

Aspiring Towards Social Solidarity Economy: The Case of Patamaba-Wise

Margarita Chan Royandoyan

Associate Professor III, University of Eastern Philippines, Catarman, Northern Samar, Philippines

Abstract – This paper is an attempt to describe how the Pambansang Kalipunang Manggagawang Impormala Pilipinas (National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines –Workers in the Informal Sector Enterprise) or more popularly known as PATAMABA-WISE applies the five (5) dimensions of Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) in its attempt at pursuing the SSE model. Using these five dimensions: a) Socially Responsible Governance; b) Edifying Values; c) Products and Services for Social Development; d) Environmental Conservation Measures; and e) Economic Sustainability as the lens, the experience of PATAMABA-WISE was examined. It was found out that PATAMABA-WISE have remarkable successes in the first four (4) dimensions, but the biggest challenge faced by this organization lies in its limitations to ensure the fifth dimension (Economic Sustainability) because of its limited financial capacity to support its economic activities and the resultant heavy reliance on external grants. Hence, the need to address this aspect for it to become a full Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) model.

Keywords: *Social Solidarity Economy; Social Enterprise; Informal Sector; Livelihood; Sustainable Development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social solidarity economy is an approach to economic development which prioritizes the welfare of people and planet over profits and blind growth. It is an alternative to capitalism which mainly aims at earning profits often without regard to the adverse effects of business on the welfare and interest of the workers as well as on the environment.

In the Philippines, there are traditional cooperative endeavors like the “Bayanihan” (Collective or Cooperative endeavor) some features of which are similar to some of the features of the Social Solidarity Economy (SSE). is relatively new to many groups in the Philippines, but the Pambansang Kalipunang Manggagawang Impormala Pilipinas (National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines –Workers in the Informal Sector Enterprise) or more popularly known as PATAMABA-WISE has already been exposed to this concept in the past decade or so and now is trying to pursue this SSE model.

The SSE model has five dimensions and these are: 1) Socially responsible governance; 2) Edifying values; 3) Products and services for social development; 4) Environmental conservation measures; and 5) Economic sustainability. (Quinones, 2009).

It would be to the advantage of PATAMABA to examine how far it has gone in pursuing the SSE model by examining their experience using these five dimensions. Through this, PATAMABA will learn lessons on how best to address their situation so that they can further pursue their aspiration to become a full SSE practitioner.

A. Objectives

This study aimed at achieving the following:

1. Describe PATAMABA and how PATAMABA-Wise came to be: and
2. Find out how far has PATAMABA pursued the Social Solidarity Economy using the five dimensions of SSE.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research is a case study, basically an exploratory research which delved into the experience of PATAMABA-WISE in its economic/livelihood activities. The method used in data gathering for this study was mainly the Key Informant Interview (KII) with Ms. Josephine “Olive” Parilla, the President of PATAMABA-WISE as the informant. To supplement and validate data gathered from the interview, secondary sources such as articles written about PATAMABA-WISE as well as organizational reports were also utilized. Another interview was also done with a non-PATAMABA member who had knowledge about their operation.

One limitation of this study was the inability to contact other members of the organization for the scheduled interviews and focus group discussion because it coincided with the Christmas Holiday season, the peak season for their livelihood products. Hence, the researcher decided to have an in-depth interview with the President on the experience of PATAMABA-WISE.

This study was conducted in October to December 2017. In this paper, the terms livelihood, business and enterprise are used interchangeably to mean the economic undertakings of PATAMABA-WISE.

II. BRIEF SITUATIONER OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Despite various efforts at poverty reduction, the number of poor globally continues to increase. More than 1 billion people struggle to survive on a less than \$1.00 a day. (United Nations, 2005). Half of these, roughly 550 million are working (ILO, 2005). The majority of them earn their livelihood in the informal economy where, on the average, earnings are low and risks are high. (Chen, 2008).

The informal economy consists of independent, self-employed small-scale producers and distributors of goods and services. Workers in this sector are for the most part not covered by the country’s labor laws and regulations (International Labor Organization, n.d.)

