



Evidence in Practice Issue 1
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Evidence in Practice:

Evaluation of the MSEMVS
community-driven model to
eradicate modern slavery in India

Summary

In September 2014, the Freedom Fund commissioned a team at the Francois-Xavier Bagnoud (FXB) Center for Health and Human Rights at the Harvard School of Public Health to conduct an independent evaluation of the intervention model used by one of our partners in Northern India, MSEMVS.¹ The **focus of the evaluation** was to explore the extent to which MSEMVS had successfully eradicated forms of modern slavery in target communities, and to quantify the resulting socio-economic benefits.

MSEMVS is an Indian NGO that supports rural communities, primarily of “low caste” residents, to work together, enabling them to eradicate all forms of modern slavery in their community, including bonded labour and human trafficking.

The approach has several distinctive elements including ownership of the work by the local community groups; working with these groups towards the specific intended goal of full eradication; and using the combination of children’s transitional education, training in human rights and legal rights, women’s empowerment, and economic independence strategies.

Key findings: The study found that debt bondage and trafficking declined significantly in the area – it was almost completely eliminated. It found that communities supported by MSEMVS’ full intervention benefited in the following ways compared with similar communities:

- **Reduced household debt:** The intervention significantly lowered the odds of a household having any amount of debt.
- **Increased household savings:** Monthly household savings within the completed intervention area were 55% higher than the comparison group.
- **Higher wage growth:** Wages grew 30% faster in the completed intervention area.
- **Increased access to medical care:** Those receiving the intervention were three times more likely to report access to free medical care.
- **Increased use of Indian government protective schemes:** Households in the intervention group were almost four times more likely to report having a job card under the rural employment scheme.
- **Improved household food security:** The intervention significantly increased the number of meals eaten per day.

The full report *When we raise our voice: The challenge of eradicating labor exploitation. An evaluation of a community empowerment intervention in Uttar Pradesh, India*, Harvard FXB Center for Health & Human Rights, March 2016 can be accessed at freedomfund.org

¹ MSEMVS is the Hindi acronym for the Society of Human Development and Women’s Empowerment

Context of modern slavery in the area

The communities targeted by the NGO MSEMVS in the state of Uttar Pradesh are home to some of the most economically disenfranchised and vulnerable populations in India. Community members work in local agriculture, brick, stone and carpet industries, often in conditions of debt bondage, typically receiving less than minimum wages, and unable to freely change their employer. Sometimes the children within the families are expected to work by the landowner or employer. Because these families are often unable to access protective state services and are hit by successive life crises, they fall deeper into debt-ridden and coercive relationships with these employers. They are prey to traffickers. Their condition of slavery is fundamentally sustained by harmful beliefs related to caste, gender and child rights. Although the families are under the control of the employer, they usually live separately, within the socially-excluded dalit ("low caste") hamlets of the village.

A family works together to thrash the paddy harvest next to their field in Bhadohi district in Uttar Pradesh, India.

The Freedom Fund: Identifying scalable intervention models

In addition to supporting direct work to reduce prevalence of modern slavery in hotspots around the world, the Freedom Fund is tackling the urgent need for evidence regarding effective intervention models. When we observe promising interventions in the field, the Freedom Fund commissions evaluations to measure the results and impact of the work. In this way, we aim to contribute to the knowledge base required to adequately fund and scale up anti-slavery work. Our Evidence in Practice series helps ensure that strategic achievements against slavery are communicated to other practitioners, funders and policy makers.



