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REDUCTION IN OBUDU AND OGOJA LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
AREAS OF CROSSRIVERSTATE**

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# ROLES OF SKILLS ACQUISITION CENTRES IN POVERTY REDUCTION IN OBUDU AND OGOJA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF CROSSRIVERSTATE

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## ABSTRACT

This study was designed to find out the role of skills acquisition centres in poverty reduction in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas of Cross River State, Nigeria. Three specific purposes and corresponding research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. The study employed survey research design. The population of the study was three hundred and seventy two (372) artisans who participated in the skills acquisition programme between 2009 and 2011 which is made up of one hundred and ninety-four (194) male and one hundred and seventy-eight (178) female artisans. There was no sampling since the entire population was small. An instrument titled: Skill Acquisition Centres and Poverty Reduction Questionnaire (SACPRQ) was designed to elicit information from the respondents. Data obtained for the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer all research questions and t-test statistic was used to test all the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that the training programmes impacted to a large extent on the social and economic lives of the participants as well as reduced the level of poverty in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas. It was concluded that the acquired skills has impacted positively to a large extent on the socioeconomic lives of the participants and also reduced the level of poverty in the study area. It was recommended that government should ensure that more of these skills acquisition centres are established, especially in rural areas to avail many youths and other unemployed the opportunity to acquire relevant skills for self-employment and self-reliance.

**Keywords:** skill acquisition, poverty reduction, socio-economic life and training

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the key responsibilities of government is to create social order that addresses the total wellbeing of the citizenry, by providing the essential social amenities like food, shelter and clothing as well as the opportunity to create both biological and economic livelihood. But due to increased population and the attendant unemployment, and lack of capacity by government to provide for everybody, there is the clamour for providing opportunities for forms of education that can aid people acquire self-sustenance by government. It is in this connection that Akpomi (2008) advocated that the only sure way government at all levels can reduce the preponderance of unemployment in the country is to create avenues for skills identification and acquisition along the lines of competencies exhibited by the participants.

Omoruyi&Osunde(2011) defined skill as ability to do something well, usually acquired through training or experience. According to them, Skill acquisition on the other hand involves the development of a new skill, practice or a way of doing things usually acquired through experience. They also stated that absence of vocational skills and competence on the part of individuals has been considered to be what has been hindering the economic development of most African countries, particularly Nigeria. In Nigeria for instance, the educational system which was experienced at post-independence placed emphasis and value on academic excellence rather than acquisition of vocational skills which tends to prepare them for a more fulfilling lifestyle within the society. In other words, the system placed its beam light on subjects in the humanities or arts to the detriment of vocational courses that facilitates practical skill acquisition which is believed to be more important to the development of the country. This has resulted to high level of poverty.

Bradshaw (2005) defined poverty in its simplest form as ones inability to acquire and use or have access to the most basic essentials of life usually because of poor income status, handicapping conditions or government inability to provide such essentials. Poverty according to Alegieuno and Attah (2005) is also defined as a

multidimensional phenomenon that transcends lack of money or material resources. They maintained that it encompasses issues such as lack of access to economic, social, political, religious and cultural opportunities. In the real sense of the word, poverty puts one in a state of sub-optimal utilization of basic needs such as food, education, health, jobs, political power, due to some inhibitive economic and social forces around his social and physical environment.

Azih (2010) also defined poverty as a socio economic state, political state or other areas of deprivations that can affect an individual, family or communities and usually results in lack of access to basic necessity of life. Hence, it could be said that poverty is having in short supply of basic needs of man and other social amenities which include food, clothing, shelter, safe drinking water, affordable power supply, all of which determine the quality and health standard and or lifestyle of an individual, family, community and the society in general. Poverty also include the lack of or insufficient access to educational opportunities, and employment which have the capability to rescue one from poverty so that he can enjoy respect from other citizens (Agbogo, Udama&Urom, 2007).