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defines informal economy workers as those “independent, self-employed, small-scale producers and distributors of goods and services. They are the vendors, the jeepney drivers, the tricycle drivers, the home-based workers. They are just some of the

workers in the so-called informal economy. They comprise the most vulnerable sectors in society. (Rappler, May 9, 2017)

Latest Labor Force Survey figures put the number of informal sector workers at 15.6 million or 38% of the total working population of the country. (Rappler, May 9, 2017)

In the Philippines, the Labor Force Survey data indicated that 38.3 per cent of those employed are in vulnerable forms of employment. This means nearly two out of five workers are less likely to have formal work arrangements and access to social protection and are more at risk during a crisis or shock. (International Labor Organization, n.d.)

III. PATAMABA AND PATAMABA-WISE CREATION

PATAMABA, then known as the Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Bahay or the National Network of Home-based Workers was established in 1989 with the objective of creating, strengthening, consolidating, and expanding the national network of home-based workers and providing support services for their personal, social and economic well-being (Verceles, 2014). Its history dates back to 1988 when about twenty-two (22) women from Bulacan, mostly members of "Kababaihan sa Bagong Pilipinas" (KABAPA) or Women of the New Philippines brought to the attention of the Department of Labor and Employment their problem concerning unpaid embroidery work contracted to them by a certain company. Since during this time, there was yet no law or any provision in the Labor Code that covers or protects the home-based workers/informal sector, a certain Lucita Lazo, then the head of the Bureau of Rural Workers encouraged the women to organize their ranks. The following year, 1989, KABAPA started organizing the women. In March of the following year, PATAMABA was finally registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Also in the same year, it was registered with the Department of Labor and Employment.

From this time until 2003, PATAMABA encountered a lot of issues which not only affected the home-based workers, but also affecting other workers in the informal sectors like the vendors, tricycle drivers, small transport owners, and others.

Under the framework of a neoliberal economy, workers in the factories and other employment settings do not enjoy adequate protection and security in their work setting. The intensification of globalization resulted in massive unemployment which led to the growth of the informal sector. Due to lack of social protection from the government, these vulnerable workers in the informal economy became marginalized and pushed further into poverty.

Recognizing the growth of the informal sector and their vulnerable situation, PATAMABA spearheaded in ventilating the issues of the informal sectors to influence policy-makers to legislate measures aimed at advancing the welfare and interest of the informal workers.

PATAMABA's strategies in attaining their goal included organizing, education and trainings for capacity-building as well as advocacy, networking and mobilizations. With the expansion in its focus, the original name of the organization which is Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Bahay or National Coordinators of Homeworkers was changed into Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Manggagawang Impormal sa Pilipinas or National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines. However, it retained its original acronym PATAMABA.

PATAMABA now has more than 19,000 members all over the country. It exists in eight (8) regions, thirty-four (34) provinces, and has two hundred (200) local chapters.

One of the provincial chapters of PATAMABA is in Rizal province. It exists in thirteen (13) municipalities and one (1) city in this province. Under the leadership of Ms. Josephine "Olive" Parilla who was a former active National Council member of PATAMABA, the members of PATAMABA-Rizal have conscientiously undergone series of education and training activities; were involved in organizing work; have participated in advocacy and mobilization activities for the social protection of their sector. Realizing that development could not be achieved simply through these strategies, entrepreneurship was included as one of the strategies of PATAMABA-RIZAL. According to Olive, it is impossible for the members to attain development if their stomach is empty. Hence, the economic arm of PATAMABA was created in 2010 and was named PATAMABA-WISE (or WISE for short).

The active members of PATAMABA-WISE are in the municipalities of Angono, Binangonan and Taytay, all in the Rizal province in the Philippines. At present, it has 243 members engaged in various economic activities such as manufacturing candles, fashion accessories, breads and pastries, home care products, perfumes, boxes, slippers, doormats and rags. Its initial capital for their business was put up by twenty-nine (29) PATAMABA members who invested two hundred pesos (P200) each for their livelihood project.

WISE envisions to pursue a Social Solidarity Economy, a socio-economic order and new way of life that serves the needs of the people in an ecological manner over the desire to maximize profit.

