



Part Three: Community Video for Social Change

Photo: Checking a camera exercise during follow-up training (Uganda, 2009).

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This section of the Toolkit provides an overview of community-based, participatory video, its benefits, and its effectiveness across a spectrum of development issues. Program examples highlight how locally-made video creates social change through processes of collaboration, dialogue, and action, and how video capacity strengthens communities and organizations. The latter part of the section focuses on using community video to address highly sensitive issues such as gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS, and on special considerations when working in crisis settings.

What is community video?

Community video is a communication approach that engages local people in creating videos that represent their lives and concerns. This approach is highly empowering, because participants decide why and how to present different issues, what stories to tell, and how to represent themselves and their community. They also decide how the videos should be used and who should see them.

Community video differs from professional film and television productions in several ways. Above all, community video emphasizes collaborative processes at the local level. These processes—planning, problem-solving, raising questions, generating discussion, and seeking consensus—are just as important as the final product. In addition, community video is shared “horizontally” among people at the community level. In contrast, mass media “vertically” broadcasts to anonymous audiences. The person-to-person nature of community video fuses the strengths of interpersonal communication and peer education with the power of visual media.

The rise of participatory media and community video

Participatory media has deep roots in Latin America. In the 1950s and 1960s, miners in Bolivia aired local-language radio programs about their daily lives and needs. Since that time, many communities in the region have voiced their concerns through what came to be known as alternative or “citizen’s” media



Filming a person-on-the-street interview, Video Sabou et Nafa project (2002, Guinea, © Communication for Change)

(Rodriguez, 2001). Many early examples of video in rural development work were supported by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Projects in South America and Africa used video to document agricultural conditions, support technical and literacy training, and enable cross-sharing of methods across communities (Dagron, 2001).

As equipment became increasingly portable and low-cost, participatory video spread worldwide. Today, teams in sites as diverse as Thailand, Tanzania, Kazakhstan and Brazil use community video to address a wide range of development and humanitarian concerns: land use and environmental preservation, livelihoods, community health and hygiene, human rights, and key issues in crisis and conflict.

The benefits of community video

Community-made, participatory video...

- Features faces, stories, and examples of change from within the community itself. For this reason, community-made videos often “speak” more powerfully to people than films from outside.
- Enables different groups and individuals to represent their views, including those who may be unrepresented or marginalized, such as women, youth, people living with HIV/AIDS, or the disabled.
- Helps draw the attention of local leaders and



Video team members playing back for a local participant the interview they have just recorded with her (Thailand, 2009)

authorities to priority concerns in the community.

- Is immediate. Video can be played back right away: people who take part in filming can watch material and offer instant feedback. An entire program may be completed and shared with community audiences on the same day.
- Is highly versatile, and can be used to address any theme or topic prioritized by community members.
- Is accessible to people of any educational or literacy level.
- Integrates storytelling and oral traditions that are valued in many cultures.
- Builds capacity and self-confidence among individuals and groups as they master technical and interpersonal communication skills.
- Strengthens advocacy and leadership skills among team members.
- Fosters collaboration and creates a shared sense of purpose among concerned community members.
- Generates excitement and interest among community members and staff.

What makes community video an organizational asset?

Community video creates sustainable, cross-cutting communication capacity

An organization with participatory video capacity can create locally-relevant communication materials over the long term, at low cost. Video capacity can strategically support any program area (see “Using video as a cross-sectoral tool” in Part 5, “Implementing a Community Video Initiative”). Video team members can share their skills with other personnel and serve as resources across sectors and sites. In addition, video can be used as an asset for other organizational activities, including staff training, peer education, project documentation, monitoring and evaluation. (See “Video as a tool for monitoring and assessment” in Part 7, “Monitoring and evaluation”).

Community video enables real-time response to changing program needs

Participatory video can help organizations respond to evolving needs. Many early videos made by the Through Our Eyes Liberia team, for example, provided information on care for rape survivors, prosecution of perpetrators, and treatment of sexually-transmitted infections. As people began to make greater use of legal and health structures, the team began to address broader issues relating to gender norms and women’s rights. New themes included mutual respect between spouses, joint decision-making, and shared economic resources and responsibilities. These videos help spark discussion on the roles of women and men in post-conflict Liberian society.