As a panacea to this problem, skills acquisition for most citizens of the country is advocated since this will provide employment and income generating opportunities for the populace. Olukosi (2003) emphasized that the application of the acquired vocational skills for self and paid employment should be the main target of the skills acquisition centres. He further contended that temporal and short term strategies adopted to supply the basic and immediate needs of the poor may however serve more effective purpose, but a durable strategy is most desirable because it will provide for the design of a permanent educational programme which will include vocational skill acquisition for youths and adults.

Government has no doubt made some efforts through the enhancement of the curricula for entrepreneurship education in schools as well as the vocational skills training programmes by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in states, Women Development Centres and the Skills Acquisition Centres in some Local Government Areas across the country (Obabe, 2001). Other poverty reduction measures taken by the federal government include the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1979, Agricultural Revolution Programme (ARP) of 1982, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DEFRRRI) of 1986, National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPAP) of 1999, under which Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP) as well as Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP) were established. Others include Youths Economic Empowerment Programme (YEPP) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS). The National Economic Empowerment and development Strategy was meant to operate at the national level, while at the state and Local Government levels, it was replicated as State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) respectively.

In all of these, skills acquisition programme as a matter of national policy, has more definite design for training potential entrepreneurs in our institutions. Skills acquisition programmes are aspect of entrepreneurship development which have been recognized the world over as an important aspect of human capacity development as well as a veritable tool for the functioning of organization. Dickson, Solomon and Weaver (2008) explained that it is no doubt that skill acquisition programmes contribute immeasurably towards creating new jobs, wealth, poverty reduction and income generation for both individuals and governments. They defined skills acquisition as a life-long learning process which started as early as the basic school age and progressed through all levels of education which adult education is inclusive. The standards developed and the achievement indicators culled from this process have been used as a framework for the trainers to employ in building earmarked objectives, learning activities and evaluation for their trainees.

Rae and Carswel (2000) reported that, using the curricula for training potential entrepreneurs has brought about the development of the good understanding needed to ascertain and pave way for entrepreneurial opportunities through a guided capacity and expertise in order to successfully start and manage one's enterprise. The importance of entrepreneurial education to any given economy cannot be over emphasized because entrepreneurial activities and the resultant financial gains contribute in no small measure to build a buoyant economy.

Acquired entrepreneurial skills and attitudes provide benefits to individuals and the society as a whole, even beyond the application to business activities. For instance, Young and Sexton (1997) stated that, personal qualities that are relevant to skills acquisition such as creativity and the spirit of initiative can be useful to everyone, in their working responsibilities and their daily existence. This is why it is important that important technical and business skills should be given to the individuals who decide to get themselves engaged in their own business as well as those whose business have grown to employ others. In doing this, a platform would have been created for self-sustenance through the application of the acquired knowledge and skills which result in the exhibition of high standard of capabilities and competencies.

In Nigeria today, and indeed in most African countries, a lot of efforts have been made by local, states and the national governments to create awareness and opportunities for the acquisition of technical skills and vocational competencies as means of providing opportunity for wealth creation and poverty reduction. The incidence of poverty in Nigeria according to Olayemi (2003) is on the high side, where about 70% of the total population has been classified as poor. This rate of poverty, according to him is getting high as a result of high rate of unemployment,

increase in level of illiteracy, income inequalities, high incidence of diseases, social tensions, corruption and bad governance among others arising from over concentration on a mono-economy which is petroleum.

Most people irrespective of their gender and the location of their town do not have the knowledge and skills that can enable them to be self-employed or take jobs where they are available; as a result, they remain poor.