The intervention: Process and distinctive elements

Having worked against bonded and child labour for over 25 years, in 2011, MSEMVS began a program aiming for the complete eradication of forms of modern slavery across two administrative areas, called “Nyaya Panchayats” within the district of Sant Ravidas Nagar. These Nyaya Panchayats encompassed 16 contiguous villages; and MSEMVS targeted 33 primarily dalit (“low caste”) hamlets (small settlements) within these areas. Bonded labour and trafficking occur disproportionately within dalit areas. Depending on the needs and priorities identified in each location, the MSEMVS intervention process includes the following steps:

- 1 Fieldworkers gradually create a relationship with many people in the hamlet, often through other nearby people, already freed from slavery.
- 2 They create a transitional school at the centre of the hamlet, so that children in forced labour or who have never attended school can be educated using an accelerated curriculum, typically entering the government school within two to three years, at which point the transitional school finishes. With MSEMVS’ encouragement, parents are willing to push employers for their children to be able to do this. At the school, children learn their basic human rights, improve nutritional status through receiving lunch, and older children access vocational training.
- 3 Community members form a Community Vigilance Committee (CVC), collectively identifying the reasons why slavery and trafficking are happening, and working with MSEMVS to advocate for access to government services such as health and employment schemes. They spread human rights-based awareness about trafficking and bonded labour, and begin to challenge traffickers.
- 4 Community members identify, and MSEMVS rescues, individuals who have been trafficked into slavery elsewhere.² Reintegration of these trafficking survivors builds momentum towards addressing root causes of vulnerability. This is because reintegrated survivors often become members of CVCs, and this means that the violence and coercion they have suffered becomes better understood. Also, the CVC helps survivors access health care, education and economic safety nets as part of their reintegration, and often at the same time they help make these services function better for everyone, thereby helping prevent further trafficking. Community members use MSEMVS’ legal support to protect themselves and in some cases prosecute perpetrators.

² Rescues are conducted in coordination with the police where appropriate.

5 Self-help groups, mostly of women, save money together, make small loans as needed, link with local banks and learn a vocational skill, through which they gradually develop independent income outside the debt bondage relationship.

6 Multiple CVCs across the local area and district meet together to address collective issues with the authorities and to increase their knowledge of what works.

7 Using this approach, MSEMVS reports that, within this context, most communities with high levels of bonded labour and trafficking are able to bring everyone in the hamlet to sustainable freedom within three to four years.

Currently, within Uttar Pradesh, in eight districts, MSEMVS is active in 332 communities, with 133 of these having economic self-help groups, and 23 having the transitional schools. The Freedom Fund has supported MSEMVS in this work and is now funding MSEMVS to expand into new areas.

Distinctive elements of MSEMVS' intervention include: The emerging ownership of the work by each community group; a combination of rights-based interventions; the focus on developing economic independence; and intentional work towards eradication, rather than simply individual rescues or reductions in slavery.

Research methods

In September 2014, the Freedom Fund commissioned the FXB Center at the Harvard School of Public Health to measure the results of the three-year intervention in the Nyaya Panchayat area. This independent research was commissioned in order to i) explore the extent to which the intervention had successfully eradicated forms of modern slavery in the intervention villages; and ii) to quantify the effect on a wide range of social and economic factors.

In 2011, at the start of MSEMVS' intervention in the area, the NGO itself worked with local social work students to carry out in-depth interviews with 1,865 households within 21 villages in three Nyaya Panchayat areas. In the dalit hamlets of these villages, MSEMVS interviewed 100% of the households. This baseline survey identified how many households in these hamlets were in bonded labour or affected by trafficking, and gathered data about their access to basic services and their economic status. The NGO then used this information to select the intervention area, consisting of 33 hamlets in two out of the three Nyaya Panchayats. These two Nyaya Panchayats (called Bisapur and Giriyan) had a greater need for intervention than the third one, where levels of bonded labour were found to be lower at baseline. MSEMVS therefore implemented the comprehensive intervention (described above) in these two areas but not the third area.

