

## CANADA IN THE WORLD OF DEVELOPMENT: OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY FRAMEWORK

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### *Abstract*

*The contribution describes the necessity of Canadian aid strategy and stresses its priorities in Canadian foreign policy. The elements of the strategy are characterized together with the aid partnerships in Canada's development strategy entitled "Canada in the World".*

*The effectiveness in Canadian aid programming is also underlined.*

**Key words:** Canada, foreign policy, aid strategy, effectiveness

### INTRODUCTION

In February, 1995, Canada's recently elected Liberal Government issued its first Statement on foreign policy entitled *Canada in the World*.<sup>i</sup> This Government Statement adopted an "integrated" approach to foreign policy focusing on three "key" objectives that were identified as the promotion of prosperity and employment, the protection of security within a stable global framework, and the projection internationally of Canadian values and culture. In keeping with this integrated approach, Official Development Assistance (ODA) was viewed instrumentally as but one component of a holistic, over-arching foreign policy framework geared to the Government's three primary objectives. Thus, for the first time in Canadian foreign policy-making, international assistance was treated as part of a foreign policy framework that did not include international development as an explicit, designated goal in its own right.<sup>ii</sup>

To be sure, each of the primary objectives ascribed to Canadian foreign policy embodied a particular concern relating to international development. Among the salient considerations shaping the Government's response to the global economic outlook was the emergence of significant 'new players' as partners and competitors of Canada's in international trade and investment, including newly industrializing economies like South Korea, Mexico and Taiwan, and middle income countries of Asia and Latin America. In seeking to promote prosperity and employment, the Government Statement emphasized the importance of "using all available foreign policy instruments in a coordinated way," including, by implication, development assistance, to "build relationships" with these dynamic high growth developing economies.<sup>iii</sup>

#### **The Elements of Canadian Aid Strategy**

Among the core Canadian cultural values that the Government proposed to project abroad through the

international assistance component of its foreign policy, major emphasis was placed on human rights, democracy, and environmentally sustainable development. Human rights were recognized as a foremost issue of international concern and action for Canadians, and were deemed "crucial" for global prosperity and security as well.<sup>iv</sup> The Government Statement pledged that "we will make effective use of all of the influence that our economic, trading and development assistance relationships give us to promote respect for human rights." Likewise, foreign policy support was promised for the extension of democracy and good governance, as a matter of "priority." Environmentally sustainable development was also identified as one of the "central components of the Canadian value system"; the Government Statement offered an undertaking that Canadian foreign policy will ensure the promotion of sustainable development "through the careful and responsible balancing of trade, development and environment considerations."

Parenthetically, it should be noted that the Government also took this opportunity to transfer administrative responsibility from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for the delivery of assistance to the former Soviet Union and East and Central Europe.<sup>v</sup> However, the present study will focus exclusively on Canada's ODA program, that is, the international assistance directed at the developing countries.

To give fiscal expression to its commitment to international development assistance, the Liberal Government Statement declared an intention to progress towards an ODA target of 0.7% of Gross National Product (GNP), from then current 0.4% level, "when Canada's fiscal situation allows it."<sup>vi</sup> This target has not (yet) been reached, and indeed successive budgetary cutbacks under the Liberal Government has reduced its aid effort to an unprecedented (for Canada) low level of

0.22%.by 2001. At the United Nations Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico, in March, 2002, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced a long-term commitment to restore Canada's aid volume by at least 8% a year.<sup>vii</sup>

The Liberal government has taken a regionalist approach to asserting ministerial control over Canada's relationship with the developing world. While concentrating overall political-level responsibility for foreign policy, trade policy and aid policy in three separate ministerial portfolios, a Minister for Foreign Affairs, a Minister for International Trade and a more junior Minister for International Cooperation, respectively, the Chrétien administration also appointed two ministers of state, for Africa and South America, and for Asia Pacific, to oversee bilateral relations with countries and regional institutions in these geographic areas. This regionalist approach accentuated the already strong geographic spread of Canada's development assistance program, and reinforced the Government's propensity to try to blend bilateral aid together with other aspects of foreign policy towards regions and countries of concern.