IV. PATAMABA-WISE AND THE FIVE SSE DIMENSIONS

A. Socially Responsible Governance

PATAMABA-WISE, being a part of PATAMABA basically adheres to the principles of democratic leadership. It employs participatory governance in the management and operation of their livelihood projects. The members own and govern their business because they are not mere members of the organization, but they are also the investors who are themselves involved in the production, marketing and management of their business. While they are bound to abide by the policies of PATAMABA National and their own chapter, WISE members enjoy the autonomy to decide on matters about their economic activities provided these do not violate the principles and policies of the bigger organization of PATAMABA.

Through WISE, the PATAMABA members who are excluded from employment have been provided with an opportunity to participate in the market and augment their meagre income by engaging in economic activities of their interest. It can therefore be said that WISE has contributed to poverty reduction which is consistent with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 1 which is "To end poverty in all its forms everywhere", which when translated further can also contribute to SDG 2 which is "To End Hunger".

Due to the nature of the members' involvement in the business/livelihood projects, a consistent practice of transparency and accountability to the organization is highly essential. These two are of utmost value to the members because WISE practices profit-sharing, a recognition that it

cannot survive without its workers/members. They also give rebates/ patronage refund to the members every after six (6) months of operation at 1% refund.

The business/livelihood also plows back to the organization a certain amount of their profit for organizational concerns. The profit generated are allotted for their education fund, mutual fund, mobilization fund, administration, emergency fund and social protection fund. Forty percent (40%) of the profit goes to the members. During Christmas, WISE also give gifts to their members. They practice what they call as “equity, not equality” in the provision of incentives for the organization members. Whatever this may mean to them, the members have developed a sense of community among themselves as well as sense of ownership of the livelihood project. Both are important ingredient for project success.

Involving the WISE members in the livelihood projects not only contributes to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal No. 1 (End poverty), but it further contributes to the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all which is SD Goal No. 8. It is expected that by integrating or providing the informal sectors an opportunity to augment their meagre income, SD Goal 10 which is “To reduce inequality within and among countries is being pursued.

Consistent with the practice of transparency PATAMABA-WISE maintains open communication line between and among the members and officers of the organization. Meetings are regularly held where updates and reporting on issues such as about performance of members, problems regarding sales, and others are tackled. Since the members see each other almost everyday at their Productivity Center, problems that crop up are immediately tackled by the organization.

As a leader of the organization, the President has this to say, “In participatory leadership, I want everyone to shine, not just the leader”. She provides opportunities for everyone to assume the roles she normally plays because it is part of grooming them. She even gives room for the members to express their negative observations about her, if any, so that she would know what her weaknesses are. In terms of financial management, her role is focused on auditing and accounting. Purchasing and marketing are assigned to other individuals. This implies division of tasks as well as check and balance in the business operation.

B. Edifying Values

One of the important values of solidarity economy is social ties. A community or society that thrives on mutual inter-dependence would tend to highly value social relationships/social interaction. (Quinones, 2009).

PATAMABA-WISE adheres to the value of maintaining harmonious relationships and sense of solidarity among the members. Income from the economic activities of the members may not be profitably enough, but the members cling to the organization because of a strong sense of solidarity among them. “What keeps them going in the organization is not the income that they derive from their livelihoods, but it is the sense of belongingness that they feel in the organization. It should be recalled that PATAMABA-WISE started with an investment of only P200 put up each by the initial 29 members. Although this amount was immediately recovered in their three

months of operation, the income derived from this is hardly enough to sustain the needs of the members.

Social Solidarity Economy or SSE is said to be SOLIDARITY-based in as much as it embraces the principles of mutual help, reciprocity and cooperation among stakeholders in undertaking collective actions... (Quinones, p. 35, 2009). The members of PATAMABA-WISE, being members of PATAMABA have been fortified through the organizing activities initiated by PATAMABA leaders. Needless to say, they have undergone several capacity-building and other education activities and have been involved in mobilizations and networking with various groups before they engaged in their economic activities. This means that the social preparation activities necessary before embarking on any economic endeavor have already been satisfied. It is therefore no wonder that the members of PATAMABA-WISE have exhibited a strong sense of community.