At the time of the follow up research, MSEMVS believed the process of eradicating slavery had been completed in 25 out of the 33 hamlets within these two areas (the "completed intervention" cohort) but that it still needed more time for completion in eight out of the 33 hamlets ("incomplete

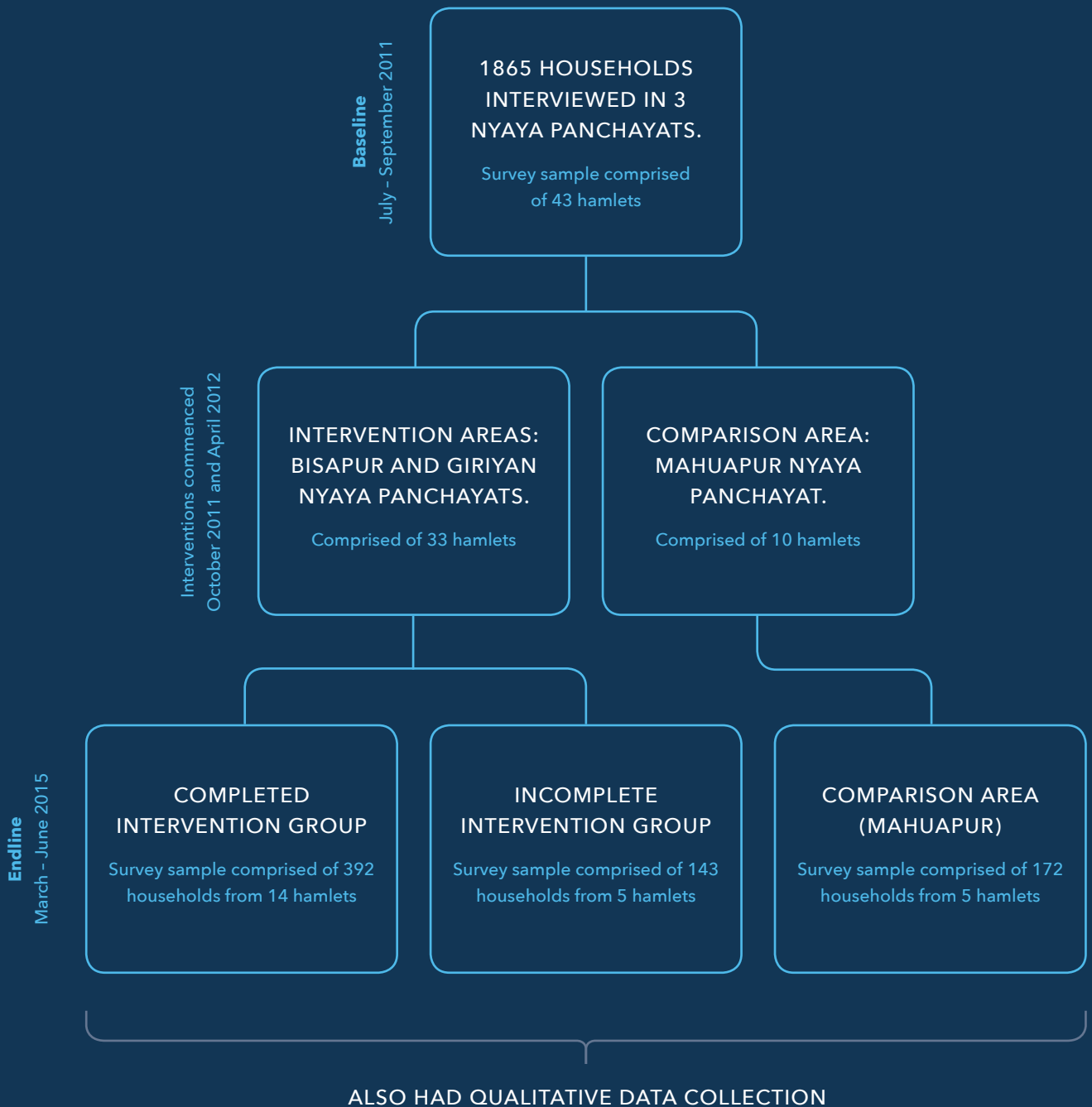
intervention" cohort). In the third Nyaya Panchayat, called Mahuapur, MSEMVS had organised various rescues and reintegration of individuals, prosecution of cases, awareness-raising, and police training, and in 2014 it began formation of CVCs, but it had not undertaken the full intervention. Hamlets in this third Nyaya Panchayat area were therefore labeled as the "comparison" cohort.