***The Program Priorities of Canadian Aid Policy:***

The Government Statement on Canada in the World established six "program priorities" for Canadian development assistance: (1) Basic Human Needs; (2) Women in Development; (3) Infrastructure Services; (4) Human rights, Democracy and Good Governance; (5) Private Sector Development; and (6) The Environment.<sup>viii</sup> These six "priorities" are intended to apply to all program mechanisms for the transfer of Canadian ODA. However, while six program priorities were stipulated, only one - the priority for basic human needs - received a specific pledge of 25% of ODA. Apart from this singular target, none of the other program priorities was assigned a precedence, i.e. priority, over the rest.

The program priority assigned to basic human needs reflected the Government's determination to promote the security of the individual as a core value of a Liberal foreign policy. Six distinct issues were identified as "basic human needs" under this priority, including primary health care, basic education, family planning and reproductive health care, nutrition, water and sanitation, and shelter. According to the Government Statement, 25% of Canada's ODA will be committed to basic human needs programming.

In addition to programming for these specific basic human needs, Canada expects to continue to provide humanitarian and emergency relief when needed, and will also provide other categories of human need that warrant attention.

The ODA priority for Women in Development represents the current iteration of CIDA's evolving commitment to the integration of women in development (WID) and gender equity.<sup>ix</sup> Programming for this domain is governed by the CIDA Policy on Women in Development and Gender Equity, which is intended to permeate all areas of aid policy and programming. Its goals extend beyond targeting just equal access for women, and embrace the promotion of a more generally comprehensive developmental role for women based on gender equity and participatory development.

The aid program priority for "infrastructure services" expressed the Liberal Government's interest in involving Canada in helping improve the quality and distribution of economic infrastructure services in developing countries. Adoption of this priority, a decision reportedly taken at the instance of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, signalled Canada's intention to resume programming for infrastructure development, which was largely abandoned since the 1980s. However, deliberate care was taken to frame this priority in terms of "infrastructure services" rather than the actual construction of physical infrastructure, so as to avoid the substantial costs and risks - and controversies - associated with large-scale physical infrastructure projects. Infrastructure services were defined as referring to the outputs or flow of benefits emanating from economic infrastructure projects, eg. utilities, transportation systems, or other civil works. Support for infrastructure services is to be associated with strictly "environmentally sound" projects, and in particular those emphasizing "poorer groups and capacity-building."

CIDA priority for Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance has, as its goal, "to increase respect for human rights, including children's rights; to promote democracy and better governance; and to strengthen both civil society and the security of the individual." Five distinct areas of activity were identified as focal points for this area of policy priority: (1) the protection and promotion of human rights; (2) the strengthening of democratic institutions and practices; (3) the enhancement of public sector competence in government; (4) building civil society; and (5) improving the political will of governments to respect rights, rule democratically and govern effectively. Programming in these areas will concentrate on capacity-building and institution strengthening to support organizations and practices that develop and sustain human rights observance and responsible government. Aid will serve to foster a dialogue on rights, democracy and governance issues, in order to deepen CIDA's own understanding of the interests and positions of partner governments and organizations, and to influence recipient country development efforts.

Canada's aid program priority for private sector development is aimed explicitly at promoting "sustained and equitable" economic growth in developing countries. Adoption of this new, for CIDA, programming initiative represented one more indication of the far-reaching reorientation of Canadian bilateral assistance programming away from its traditional government-to government framework, to a new functional approach that reaches out to other agents of development, in this case the private sectors of developing countries. Aid support for private sector development was considered a growth formula for local entrepreneurship and investment, to create employment, generate income, and attain higher levels of economic activity. Indeed, for purposes of this program priority the "private sector" in developing countries was defined so as to include both privately-owned businesses and state-owned enterprises, provided the latter operated on a "commercial" basis.

The Government Statement included an environment priority for Canadian ODA "to help developing countries to protect their environment and to contribute to addressing global and regional environmental issues." Inclusion of the environment as a Canadian ODA priority reflected the ongoing CIDA involvement with environmental sustainability issues, coupled with the decision to apply the terms of the Environmental Administration Act to federally funded aid transfers, and the Liberal Government's identification of environmentally sustainable development as one of the "central components of the Canadian value system."