Uses of community video

Community video can support development and social change activities in diverse ways and across different settings.

1. To support practical training.

Video is ideal for depicting techniques: for example, how to prepare oral rehydration solution, build latrines, or construct smokeless stoves (see **Video SEWA: Collective strength**).

2. To enable exchanges of experience.

Many groups, including SEWA, have used videos to spread examples of production methods and mutual aid opportunities for low-wage workers. In Guinea, Video Sabou et Nafa teams showed new income-generating activities undertaken by women who had formerly made their living by excising girls.

3. *To communicate local concerns to decision-makers.*

Community video has been used to depict the effects of dynamite fishing (Maneno Mengi, Tanzania) and industrial waste (Video and Community Dreams, Egypt) to high-level policy-makers as well as local audiences.

4. *To advocate for human rights and legal justice.*

Community video has been used as a legal aid tool for survivors of spousal abuse (Banchte Shekha, Bangladesh). With the support of Witness, human rights advocates worldwide use video for documentation, testimony and evidence. (See also **The Insight story**, next page.)

5. *To amplify voices rarely heard in the media.*

The work of Kayapo, in Brazil's Amazon region, and of Insight, among Batwa pygmies in Uganda, has helped indigenous peoples represent their needs. Young people living in villages and slum areas in India speak out about social concerns through community video units trained by Video Volunteers/Channel 19.

6. *To advance women's empowerment.*

From Guatemala (Nutzij) and St. Lucia (Breaking the Silence) to Bangladesh (Proshika), women and girls have used video to heighten awareness on such issues as dowry abuse, girls' education, gender roles, and HIV prevention. Shifts in awareness and attitude take place



Video SEWA: Collective Strength

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) represents millions of women from India's vast non-formal sector. SEWA's video team has included women of all ages, literate and non-literate, Hindus and Muslims. Their productions have helped members learn about income-generating opportunities and health issues.

Videos that showed, step-by-step, how to build a smokeless stove and how to prepare oral rehydration solution were accessible to non-literate viewers from multiple language groups. SEWA videos have also helped women learn how to use savings and credit services and how to take collective action. Still active after over 25 years, Video SEWA shows how video can support an organization's activities and mission. (Sources: www.c4c.org; www.videosewa.org)

through local screenings and as community members see women wielding cameras and new communication skills.

Community video forms: drama and documentary

The power of drama

Through dramas, community video teams can portray sensitive issues in a true-to-life way, but using the lens of fiction. One of the first Through Our Eyes productions focused on child rape, a serious problem in the refugee camp at that time. While roughly based on an actual case, the team shaped the story to focus on response and prevention, and were the main issues explored in the playback discussions. Dramas made by teams in refugee camps in Rwanda depict the harmful effects of forced/early marriage and emotional abuse. The stories feel authentic to viewers, but are not linked to particular individuals or incidents.

Since the start of the Through Our Eyes project, many survivors of gender-based violence and people living with HIV/AIDS have helped develop dramas that reflect their experiences. Through on-screen characters, participants can indirectly represent themselves and communicate issues that might be

The Insight story

Insight, a non-profit organization based in the UK and France, has helped many different groups around the world use participatory video to support social development needs and promote human rights. Insight projects in India, China, Turkmenistan, Malawi and Pakistan have addressed issues ranging from biodiversity and indigenous knowledge to sustainable livelihoods and HIV/AIDS awareness. In Tanzania, Insight helped midwives and hospital staff produce a video advocating for improved health services to reduce maternal mortality. Through other collaborations, impoverished residents of a South African township expressed their anger at government and local authorities over terrible housing and sanitation conditions, and Himalayan pastoralists created films about their use of natural resources, which in turn informed a regional research initiative on sustainable development.

Insight has also used video as a valuable tool for participatory research, monitoring, and evaluation, through “community consultations” and in conjunction with the Most Significant Change approach. The organization’s publications include a training guide and a Toolkit on rights-based approaches to participatory video. (Source: www.insightshare.org)

hard to address in direct ways, such as personal testimonials. Also, through drama, stories can be shaped to show positive scenarios and alternatives to violence.

