS scheme, which was followed by the cementing the road from the award money of PEAIS. The black topping of the road was done under MLA –CDS funds. The installation of streetlights in the area was done from Panchayat General Fund.

Thus, this practice of the GP has resulted in efficient utilization of scheme funds as well as in the enhancement of infrastructure in the GP. This has eased the lives of the people, who find themselves better connected to other parts of the Panchayat. It has made reaching school much more convenient for the children in the area as they don't need to wade through bushes and shrubs in order to access their school. Further, the installation of a streetlight has made it safer for the women of the hamlet, thereby improving their movement even after sun-set.

Thus, the management of finances in the GP is commendable. The transparency and good maintenance of Panchayat accounts is appreciated by the members of the GP, the people residing within the Panchayat as well as the officials at the Taluk and District levels. Officials were of full praise for the manner in which these accounts have been maintained in Leepuram and said that Leepuram was often cited as an example to be followed.

c: Environment Friendly Initiatives and Awareness

The GP has in the previous year installed 20 solar powered streetlights within the Panchayat. The reason for this being two-fold, firstly to be more eco-friendly and secondly to reduce costs incurred on the electricity bill. Further, there is an ongoing pilot with timer attached streetlights which are set to automatically turn on and off. This would help conserve energy, especially during the monsoon season as people tend to be hesitant to switch the lights on or off due to the fear of being electrocuted. Currently 45 of the 458 streetlights in the GP run on either solar power or use CFL bulbs.

The construction of streetlights has instilled a sense of empowerment among the women, who now find places that were traditionally out of bounds, accessible even after dusk. Further, a number of them reported feeling at ease when their children returned late from tuitions from Kanyakumari town.

Additionally, the GP has been conducting intensive awareness campaigns to provide the people of the community with information on environmental issues such as pollution, disposal of waste, segregation of waste etc. It is taking steps towards making the GP a plastic free zone.

The awareness sessions are conducted at Gram Sabhas, SHG meetings, schools etc. The GP intends to involve various stakeholders in the process. It has also sought the assistance of local NGOs to achieve the same.



6. Conclusion

The good practices in GP appear to be mainly driven by the President, Mr. K Muthusamy, who was elected to this position in the 2011 elections. He served as the Vice-president of the Leepuram Panchayat from 2001-2006. Mr. Muthusamy is a graduate in literature and has previously engaged in agriculture. His previous tenure as the Vice-President enabled him to gather the necessary experience and knowledge on how to administer effectively. The President attributed his abilities and skills to Mr. Nyayaprakash, former President of GP, from whom he claimed to have learnt the reins. Under his mentorship, the current President got a chance to acquaint himself with the working of a Panchayat, the demands, the rules, the regulations and the roles and responsibilities of a President. Further, his close association with Mr. Nyayaprakash has lent him great credibility in the eyes of the people who support him whole-heartedly.

Further, he developed a working relationship with officials, the people and the Panchayat Secretary which holds him in good stead even today. He is also assisted in his endeavours by the erstwhile Panchayat Secretary Mr. Ponnuraj who acted not only in his capacity as a Secretary, but is also his friend, guide and confidant. This camaraderie was effectively used by the President from 2007-11 during which even though he was not in power, he was able to get a few of his requests on behalf of the people processed. Mr. Ponnuraj has over 15 years of

experience as the Panchayat Secretary of Leepuram GP, which has ensured that he has a very thorough understanding of the GP, its problems, issues and systems. The current President has used Mr. Ponnuraj's experience and knowledge very effectively in strategizing and planning for the GP. Further, the GP President enjoys a very amiable and trustworthy relationship with the Taluk and District Level officials who were full of praise for his efforts and his transparent practices.

The GP is a case of good working democratic practices. The public in the GP is heavily invested and participative in the planning and working of the GP. A symbiotic relationship between the community and the GP has ensured that while the public is more aware, knowledgeable and demanding, the GP is highly transparent and accountable.

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