Supplementing these "program priorities", in 2000 CIDA launched in *Social Development Priorities: A Framework for Action*, inspired by the then Minister Maria Mina. According to this Action Plan CIDA was to move towards a greater sectoral focus with increased emphasis on the four areas of health and nutrition, HIV/AIDS, basic education, and child protection. CIDA committed itself to doubling its investment in social development over a five year period, with specific financial targets being set for each year up to 2005. In fact CIDA exceeded its targets for the Social Development Priorities in 2001 and 2002.<sup>x</sup>

The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, and the appointment of a new Minister for International Cooperation, Susan Whelan, who had a strong personal interest in agriculture, prompted a further elaboration of CIDA's development objectives. CIDA programming strategy now resumed an emphasis on agriculture and rural development as a means of promoting the poverty reduction and economic growth targets stipulated in the Millennium Declaration.<sup>xi</sup>

The multiplication of aid priorities was, for the most part, domestically driven; developing countries were barely consulted.<sup>xii</sup> The formulation of Canada's new ODA policy highlighted that trend: the priorities and

principles that were adopted responded, by and large, to the perspectives of Canadian politicians, bureaucrats, domestic activists and stakeholders, with but minimal input from the developing countries. Goal diversity, in effect, overtook the singularity of poverty reduction on Canada's aid policy agenda. And, by virtue of their domination of the policy agenda, Canadian politicians, aid managers and stakeholders now became the reference "clientele" of Canada's aid policy, in effect displacing the poor in the developing countries.

#### *Aid Partnerships in Canada's Development Strategy:*

CIDA's aid delivery strategy continues to place high priority partnership initiatives involving Canadian Non-Governmental Development Organizations (NGDOs), institutions and the private sector. Indeed, partnerships continued to attract a comparatively high level of CIDA financial support, notwithstanding a succession of budget cuts over the past decade and more. Support for Partnership programs accounted for about 13% of Canada's total ODA budget. Canada has ranked among the foremost donors in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), following the Netherlands, Japan and the United Kingdom, in the volume of aid disbursed through the NGDO channels.<sup>xiii</sup> The Canadian NGDO community remains among the best funded and most influential in the donor world, notwithstanding the fiscal stringencies of recent years.

The partnership principles of *Canada in the World* have had far-reaching implications for the policy relationship between CIDA and its partner organizations, and in particular the NGDOs community. What distinguished these Partnership arrangements in the past was its "responsive" character, which allowed relative autonomy to NGDOs in managing and delivering their aid initiative. However, as a result of the integration of aid policy into the new foreign policy framework, the six official aid priorities --- and the expanded social development and Millennium sectoral objectives --- now also govern CIDA's Partnership Programs, including its NGDO component. CIDA support for NDGO and other institutional private sector partnerships is confined to proposals that subscribe to the designated priorities and conform to its own country programming directions. Furthermore, partnership funding is contingent on compliance with CIDA accountability and evaluation requirements.

Among the first casualties of this country program priorities-driven approach were the international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Since these international voluntary agencies could not bind themselves to Canadian priorities, CIDA support for INGOs was almost terminated (except for INGOs headquartered in Canada and which conform to government priorities).

CIDA's Industrial Cooperation Program (CIDA-INC) has enjoyed a relative shift in the balance of partnership funding in favour of the private sector. As a responsive program, CIDA-INC activities responded to projects initiated and implemented by the Canadian private sector. In keeping with the new integrated approach to CIDA programming, private sector proposals for CIDA-INC support were expected to conform to the priorities and objectives adopted for the countries and regions concerned.