Documentary and direct testimonials

Documentary, non-fiction videos help communicate information and ideas directly to viewers. Through Our Eyes documentaries have explained the role of local authorities in responding to rape and profiled women in leadership positions. Documentaries based on interviews or personal testimonials amplify voices that might otherwise not be heard: people living with HIV/AIDS, for example, or survivors of gender-based violence. The young Liberian refugee woman featured in the video “The Plight of Kumba Fomba” wanted to speak out directly about her forced marriage at the age of 13 to an abusive older man, and urge parents to abandon the practice that had such a harmful impact on her own life.

Documentaries filmed by local teams can also help audiences learn about resources such as health facilities, support groups, or response centers that are right in their community, but of which they might not have been aware. The Through Our Eyes team in Liberia partnered with clients and staff at the main hospital for fistula care in Monrovia, co-producing

Saying “no” to sexual exploitation

In 2009, the Through Our Eyes team in Liberia filmed a drama called “The Last Woman.” Inspired by real events, the story depicts a town chief who tells a local woman that if she sleeps with him, he will ensure a good outcome for a case she has presented for settlement. The woman refuses, and resolves to be “the last woman” the chief takes advantage of. She reports his actions, and the town council makes the decision to remove him because he has abused his position.

Response to the video was powerful. Some audience members remarked that the community should make laws to punish chiefs or leaders who demand sex in exchange for the job they were put there to do. “I admire the way Bindu reported the town chief to the elders,” said one woman. “Her example shows that we women can say no to what we don’t like.” Another woman said the video “will help women to say no to big people who will want to misuse them.” She added, “The lady in the video is very strong and all women should be like her.”



Rehearsing a drama on care and support for family members living with HIV/AIDS (Southern Sudan, 2007)

Sensitizing people about stigma and support

One of the first videos made by the Through Our Eyes community video team in Gulu, northern Uganda, was a documentary that features a woman living with HIV. She describes the stigma and blame she experienced after her status became known, including rejection by several relatives and neighbors. With the support of her immediate family, however, she has been able to live a full and productive life, working as a peer educator and caring for her children and household.

During the first playback of the video, audience members young and old watched attentively and asked many questions about HIV transmission, prevention, and care. "I was encouraged to go get tested for HIV so I know my status" said one viewer. "HIV does not mean you are going to die." Another noted that, in the video, the positive support provided to the woman by family members was a kind of treatment in itself.

a documentary that helps people understand the causes of obstetric fistula, the possibility of treatment, and the importance of not stigmatizing women and girls living with this condition.

Docu-drama: a combination of forms

Docu-drama is a blending of dramatic and documentary forms. In fusing both approaches, docu-drama opens the way for creativity within factual contexts. As an example, the Through Our Eyes team in Southern Sudan filmed a docu-drama on voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) for HIV/AIDS. In the video, a woman visits a local VCT center for the first time. The client is played by a peer educator with a local organization, and the counselor is played by a real-life counselor. The video depicts their session in detail, explains the testing process and how client confidentiality is maintained, and shows the lab and other parts of the facility. The program helped de-mystify VCT services and encouraged many community members to visit the clinic.

How are community videos made?

The basic steps of community video production include:

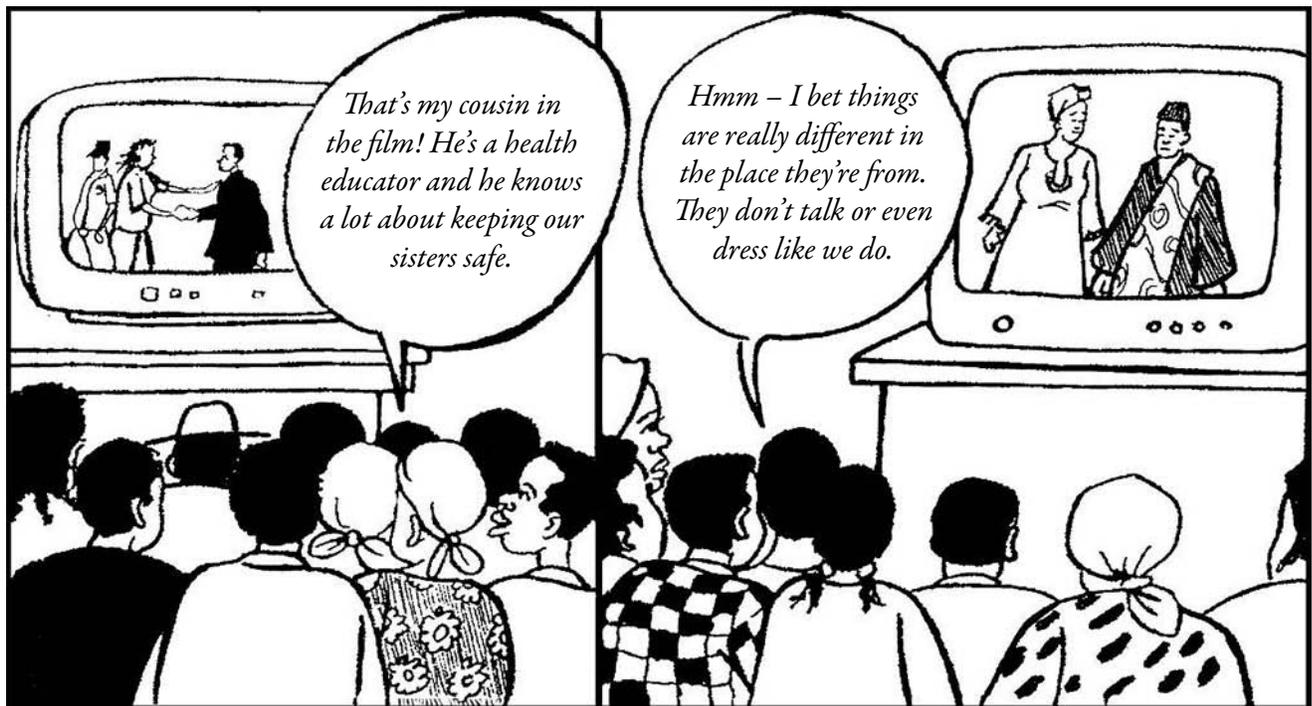
1. Introducing participatory communication concepts and reviewing the potential uses of community video in the local context
2. Identifying priority topics based on local needs and/or organizational goals
3. Providing training for community members/designated participants in the use of lightweight, portable equipment
4. Deciding, by consensus, on the topic of the first production(s) to be filmed
5. Choosing the form the video will take (drama, documentary, docu-drama)
6. Identifying the main and/or secondary audience(s) for the video
7. Identifying participants/actors/spokespeople for the video
8. Identifying locations where filming will take place
9. Preparing storyboards (simple drawings used to plan shots/scenes)
10. Preparing the scenario/script or interview questions
11. Rehearsing with actors, preparing with interviewees/spokespeople
12. Filming the production in collaboration with community members
13. Playing scenes back for comment by the video team and participants
14. Finalizing the video through re-filming and/or editing



Filming a drama on mutual respect in marriage (Thailand, 2009)

Community-made video

Video made outside the community



Drawing by Augustine Cholopoly (Liberia)

These steps can vary depending on project goals and timelines. In some cases, filming a video may follow a series of camera exercises; in others, training may continue for several days before production planning begins. In projects designed to foster self-expression and confidence (such as projects among people with disabilities), identifying audiences may be a lesser consideration. For advocacy work or promoting changes in attitudes or practices, identifying the key audience is a critical step. (See the accompanying manual, **A Practical Guide to Community Video Training, Days 7-9.**)

Community-made videos look and feel different from professionally-made productions. Especially in the early stages, as participants gain technical skills, videos may look rough around the edges: shots may not be centered or scenes may end abruptly. These things tend to matter very little to local audiences. Seeing their own community and its concerns on screen far outweighs minor technical issues. Moreover, as people take part in post-screening discussions, the focus shifts from the video to dialogue around critical issues and collective problem-solving.

The give-and-take between production quality and

participatory process is a fact of community video. If an organization needs a professional-looking, broadcast-quality film about its work, it should probably hire an experienced filmmaker. But if it wants to create many different videos to support its activities on an ongoing basis, participatory approaches are ideal.

The Through Our Eyes playback process

The change-making effects of a community video depend on people not only seeing, but also thinking and talking about it. For this reason, discussion and feedback are essential to the participatory video process.

In the Through Our Eyes project, videos are shared with local audiences through “playbacks”—screening and discussion sessions facilitated by team members, staff, or peer educators. The first playback of a video usually takes place in the neighborhood where it was filmed; afterward, playbacks occur in different areas of the community. Teams try to keep audience sizes small (20-35 people) to enable in-depth discussions.