“Tangkilian” (a Filipino word for patronage of each other’s products) is highly encouraged. The President explains by saying, “We produce, we sell and buy our own products. In return we provide our members the opportunity to earn. The more our members sell and buy their products, the more they earn. When they produce, we protect their welfare by giving them just compensation”. Cluster leaders even allow the women to work on schedules or arrangements that is convenient to them as mothers because they understand that mothers also have to take care of their babies.

Caring and sharing with fellow members of the organization, a trait which the President herself instilled among the members by leading an example and showing the virtue of Filipino “damayan” (a Filipino term for mutual help and caring) are manifested in many situations. Members who are in crisis situations are readily afforded support by the other members. Through modest means, they are accompanied in their journey through difficult times. For instance, a mother who was in an abusive relationship with a husband was provided help by the other members during her very difficult crisis. They succeeded in putting the husband in jail and at the same time, extended psycho-social counseling to the victim. This and similar situations strengthen the solidarity among the members. The President is proud to say that it is not only she who extends this kind of support, but also the other members of the organization. This reflects that “damayan” has already evolved as an organizational norm depicting in turn, a sense of co-responsibility of the members for each other.

The President admits, though, that the income that they earn from their livelihood projects is not yet big, but they are able to extend assistance to individuals even outside their organization. Right now, they are supporting two families in their community whose family heads do not have the capacity to earn. This is part of their commitment to share what they have to the other needy members of their community, no matter how modest their resources may be.

Josephine Parilla expressed that the aim of their business is to attain the goals and objectives of social solidarity economy, but she openly admits that their organization is at present still trying its best to work towards this. “We may not be a full-blown Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) model yet, but our goal is to work towards becoming one.”

C. Products and Services for Social Development

PATAMABA-WISE strongly believe that a group enterprise has lesser risk compared with an individual enterprise. Some members expressed interest to have a

personal sewing machine for them to work on at home. To this, Olive said, “My goodness, we only have 70 machines... not even enough for each of the existing organizations of PATAMABA Rizal. There is a big risk in dispersing the machines and other properties of the organizations to willing individuals. “When this happens and they go bankrupt, there is a likelihood that PATAMABA-WISE will go bankrupt. Whereas if the machines are owned by the organization, the machines still stay even if the individual stops sewing.” Pataysindi man ang operasyon, nandyan pa rin ang mga gamit.” (Even if the business operation is on and off, still the equipment is there.)

PATAMABA-WISE engages in the production and selling of products varying from food, home care products, fashion accessories, candles, perfumes and boxes. Contrary to the set-up in a neoliberal economy where the primary consideration of the capitalist is to be able to gain huge profit at the expense of the worker and even the environment, PATAMABA-WISE ensures that the members who take part in production receive just compensation for their labor; are given proper incentives for their labor and for patronizing their own products. It likewise see to it that they do business without harming the environment.

On top of the income received by the worker are the benefits that they receive as a member of an organization because part of the profit from the enterprise is plowed back to the organization (educational fund, mutual assistance, etc.). This arrangement is basically Solidarity Economy, it chose to “serve the needs of people and ecological as the goal of economic activity rather than maximization of profits under the unfettered rule of the market”. (Quinones, 2009). The organizational policies that fairly compensates the workers/members is expected that this will contribute both in sustaining the enterprise and the economic growth of the country. Hence, contributing to SD Goal 8 (Sustainable Economy). Eventually, with increased capacity to earn, the workers/members are afforded the capacity to take care of their health and well-being, therefore also contributing to the attainment of SD Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at allages.)

In every livelihood activity or project, there are skills that need to be taught to the workers. PATAMABA-WISE made sure that their livelihood projects would have lasting and meaningful impact on the lives of the members. According to Olive, “We teach them the basics. Now, it’s up to them to modify”. The organization is not in any way bothered if in the future, these trained individuals become their competitors. What they are after is the development of second-liners.

“Many individuals could and have extended their hands to PATAMABA, but we do not want to be asking help all the time”, she continued. That is why they conduct several self-enhancement trainings for the members. Among these activities are the organizational development seminars, paralegal trainings, skills in lobbying and advocacy, negotiation skills trainings, livelihood-related trainings, disaster risk reduction and management, gender and development, and many more.