***The Geographic Focus of Canada's Aid Effort:***

The Government Statement on *Canada in the World* and the subsequent 2002 report on *Strengthening Aid Effectiveness*<sup>xiv</sup> resolved to enhance the utility Canadian ODA by improving policy coherence and synergy among the aid instruments, and by focussing the aid effort on selected recipient countries. Compared to other donor countries with aid programs of similar magnitudes, Canadian international assistance has always been widely dispersed geographically among a relatively large number of recipient countries.<sup>xv</sup> For their part proponents of a wider geographic roster argue that Canada, as a G8 country, as the only DAC donor that is concurrently a member the Commonwealth, la francophonie, the Organization of American States, and is a dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has extensive interests and foreign policy objectives relating to most of the developing world. This extensive bilateralism compels Canada to maintain an aid presence in most, if not all, developing countries. The argument is often buttressed by influential domestic constituencies, including immigrant communities, and exporter interest and internationally-oriented associations and institutions. Advocates of geographic concentration maintain, to the contrary, that Canada's interests and capabilities do not justify a dispersal of its aid effort, and that a more geographically focussed approach would yield better developmental results from available resource transfers.

Since the early 1980s Canada has concentrated its bilateral ODA on thirty "program" countries and regions (later reduced to twenty-eight) plus some 90 other selected "project" countries. Most of the 28 countries in the core program category consisted of lower income economies, including large-population, low-income countries like China and India as well as some of the least-developed countries (LLDCs) such as Bangladesh, Guinea, Haiti, Lesotho, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zaire and Zambia. However, other major recipients included high-growth, middle-income countries like Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Broad geographic targets were introduced in order to re-allocate half of Canadian bilateral assistance to Africa, 35% to Asia and 15% to the Americas.

The geographic distribution of Canadian ODA that evolved during the 1980s was symptomatic of a

dichotomy of purpose, what one observer described as a "two-track" approach to country selection.<sup>xvi</sup> Thus, while nearly four-fifths of Canadian bilateral assistance was still directed at poorer countries, mostly in Africa, at the same time an increasing effort was devoted to developing longer-term linkages with middle-income and certain high-growth, lower-income countries, especially in Asia. From the early 1990s, CIDA began shifting its geographic allocation of resources more towards Africa, in response to the deepening economic crisis in that continent, at the expense of Asia. By the mid-1990s, 70% of Canadian country-to-country assistance (bilateral plus partnership programs) went to just twenty-eight countries and regional organizations in Africa and Asia, however the remaining aid resources are dispersed amongst another 100 recipient countries.

To be sure, the relatively high proportion of Canadian ODA going to non-program, 'project' countries resulted in a very widespread and diluted aid effort across the developing world. In 2000-2001, the most recent year for which official data are available, 37% of total Canadian bilateral disbursements were allocated to the least developed countries, with the highest degree of concentration (31%) being in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>xvii</sup> This broad dispersal of effort meant that Canada's aid contribution usually comprised only a modest proportion of the aid receipts of even low-income core program countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, which received an expanded overall share of Canadian aid since the 1990s, Canada's contribution averaged under 2% of total ODA receipts. This low contribution ratio diminished Canada's donor profile in precisely those core program countries where, by virtue of this geographic focus, Canada was actively seeking a prominent presence. More to the point, it also weakened the leverage effect of Canada's aid effort on recipient country development performance.<sup>xviii</sup>

For many in Canada's development community, Africa symbolizes a singularly authentic Canadian involvement in purely "developmental" goals. Canada's foreign policy affinity to Africa was motivated also by an admixture of cultural and domestic political concerns, connected mainly to relations with francophone countries. On the other hand, Canada's aid efforts in Africa have little, if any, relevance to the primary objectives of Canada's new foreign policy framework, with its emphasis on economic prosperity and employment goals.

Asia, for its part, presents Canada with a striking duality - accelerated industrialization alongside mass poverty. The reduction of poverty is a categorical imperative for Asian development. For countries suffering from widespread poverty, poverty alleviation remains a priority objective. At the same time, most Asian developing countries are committed to economic reforms and restructuring to enhance their long-term

growth prospects. Investment in infrastructure, economic and social, is everywhere deemed to be a prerequisite for improved development performance. CIDA utilizes all its aid channels, deploying a wide array of transfer mechanisms for its Asia programs. As for the high-growth Southeast Asian economies, an effort has been made to involve Canadian economic interests with the economic developments taking place in the region. All Asia bilateral programs aim to promote more extensive country-to-country linkages among counterpart institutions in order to facilitate the transition to a more mature, post-aid relationship.