For the follow-up research, taking place from March - June 2015, FXB contracted the Institute for Human Development (IHD), Delhi, to collect quantitative and qualitative data in the same three Nyaya Panchayat areas. In the areas where the comprehensive MSEMVS intervention took place, they administered a questionnaire covering similar questions to the baseline to 535 randomly selected households. These households were a sample of the same households that had been interviewed at baseline. Overall 40% of households were followed up from the original 1,297. In addition, they interviewed 172 out of the original 568 households in the area in which MSEMVS had decided in 2011 not to carry out the comprehensive intervention (the comparison cohort). The research also included focus group discussions and key informant interviews with CVCs and local government officials.

This study therefore reports on results of an intensive systematic intervention in two Nyaya Panchayat areas, compared with an area where the intervention was not as comprehensive and focused more on "immediate needs and follow up".

Limitations

The study had certain limitations: There were changes in the survey instrument between baseline and endline which meant that clear comparisons could not be made on some issues. Using the baseline data, households in the comparison area were judged to be less vulnerable than those in the intervention areas, so it was not an ideal comparison group. The location of the comparison area was also closer to the district centre, which meant that it was more likely to benefit from government and other NGO programs. The study covered sensitive topics, and therefore, at both baseline and endline, people's willingness to give accurate answers may have been affected.



Key findings

Ability to work in freedom:

- **Bonded labour:** In the intervention cohorts at the endline, the percentage of households reporting a member was working against a loan was 0.7%, compared to 16.5% of households reporting a member working against a loan at baseline. By contrast, in the comparison area, households working against a loan stood at 5.7% at endline, compared to 1.9% at baseline, illustrating an increase and a clear difference between intervention and comparison areas.³
- **Trafficking:** None of the households in the intervention or comparison areas reported that a relative had been trafficked at endline. This is compared to a baseline that reported 358 cases of trafficking known about in the communities. This suggests a universal decrease in trafficking cases but results should be interpreted with caution due to differences in the way baseline and follow-up questions were asked.
- **Coercive conditions in the workplace** reduced significantly across all the cohorts. At baseline, in all groups, there was a high proportion of households in which an individual reported the risk of being subjected to physical violence, the loss of a home, or threats. For example, between 36% and 44% of respondents in the completed intervention and comparison groups respectively reported that they would be subjected to physical violence should they

³ At baseline, participants were asked whether the person from whom the household borrowed money required any family members to work for them as part of paying back the loan. The follow-up question at endline, phrased slightly differently, asked whether the participant currently worked for an advance wage payment, or to pay off a loan with the employer.

“Incidences of threatening or frightening us used to occur, but things have changed since the time the organization started working here.”

Respondent from Daripur
(Completed Intervention group).

refuse to work. These conditions changed dramatically over the course of the study period. **At endline, very few households reported potential violence in response to the questions on refusal to work or changing employers.** Moreover, in areas that received the full MSEMVS intervention, nearly all respondents indicated in qualitative interviews that forced and bonded labor was a thing of the past in their community. Many stated that employers used to threaten them, beat them, and verbally abuse them, but that this had come to an end with MSEMVS' involvement.

Household income, savings and nutrition:

- **Income:** In the completed intervention area, FXB found that **mean daily wages** of the highest wage earner in the household increased from Rs.83 (\$1.25) in 2011 to Rs.209 (\$3.14) in 2015 (an increase of Rs. 126 or \$1.89), whereas in the comparison area, it increased from Rs.88 (\$1.32) to Rs.185 (\$2.78) (an increase of Rs.97 or \$1.46). In the qualitative research, respondents in the areas served by MSEMVS said they had been informed about fair wages and that they now have the ability to organise and demand wage increases.
- **Debt:** The MSEMVS intervention had a strong and significant effect on **reducing the odds of a household having any amount of debt.** It also reduced the odds that a household would hold extreme debt

(Rs. 10,000 i.e. \$150 or more), as well as the odds that a household reported taking on debt as the result of a medical expenditure. In addition, in the qualitative data, the majority of respondents in the intervention groups indicated that they were able to easily borrow money from family members or neighbours, and if not, they could go to the village self help group (SHG) that MSEMVS had helped set up to get a loan rather than going to a moneylender, as they had done in the past.