This is why Obabe (2001) stressed that the production of skillful educated and self-reliant individuals who will be useful to themselves and the society by enhancing the socio-economic growth of the society is the sure way of reducing the incidence of poverty in our country. This opinion is in line with the objective of the establishment of Skills Acquisition programmes by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and the replication of such programmes by states across the country. As part of the measures to minimize the level of poverty in some states of the federation. Obabe (2001) reported that the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) sought collaboration with Cross River State Government to execute the Open Apprenticeship Scheme (OAS) by using the then Women Development Centres in the state. Ogoja and Obudu Women Development Centres were the very first in the Northern Senatorial District of the state to be converted to Skills Acquisition Centres for the purpose of engaging the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) trainees in the different skills acquisition programmes designed by the Directorate. The preference for these two (2) centres was predicated on the level of equipment and facilities available for training the participants. Even though other centres later joined in the training of National Directorate of Employment (NDE) trainees by the mid 1990s, Obudu and Ogoja have remained ahead of other centres in terms of the training packages. It is therefore important to ascertain the role these skills acquisition centres have played to reduce poverty in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas of Cross River States.

### 1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which the programmes of the skills acquisition centres have affected the social lives of the participants in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas;
2. Ascertain the extent to which the programmes of the skills acquisition centres have affected the economic lives of the participants in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas; and
3. Determine the level of poverty reduction in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas.

### 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent have the training programmes of the skills acquisition centres affected the social lives of the participants in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas?
2. To what extent have the training programmes of the skills acquisition centres affected the economic lives of the participants in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas?
3. In what ways have the acquired vocational skills reduced the level of poverty in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas?

### 3. METHODS

This study was carried out in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas in Cross River State of Nigeria. These Local Governments Areas are two out of the five that make up the Northern Senatorial District of the state. Obudu Local Government Area is one of the oldest in the Senatorial District. Both Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas administratively comprises of ten (10) Council Wards and both councils have a population of 87,608 and 92,305 respectively, based on National Population Census exercise of 2006.

The population of the study was 372 made up of all the artisans who undertook skills acquisition programmes in Carpentry, Tailoring, Hairdressing, Auto- Mechanic, Auto-Electrical, Computer Operation, Shoe Mending, Welding, Printing, Painting, Catering and Soap Making and graduated in 2009, 2010 and 2011 in the two local government areas. This comprised of 158 artisans who graduated from Obudu and 214 who graduated from Ogoja out of which 194 were males and 178 were females.

For the purpose of generating the required data, a well self-structured questionnaire was designed and administered on three hundred and seventy-two artisans in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas and all the copies were retrieved which showed 100% retrieval.

The data collected for this study were computer-analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). It employed descriptive and inferential statistics.



#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the study are presented in tables in accordance with individual research questions and hypotheses of the study.

Table1: Mean Ratings and the Standard Deviations of the Extent of the Effect of the Training Programme in the Social Lives of the Participants

	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	N	Decision
1.	You now have higher self-esteem because you are financially buoyant	3.06	0.94	372	Large Extent
2.	You now have a greater sense of Control over your life.	2.95	1.00	372	Large Extent
3.	You now exercise freedom of choice because of your earned income.	2.76	1.03	372	Large Extent
4.	You are now functional in your community and society at large.	2.88	1.06	372	Large Extent
5.	The skills you acquired have improved your social status as you are an independent citizen.	2.94	1.04	372	Large Extent
6.	With the income from your business venture/trade, you can conveniently further your education to a higher level.	3.15	0.91	372	Large Extent
	Grand mean	2.96	0.91		Large Extent

The summary of results of items 1-6 presented on Table 1 above revealed the extent to which the skills acquisition programme has affected the social lives of the participants in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas. Responses to all the items in the table showed that the skills acquisition programme has affected their social lives positively. This yielded a grand mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 2.96 and a grand mean of standard deviation (SD) of 1.0, which therefore means that the skill training programme has affected the social life of the respondents positively to a large extent.

The analysis of research question 1 as shown in Table 1 indicated that responses from the respondents revealed that through the skills acquired by the respondents, they have gained higher self-esteem, greater sense of control over their own lives, they can now exercise freedom of choice, they are functional in their various communities and the society at large, the skills acquired has liberated their minds as well as improved their social status and can attend a higher education if so desired with the daily income they earn from their business ventures or trades.