The teams also focus on reaching the primary audience identified during the production planning stage: for example, married couples, youth or local

“The community playback session is the heartbeat of the video program.”

Zeze Konie, Through Our Eyes
master trainer, Liberia

leaders. In some cases, videos are appropriate for a broad range of community members. Audience members often offer suggestions about who else would benefit from seeing the video. Based on the topic’s relevance and the language used, the video may be shown in other communities as well. In this way, a video will reach thousands of people, one group at a time.

The discussion revolves around responses to questions such as “What can we do, as community members, to help change this situation?” or “What can we do to encourage this positive example?”

Also during the session, audience members learn about available resources, such as services for survivors of rape, or voluntary counseling and testing. Local resource people may be on hand to help provide detailed information about these services. At the end of each playback session, community members are invited to share their ideas for future videos.

(Detailed information on planning and carrying out video playbacks is included in the accompanying manual, **A Practical Guide to Community Video Training, Workshop Sessions/Days 10-12.**)

How do community videos help make a difference?

Sparking consciousness through dialogue

Video playback sessions go beyond awareness-raising; they help catalyze the process of “conscientisation.” As noted in **Part 1: Critical Issues in Conflict-Affected Settings**, issues such as rape, wife-beating, HIV/AIDS and harmful practices are rarely discussed among family members or in the wider community. Videos serve as a springboard, opening the door to topics that might otherwise stay wrapped in silence. Group dialogue prompts people to share experiences, relate issues to their own lives,

and question long-held attitudes and practices.

Making connections

Videos can help people understand connections that may not have been apparent to them: for example, the links between gender violence, harmful practices such as early marriage and wife inheritance, and poor health outcomes. Video can also help people understand the consequences of certain decisions, such as not seeking treatment for STIs, or of sending daughters to work in settings where they are likely to be sexually exploited.

Breaking through isolation

Many community videos help people understand that they are not the only ones who have had certain experiences. When people see their own situation reflected in a story, they realize they are not alone. This can encourage them to speak out, ask questions, or find out about services that can help them.

Depicting positive models of change

Local videos can present positive models of change and alternatives to violence. Many Through Our Eyes productions present credible examples drawn from the community. One documentary profiles a man whose alcoholism led to family neglect, and describes how, with the support of relatives and peers, he was able to overcome his addiction and became a caring, responsible person. The Liberian drama “Women Can Also Be Roosters” shows a household in which the wife earns a good income from her market stall while her husband helps care



*Playback of a drama that has just been filmed
(Southern Sudan, 2009)*



Video playback discussion in Anaka, northern Uganda (2009)

for their children and home.

Other videos help people understand how to respond to situations that might affect themselves, their family members, or friends. These include productions on seeking medical and legal services for survivors rather than treating rape as a private, “family matter;” reporting sexual abuse by teachers; and making use of family mediation services.

Community video in crisis- and conflict-affected settings

Media sources are often scarce in humanitarian settings. Existing channels may not address the specific needs of refugees or displaced people. Radio is the most widespread medium in many developing countries, and can serve a vital role in crisis-affected areas. However, radio ownership and listenership is

“The discussion we have, it tends to give local solutions to local problems...A solution that is given by the community is a solution that they can follow.”

Guya Cons, ARC Southern Sudan
Through Our Eyes Team Member

often dominated by men; women may lack access even to programming intended for them specifically, unless efforts are made to ensure otherwise.

Visual media such as television or film are especially rare in these contexts. With their combination of sound, image, and storytelling, they are attractive and accessible to all. Locally-made, participatory videos will reflect real-life conditions and immediately engage community members.

In addition, the collaborative and discussion-based aspects of participatory video are valuable in crisis-affected settings where traditional modes of dialogue may have eroded, or else become hierarchical or exclusionary. Community videos can help reach people across groups, build common awareness, and communicate issues to local leaders.

Understanding different forms of violence

Through Our Eyes team members at Nu Po camp in Thailand filmed a drama about a possessive husband who does not let his wife leave their home to take part in social or income-generating activities. The video caught the attention not only of married couples, but also of section leaders who monitor community welfare. “The video helped them realized that this sort of action is also a form of violence that they rarely think about,” Through Our Eyes team members reported.