PATAMABA-WISE acknowledges that solidarity economy has to be built on connections across solidarity systems and communities (Rodriguez, 2008), it established linkages with friendly groups and individuals such as Women in Sustainable Economic Action (WISEACT), MAGIC, the UP College of Social Work and Community Development, among others in terms of trainings (such as occupational safety

and health, product development, among others); sourcing out some raw materials they need for their production; and marketing of products. In return, some members of PATAMABA also train others on fashion accessories making, doormat making, and others. Thus, sharing and complementation with others is made possible.

One thing which WISE admits, though, is their weakness in the management of a P1.5 million funding where they spent about four hundred thousand pesos (P400, 000) for trainings alone in the desire to capacitate the members. “This big chunk could have been accessed somewhere else and not from that funds”, Olive says.

D. Environmental Conservation Measures

PATAMABA-Wise is very conscious that in their business operation they will not sacrifice the environment. In the production of their bath soap, they use all natural ingredients extracted from papaya, cucumber or Philippine citrus kalamansi. In their laundry soap-making, they do not use borax because of its harmful effect. “When we say, natural ingredients, it is guaranteed natural...no artificial, no synthetic. Try using our laundry soap (and even other soap), your hands won’t be harmed when you use them. Ka Olive proudly says. WISE customers and members even utilize used laundry water in watering their garden plants and in treating certain plant diseases. WISE is aware, however, that the cost of their soap is relatively higher compared with the popular commercial brands like Tide, which WISE claims as inferior than their own product. It is because they avoid using cheap materials which are usually so harmful to human health and the environment. There is then, no doubt, that this contributes to SD Goal 15 (Protect environment and biodiversity) as well as SD Goal 3 (Health).

E. Economic Sustainability

PATAMABA-WISE’s adherence to the practice of transparency and accountability; participation of the members in decision-making; profit-sharing; conducting trainings, among others are factors which will surely contribute in attaining economic sustainability of the organization.

Based on the interview, PATAMABA-WISE initiates fund-raising for their livelihood projects. Due to the credibility already established by the PATAMABA-WISE President in Rizal and the track record of PATAMABA as an organization, it is able to access funds from other sources and avail support from the local government unit of Angono under the Bottom Up Budgeting (BUB) program for its livelihood projects. With such, and with the PATAMABA-WISE President sitting as Co-Chair of the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT) of BUB; and with five (5) of the six (6) BUB Cluster heads being PATAMABA-WISE members, practically all, if not most of the members of WISE become beneficiaries of the BUB livelihood projects. Aside from this, there were also some government agencies such as the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Department of Trade and Industry which granted PATAMABA_WISE funding for its enterprise building; while still others continue to come forward to offer them funding support.

PATAMABA-WISE’s economic capital right now still needs reinforcement, though. It is the aspect that is most challenged because the organization relies heavily on outside grants. As mentioned earlier, the very modest initial investment of the original members of the business could only deliver so much even if on one hand, the members derive satisfaction

from the fact that the capital was recouped in three months' time and their money continues to rotate.

Except for some products (like their slippers, ladies accessories) which, from time to time, are able to find their place in the big commercial malls, most of their products are sold in limited markets such as their own community, their own members and their families, friends and some friendly organizations. Right now, their production strategy is "to produce (only) what we can sell", implying that their potential to produce and sell is not yet maximized. With limited capital, their sustainability is being challenged; their ultimate dream of transitioning to formality (or what they say 'being able to compete commercially) appears to be a far-fetched cry even if the current livelihood projects continue to operate.

Despite this, however, the leaders of PATAMABA-WISE feels that the most important thing that would sustain the organization is the sense of solidarity (sense of belongingness) that the members feel for each other and their organization. This is social capital made so much alive in the organization. The concept of *Damayan* (mutual support) is now a way of life lived by the members of the organization. According to Ka Olive, "They are not here just because of the income, but because they know no one would leave them behind". Obviously, the social ties that have been established is something that the members treasure most. This way of life complemented by open communication between and among the members and leaders, adherence to participatory processes, providing opportunities for everyone to "shine" by enhancing their capacity to lead are factors that WISE believes would help them sustain their organization and their business.