Table 2: Mean Ratings and the Standard Deviations of the Extent of the Effect of the Training Programme in the Economic Lives of the participants

S/N	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	N	Decision
1.	The programme equipped you with the skills for controlling an enterprise.	2.84	1.09	372	Large Extent
2.	The training developed your abilities/ potentialities for successful life.	2.84	1.07	372	Large Extent
3.	You gained some basic skills that can help you develop business plans by yourself.	2.93	1.05	372	Large Extent
4.	You acquired good decision making qualities that could make you successful in your business venture.	2.79	1.01	372	Large Extent
5.	You were receiving stipends monthly while on training.	2.50	1.17	372	Large Extent
6.	You have been empowered through the entrepreneurial skills training which leads to enhancement in your income.	2.96	1.04	372	Large Extent
7.	You are now self-reliant.	3.08	0.96	372	Large Extent
8.	You have become an employer of labour.	2.85	1.08	372	Large Extent
9.	You received training in more than one skills	1.68	0.75	372	Small Extent
10.	You received training free of cost.	1.45	0.53	372	Small Extent
	Grand mean	2.59	0.98		Large Extent

Table 2 above showed the effect of skills acquisition programmes on the economic lives of the participants in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas. Items 1-8 showed large extent with mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation as stated in table 2 above, while items 9 and 10 showed small extent with mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) of 1.68 and 0.75, and 1.49 and 0.53 respectively. However, the grand mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) of the items in the cluster is 2.59 with a standard deviation of 0.98 which therefore means that the skill training programme has affected the economic lives of the respondents to a large extent.

The analysis of research question as shown in Table 2 showed that responses from the respondents revealed that the training programme equipped them with the right skills for controlling an enterprise, developed their potentialities and capabilities for successful life, gained basis skills that help them to develop business plans by themselves, acquired good decision making qualities that could make them successful in their business ventures/trades, they are able to establish their own ventures with the help of the monthly stipends they were receiving during the training period, could save from their daily earnings from their businesses for further expansion, they are empowered through the entrepreneurial skills training which leads to enhancement in their income, they are now employers of labour rather than job seekers.

Table 3: The Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) Ratings and the Standard Deviations of the Level of Poverty Reduction through Skills Acquisition Programme in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas.

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	Decision
1.	The skill(s) acquired enabled you to establish your own business venture.	2.37	1.19	372	Disagree
2.	You can now take care of your basic needs because of the income you earned from your business venture/trade.	2.55	1.14	372	Agree
3.	You can now provide training for other unemployed youths by providing apprenticeship services for those who are willing.	2.62	1.13	372	Agree
4.	With the benefits of the skill(s) you have acquired, you can now train your siblings in school.	2.36	1.08	372	Disagree
5.	With the money you make from business venture, you can now contribute to the economic development of your community through donations/levies.	2.88	1.04	372	Agree
6.	You now have savings for possible expansion of your business venture.	2.92	1.11	372	Agree
	Grand mean	2.62	1.11		Agree

Table 3 above showed the results obtained from items 1-6. The results revealed that the skills acquired has helped in the reduction of poverty in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas with the cluster grand mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) of 2.62 and a standard deviation of 1.11 which represent acceptance to the reduction of poverty in the areas.

The data analysis as presented in Table 3 above revealed that skills acquisition programme has reduced poverty in the study area through the following ways: The acquired skills has enable the recipients to establish their own business ventures or trades which leads to the improvement in their financial base and that of their families as they create jobs for their family members, they can take care of their basic needs because of the income they earn from their business venture/trade, they can provide training opportunity for other unemployed youths who are not opportune to receive such training at the skills acquisition centre, some of them could proceed to acquire higher education if so desired, they can now contribute to the economic development of their various communities through contributions and levies as well as to the economy through their taxes to the government and some can save for future expansion of their business/trade, which leads to the expansion of the inter-link.