About half the population of the world lives in Asian developing countries. These Asian countries differ in size, natural endowments, historical legacies, economic structures, social patterns, cultures, and political systems. Asia as a whole recorded significant economic progress over recent decades. Yet, despite their generally impressive economic performance, Asia remains afflicted with widespread poverty, institutional deficiencies and structural distortions, especially among the populous South Asian countries and in Communist Vietnam. Economic activity is still largely agricultural, despite substantial gains in industrialization. Per capita incomes for South Asia and Indochina are lower than for Sub-Saharan Africa. Nearly half the developing world's poor, and almost half of those in extreme poverty, are in South Asia.<sup>xix</sup>

Latin America and the Caribbean present still another set of geographic parameters for the Canadian aid program. Canada has redefined its role as a Hemispheric leader, and is taking a proactive part in trade liberalization initiatives apropos North and South America and the Caribbean. As well, Canada is especially sensitive to poverty issues in Central America and the Caribbean, which are seen as redounding on hemispheric stability, transnational crime and flows of economic refugees northward.

As aid policy came under mounting pressure due to budgetary cutbacks on the one hand, coupled with expanded Prime Ministerial commitments internationally global development agendas in the Millennium Declaration and in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), the drive for aid effectiveness impelled CIDA towards greater strategic concentration on particular countries, sectoral approaches, and management roles. With effect from 2002, CIDA decided to channel future aid incrementally towards nine key recipient countries of focus: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal and Tanzania. Aid programming will place increasing emphasis on sector wide approaches (SWAs), and will be directed at particular social priority (SDP) target groups. Tying, and other terms and conditions will be reworked so as to reinforce the overall thrust of the aid effort. Aid administration

will utilize techniques of Knowledge Management, Results Based Management, and a more extensive field presence in order to facilitate the timely delivery of more effective Canadian aid contributions to international development.

### ***Managing by Results: The Quest for Effectiveness in Canadian Aid Programming:***

As a result of interventions by the Auditor General of Canada and Treasury Board, CIDA, like other government departments, has moved to improve its administrative capabilities through standardized performance reviews, syntheses of lessons learned, and the better reporting of the results of its expenditure initiatives. Aid administration was to become more results-oriented as well as more transparent to Parliament and to the Canadian public.

The purpose of a results-based management style is not merely to improve public accountability. Rather it is also intended to have a direct operational impact on CIDA managerial culture, transforming this, in Auditor-General's phrase, into "an action-oriented, learning organization."<sup>xx</sup> While this approach may enable CIDA to demonstrate its ability to achieve value for money along with developmental results, an emphasis on management by "results" can carry certain operational risks in its wake. For example, an emphasis on reportable "results" can create a perverse incentive for risk-averse aid management, which can be especially deleterious for PDA programming in the high-risk circumstances of, very poor countries. In situations such as Africa, a risk-averse managerial culture could yield improved reportable "results" by concentrating on certain more easily deliverable and measurable, even if less developmentally-challenging pursuits. A risk averse aid management might thus eschew challenging, complex, innovative initiatives that may be inherently more risky, even if these risks are warranted by the prospective developmental benefits for the recipient country and its people.

Canada's ODA strategy identifies capacity-building and policy development as major operational themes for CIDA programming. Administrative capacity-building and the formulation of relevant and effective policy framework are considered prerequisites for improving the capability of local institutions and organizations in the developing countries to plan and implement their mandated activities within these priority areas. Certainly, the focus on capacity-building and policy development implies a requirement for CIDA managers to acquire a more profound knowledge and understanding of the economic, cultural, social and political dynamics of the recipient countries concerned. This in itself may pose a challenge for CIDA to build up its own managerial capacity to function knowledgeably and with relevance in the priority areas being pursued.

CIDA programs promoting capacity-building and policy development typically involve a wide array of technical cooperation activities, including training, expert assistance, study tours, and placements in counterpart organizations in Canada. In technical cooperation, the essence of the resource transfer is Canadian knowledge. Usually, technical cooperation projects entail relatively high costs per (direct) beneficiary. As regards capacity-building and policy-development, the direct beneficiaries of aid-supported knowledge transfers would typically include members of the better-educated, better-placed strata of society, people already functioning in leadership positions in local institutions and organizations. If these capacity-building and policy development efforts are ever to redound to the benefit of the targeted priority (eg. Basic Human Needs, Women and Development, HIV/AIDS), this will derive secondarily from improved planning and implementation of development services and projects on the part of local and national institutions and organizations.