Similarly, during playbacks of a production on sexual harassment, several audience members said they had always considered harassment just a harmless form of joking. Now, though, they now realized that “it can affect people’s dignity” and should be avoided.

Guiding tenets for community video programs

Communication

Transparent and open communication is vital at all stages of community media work. In the planning phase, project goals must be established in close consultation among partner groups and community members. Partners/team members should emphasize that videos will be used for awareness-raising and advocacy, not for broadcast or commercial purposes. It will be important to keep providing this information throughout the project. (See also “**Community Entry**” in **Part 4**, “**Planning a Community Video Project.**”)

Respect

Participatory work is based on respect for peoples’ voices, life experiences, and self-agency. Any person who takes part in a community media production or activity should do so freely and voluntarily. No one should ever be pressured to take part.

Safety

In crisis-affected areas, security is often a major concern. When planning activities, the safety of staff, team members, participants and other community members must always be the main consideration. In addition, community video teams in humanitarian settings must observe appropriate operational guidelines and ethical practices for working with vulnerable individuals and groups. (See “**Ethical practices for community media activities**” in **Part 5**, “**Implementing a Community Video Initiative.**”)

Inclusion and non-discrimination

Community video activities should not represent only one sector of the community, but a diversity of people across ethnic, linguistic, gender and age groups. Cultural/ethnic inclusiveness is especially important when prior conflict has been rooted in tensions between different groups or entities.

Appropriate referral

When community media projects address issues of health, welfare and rights, people will invariably come forward to share stories and seek information



Counseling session, Rwanda 2007

or services that could help them. Team members or field staff must be able to refer them to appropriate sources of information or care. In all cases, information and referrals must be provided in confidentiality. (See “**Response and Referrals,**” in **Part 5**, “**Implementing a Community Video Project.**”)

Challenges in community media work in crisis settings

Any program work in crisis-affected areas involves special challenges. Conditions are often in flux. Logistics, communications, coordination, safety and security are constant concerns. Anticipating difficulties will help implementing groups and local partners avoid them or deal with them as effectively as possible when they arise.

Sensitivities to filming and media use

In refugee communities and camps for internally displaced persons, people are coping with dislocation and the strain of sadness, loss, and uncertainty. People are often very sensitive about image-taking, and about how photographs and video material will be used. Because of these sensitivities, trust, transparency, and clear communication are critical to participatory video work. Community entry—first contacts and discussion of participatory video methods, carried out in locally-appropriate ways—plays a major role in the success of future activities. (See “**Community entry**” and “**Participatory video planning meetings and site visits**” in **Part 4**, “**Planning a Community Video Project.**”)

“Look at my age. I’m not educated...but today I can take a camera, I can film, I can zoom, I can do a production. I never had this dream before.”

Liberian refugee woman/Through Our Eyes community video training participant

Logistical constraints

Logistics-related issues—transport, procurement of equipment and supplies, repairs—can present challenges for all programs, including media-based activities. Despite precautions such as having extras of important items on hand (batteries, blank tapes, cables, an extra generator and fuel, if possible), difficulties may suddenly arise. It helps to be patient and ready to deal with the unexpected—as well as to have a backup plan before each activity. (See “**Playback challenges**” in **Part 6**, “**Program Continuity and Sustainability**”).

Changes in local conditions

Rapid changes may occur in the political climate, security conditions, or working environment overall. Again, safety must always be the first consideration. It may be necessary to curtail activities because of situations that arise. Activities should not resume until reasonably secure conditions have been confirmed.

Ongoing pressures for participants and programs

Everyone who lives and works in a crisis-affected setting—field staff, trainers, participants, and other community members—is coping with extremely stressful conditions. People are concerned with basic needs. Participants and staff will have many other responsibilities outside of their project roles. It may be difficult at times to maintain continuity in training sessions or field activities. Facilitators, program personnel, and participants should recognize that they are doing the best they can under difficult circumstances, and value what they have been able to achieve.



One of many logistical challenges in delivering humanitarian supplies to camps on the Cote d'Ivoire-Liberian border (2011).

References

Note: For a detailed list of participatory/community video resources, organizations, and websites, please see Annex B.

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