## 5. Discussion of Findings

### 5.1 The Roles of Skills Acquisition in the Social Lives of the Participants

The analysis of research question three as shown in Table 1 indicated that responses from the respondents revealed that through the skills acquired by the respondents, they have gained higher self-esteem, greater sense of control over their own lives, they can now exercise freedom of choice, they are functional in their various communities and the society at large, the skills acquired has liberated their minds as well as improved their social status and can attend a higher education if so desired with the daily income they earn from their business ventures or trades.

In confirmation of the above, Barnabas and Durkwa (2007) asserted that development in any society is anchored primarily on vocational process of either a state or a nation. They also held the view that such education is a sure path way to the liberation of the mind and the improvement of the socio-economic status of the people who have received the right type of education or training.

In the same vein, Smith, Collins and Hannon (2006) advocated that people that are exposed to skills acquisition training frequently express more opportunities to exercise creativity, freedom, high self-esteem and an overall greater sense of control over their own lives due to selflessness.

Also in support of the above findings, Nwankwo and Unachukwu (2010) reported that, a particular skill acquired therefore prepares people, especially youths to be self-reliant, job creators and risk takers so as to remain functional and useful to the society in general.

Result of the analysis of the Ho3 on table 10 showed that significant difference do not exist in the opinions of male and female respondents on the extent to which skills acquisition have affected the social lives of the recipients of the skills in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas. The t-calculated value of all the items is less than the t-critical value. This means that significant difference do not exist, therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. This is a clear indication that the positive impact of the skills acquisition programme on the social lives of male and female recipients do not differ in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Area.

The findings is in line with Ogundele (2012) who contended that skills have a major impact on each individual's life chances as they transform lives, generate prosperity and promote social inclusion. Without the right skills, people are kept at the margins of the society, this is because what people know and what they can do with what they know has a major impact on their life chances.

It is a common belief that with the skills acquisition programme currently sponsored and organized by National Directorate for Employment (NDE) and the Woman Development Centres for the school leavers, if properly implemented will leave no child without survival skills in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas.

### 5.2 The Impact of Skills Acquisition on Economic lives of the Participants

The analysis of research question four as shown in Table 6 showed that responses from the respondents revealed that the training programme equipped them with the right skills for controlling an enterprise, developed their potentialities and capabilities for successful life, gained basic skills that help them to develop business plans by themselves, acquired good decision making qualities that could make the successful in their business ventures/trades, they are able to establish their own ventures with the help of the monthly stipends they were receiving during the training period, could save from their daily earnings from their businesses for further expansion, they are empowered through the entrepreneurial skills training which leads to enhancement in their income, they are now employers of labour rather than job seekers, majority rejected the fact that they received the training free of charge, since they paid for the admission form as well as materials for practical and that they did not receive training in more than one skill.

In the light of the above findings, Deakins and Freel (1998) noted that the importance of skills acquisition programmes to any economy is like that of entrepreneurship in any community where entrepreneurial activities and the resultant financial gains are always of benefit to a country. They went further to stated that the since skills acquisition programme is associated with great ingenuity, particularly when it involves about something novel to the society, then its emphasis is usually on the imagination, creativity and risk taking in business.

In confirmation of the above, Nwakwo and Unachukwu (2010) reported that vocational skills acquisition concerns itself with the collection of formalized teaching processes that bring about traits and educate everyone interested in business creation or small business development.

In the same vein, Aliu (2007) also reported that it is in line with the above that various governments and international agencies have continued to make concerted efforts particularly in the developing countries of the world to improve on their educational sector with the view to providing opportunities to both individuals and corporate organizations to sharpen their performance capacities and acquired competencies through special skills.