Development assistance for capacity-building and policy development can be particularly vulnerable to potentially damaging goal conflicts and clashes of priorities. In the Environmental priority area, for example, the strengthening of local environmental management institutions in a predominantly agrarian developing economy could, in some circumstances, have a paradoxically negative, socially-regressive impact on certain poverty groups, especially on marginalized populations. Thus, the implementation of environmental policies that have the incidental effect of inflating the price of agricultural land or other natural resources needed by the poor, or which raise the economic costs of investment and employment creation in the rural economy, will invariably worsen the incidence of agrarian poverty. Aid support for Environment capacity-building and policy development, as with other priorities, must take deliberate care to avoid any socially regressive consequences, and to ascertain that the overall thrust of ODA efforts are consistent with poverty reduction.

Where Canada's aid program priorities do address the productive sector, the programming emphasis is placed on "human resource development" and "capacity building." In keeping with this approach, aid delivery will concentrate on training and institution-strengthening activities, and will eschew by and large the provision of capital goods or technology. There is no place in this strategy for aid for economic infrastructure, such as electric power, railways, or even telecommunications, sectors in which Canada traditionally demonstrated considerable capability and which were once elements of Canadian aid programming. Indeed, only scant provision is even made for income generating projects within existing priority sectors. Economic growth was eclipsed in the

prevailing development assistance agenda in favour of equity, redistribution and environmental objectives. While the aim may be laudable - to propel developing countries along a path to sustainable development - it is indeed questionable whether this redirection of aid away from economic growth actually corresponds to the urgent needs and priority goals of the developing countries themselves. Developing countries still call for investment in infrastructure development, a point reiterated by African leaders in their NEPAD priorities.

### *The Drivers of Canadian Aid Strategy*

As we have seen, the Canadian approach to international assistance was driven by a matrix of domestic considerations, almost exclusively, and had its role defined primarily as a instrument of a higher foreign policy agenda. The architects of Canadian policy-makers subscribed to no specific paradigm of development, preferring instead an eclectic approach that appealed to a broad-based and variegated domestic political consensus fixated with the holy grail of "sustainable" development. Canada's self-image as an aid donor was borne until recently on a tide of developmental romanticism, a legacy of the global social justice rhetoric of the earlier Trudeauvian foreign policy agenda of the 1970s.<sup>xxi</sup> The appeal of humanistic internationalism would now recede as Canadian aid programming became ever more constrained by fiscal stringencies, while the remaining aid effort becomes more deliberately and explicitly geared to Canadian foreign policy perspectives.

While most Canadians were generally supportive of the equity, redistribution and environmental goals of Canada's aid policy, their unilateralist adoption as program priorities bespoke a quite different Canadian demeanour towards the sensibilities of developing countries. It was clear that the perspectives of the developing countries themselves were increasingly irrelevant to the process of defining Canada's aid agenda. Despite the Government's penchant for such mantra as "partnerships" and "democratization of foreign policy," the actual formulation of aid strategy remained a closely held, peremptory prerogative of aid managers guided by ministerial directive. Little, if any, consultation has taken place with the developing countries concerned regarding the determination of Canada's aid priorities and development goals, not even with the select group of major program recipients. In effect, this peremptory approach distanced Canadian aid management from the so-called "new paradigm on sustainable development" put forward by the Chair of the OECD DAC in 1994. This paradigm promoted a convergence of development strategies and the determination of shared objectives between aid donors and recipient countries.<sup>xxii</sup>

Since the 1990s Canadian aid policy-making appears to have headed in an opposite and increasingly unilateralist

direction. If there was a convergence behind Canada's newly-defined ODA program priorities, this was the convergence between self-righteousness and self-interest. Canada will remain without doubt a benevolent donor country, but this would become a more conditional benevolence reflecting Canadian own policy

norms and guided by Canada's own international agenda.

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