With the status that PATAMABA-WISE is in now, the President openly acknowledges that their organization could not yet be fully considered as an SSE, but she is definite that the trail they are following is moving towards that direction. She hopes that someday, PATAMABA-WISE would be able to demonstrate what an ideal Social Solidarity Economy is.

V. CHALLENGES

Needless to say, the biggest challenge that the organization is facing right now is how to raise more money for their livelihood projects to be able to expand their business. In the past, PATAMABA-WISE's slippers were disposed in a well-known mall on consignment basis. Not long after it started selling these slippers in the mall, however, the organization decided to stop because they get paid for their products one month after all these are disposed in the mall. This means their workers would not be receiving the badly needed compensation for their labor.

For a micro-enterprise that has limited capital, consignment basis of product selling has detrimental effects on their operation. This experience all the more made them realize that enterprises like what they have cannot survive in a neoliberal market. To this experience, Olive laments, "it's painful to run a business if you have very limited capital. Shall you wait until the capitalist pays you before you pay the laborer? We also have to fill the stomach of the workers". To their decision to stop selling their product in the malls under such arrangement, she said, "Hey, I have been made aware long time ago of "national situationers", malpractices and exploitation of capitalists, etc. And we have been active in our advocacies against this. Now, here I am...shall I then allow this to happen to us?"

WISE's dream is to have the WISE products seen in the malls. Right now, their products are sold mostly in side

street stores and disposed to friends, employees of the municipality of Angono, WISE members themselves, *tyangge/bazaar* patrons and supporters of the *Homenet Producers Cooperative*.

Another challenge affecting the organization is disaster risks. The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. The average number of typhoons that visit the country is twenty (20) per year (Polotan-dela Cruz, ed. 2014) with each typhoon becoming more frequent and more intense. When people's livelihoods are damaged by typhoons, it decreases tremendously the capacity of families to immediately withstand the devastation and even months beyond.

Before Typhoon *Habagat*, PATAMABA-WISE had ten (10) food carts operated by a total of fifty (50) members, with each food cart managed by five (5) members who take daily turns each in operating the business on rotation basis per week. Each of the food carts had cooking equipment and a stock inventory of P3,000.00 with hamburger, *siopao*, *siomai*, and juices being the products sold. When Typhoon *Habagat* struck in 2010, all the ten (10) food carts were destroyed. Those operating these naturally had difficulty in recovering from the disaster. Fortunately for some reasons, PATAMABA was able to transfer their baking equipment and the sewing machines to another location few days before the typhoon struck. Hence, they were able to avoid incurring more damages to the Organization.

CONCLUSION

The five key dimensions of Social Solidarity Economy enumerated by Quinones against which the operation of PATAMABA-WISE is being examined in this paper include the following:

- Socially responsible governance;
- Edifying values;
- Products and services for social development;
- Environmental conservation measures; and
- Economic sustainability

Of the five dimensions, PATAMABA-WISE could be considered as making big strides in Dimensions 1 to 4. Its Dimensions 1 and 2 are remarkably demonstrated by WISE's experience. The most noteworthy of which are a) the sense of solidarity and ownership of projects among the members and b) the practice of democratic leadership and participatory governance. These two factors played complementary roles in keeping the members active and in sustaining their interest in their economic activities even if the income derived from these is only supplementary to their own individual economic activities.

In addition, the capacity-building activities undertaken by PATAMABA together with their long history as an organization has adequately prepared and continue to prepare the WISE members in their livelihood activities. These have contributed significantly in developing the unity of the members which is a very important element in pursuing SSE.

Through the practices of profit-sharing, transparency and accountability, and allowing the participation of members in decision-making, attaining Dimension 5 (Economic Sustainability) can be facilitated. But without addressing the challenge posed by their lack of business capital and their heavy reliance on external funding, sustaining the enthusiasm

of members and their livelihoods as well as operating fully as an SSE might be difficult.

PATAMABA's modest yet relevant contribution in the attainment of SDG should be recognized and appreciated. Finally, its best practices in pursuing the Social Solidarity Economy model must be replicated while the challenges that need to be addressed in order to be a full-blown SSE model must be seriously addressed.

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