The findings is in line with Curran and Stanwort (1998) who viewed the economic importance of skills acquisition development as a component of the world's history that has been known for several decades to involve

the productivity of the expended high grade personnel such as entrepreneurs as a result of vocational skills acquisition, rather than the increase of physical capital. That this is so because while the capitalist, the man who has acquired improved skills is involved in directing the application of acquired knowledge for goods production and services for human consumption.

Results of the analysis of Ho4 in table 11 showed that significant difference do not exist in the opinions of male and female respondents on the extent to which skills acquisition programmes have affected the economic lives of the recipients of the skills in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas. the t-cal value of each of the items 25-40 is less than the t-critical value, except items 27,33 and 36 where the t-cal values are 2.10, 1.98 and 2.27 greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 370 degree of freedom, showing that there is no significant difference in the opinions of male and female respondents on the impact of skills acquisition programmes on the economic lives of the recipients in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas. Therefore the null hypothesis is upheld. For the other three items, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The findings revealed that the positive impact of skills acquisition programmes on the economic lives of the recipients is not influenced by gender or sex. In confirmation to the above findings, Hisrich and Peter (2002) explained that various vocational skills, crafts and trades that are provided through the training programmes derive their contents from well articulated entrepreneurial curricula. The bottom line is that after training, individuals and households would have had enhanced income levels that can guarantee proper planning and execution of other life responsibilities that ordinarily would have been difficult without receiving any form of training.

In support of the findings, Smith, Collins and Hannon (2006) contended that improved financial base of artisans whose competencies have been enhanced through skillful training can go a long way to create jobs opportunities for themselves, members of their families and the society in general. They could also go on to create big businesses on their own whereby expanding the cycle of the inter-link.

The findings is in line with Kourilsky and Walstad (1998) who in a survey data from United State National sample of female and male college school students about entrepreneurship knowledge and attitude and whether there are any significant gender differences in these areas, gave a result derived from its analysis of the data suggesting that there are many similarities between female and male in respect to their knowledge of and opinion about entrepreneurship. However, they also exhibit significant gender differences in several areas such as choice of professions, venturing into new areas and success perception.

The findings confirmed that of Uduma (2012) who reported that the problem of unemployment and economic discomfort are today changing the trend of entrepreneurial skills development in the society. He noted that in recent times, there has been significant growth and challenges in female self-employment with women now starting new business ventures in both the rural and urban areas. Although the characteristics of male and female entrepreneurs are generally very similar, female entrepreneurs differ in forms of motivation, business skills and occupational backgrounds.

### 5.3 Poverty Reduction through Skills Acquisition Programme

The summary of the data analysis as presented in Table 7 of chapter four revealed that skills acquisition programme has reduced poverty in the study area through the following ways: The acquired skills has enable the recipients to establish their own business ventures or trades which leads to the improvement in their financial base and that of their families as they create jobs for their family members, they can take care of their basic needs because of the income they earn from their business venture/trade, they can provide training opportunity for other unemployed youths who are not opportune to receive such training at the skills acquisition centre. They can receive training through apprenticeship process, some of them could proceed to acquire higher education if so desired, they can now contribute the economic development of their various communities through contributions and levies as well as to the economy through their taxes to the government and some can save for future expansion of their business/trade, which leads to the expansion of the inter-link.

The finding above is in line with Hisrich and Peter (2002) who contended that skills acquisition is known to function as one of the formal tools for poverty alleviation because it fulfils the primary roles in preparing the youths for self employment. They also noted that skills acquisition plays important roles in contributing to the general economic growth and development of the country through the unit contribution of the line elements involved.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The skills acquired impacted positively to a large extent on both social and economic lives of the recipients and also reduced the level of poverty in Obudu and Ogoja Local Government Areas of Cross River State. However, Government should ensure that more of these skills acquisition centres are established, especially in rural areas to avail many youths and other unemployed the opportunity to acquire relevant skills for self-employment and self-reliant.

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