- **Savings:** At the endline, the mean **monthly household savings** within the completed intervention areas was Rs.479 (\$7.19), in the incomplete areas it was Rs.405 (\$6.08), and in the comparison group it was Rs.310 (\$4.65).
- **Nutrition:** The intervention significantly increased the number of meals reportedly eaten per day.

Health, school attendance, social protection and sustainability:

- **Medical care:** Households in the intervention areas had significantly higher odds of receiving free medical care compared to the comparison group. Those who received the complete or incomplete intervention were **three times more likely to report access to free medical care** than those in the comparison group.
- **School attendance:** At baseline, school attendance of 5 - 14 year olds in the intervention areas was at 83.4% and at endline it was at 84.7%. In the comparison areas, school attendance at baseline was 75.8%, but at endline, school attendance had fallen to 67.1%. Also, at baseline, for children under the age of 15, a majority of the respondents who indicated that their child was not in school said that the reason

was that a moneylender forced their child to work. **At endline, virtually no one in any of the study groups indicated that their child was forced to work by a moneylender.**

- **Social protection:** MSEMVS' work dramatically increased the use of **Indian government protective schemes** such as its employment guarantee scheme, housing schemes and safe motherhood program. The average household in the completed intervention group reported participating in 5.2 government schemes, compared to 3.7 schemes in the comparison group. **Households in the intervention groups were nearly four times more likely than those in the comparison group to report having a job card under the rural employment scheme.**
- **Sustained results:** Nearly 70% of respondents in the intervention areas indicated that they thought the **changes are sustainable**, and that the community would be able to maintain the changes in future without MSEMVS' ongoing support. In the qualitative responses, the intervention's success in catalysing a culture of collective efficacy emerged as a critical driver of positive change.

Recommendations and significance

Ending slavery:

The program's success against debt and against households having to work against a debt is significant. **These results suggest that the intervention approaches described above should be considered for adaptation and use in other contexts of slavery.**

Progress against poverty and social exclusion:

All of the communities covered within the research were eligible for delivery of government anti-poverty interventions, but the residents' efforts towards eradicating slavery triggered significant improvement in the **reach** of these services. This collective work against slavery enabled residents to take some decisive steps toward improving human development indicators in their area. This suggests that for severely socially-excluded populations, it can be crucial to find comprehensive answers to the question of "what will protect us from slavery and trafficking?" It enables effective use of existing services as well as generation of new ones. **This can dramatically accelerate progress against poverty and discrimination.**

"[Violence] used to happen earlier. But now no one can threaten us or do any harm as well as we all are aware of our rights. We can also raise our voices."

Respondent from Baduana
(Completed Intervention group)

"If we don't get a good wage we refuse to work. We get to eat good quality food now. We have become more independent."

Respondent from Darpur
(Completed Intervention group)

Further research needed

- 1 The research highlighted the challenges of asking sensitive questions through standardised household interviews, conducted by outsiders. In addition to traditional interview methods, future research should look at a range of ways to gain accurate data from affected households, such as using visual (pictorial) guides, so that they can participate more in recording of answers; using community validation sessions to confirm the accuracy of results (with required protections in place); or designing other group participation tools to assess levels of bonded labour or trafficking in the community.
- 2 The comprehensive intervention model, with the particular mechanism of the Community Vigilance Committee (or equivalent) as the local space to coordinate anti-slavery action seems to have been effective. This suggests further questions about which factors make such a group more or less effective in its role. Moreover, further examination of effective components of the model towards replication in other contexts and at increased scale would be valuable.
- 3 In this “Nyaya Panchayat” project, the villages were contiguous, and it might be implied that due to this geographic proximity, there are more opportunities for village groups to support each other, and for field staff to be present. Is this type of concentrated intervention more effective than a more geographically dispersed approach, or what are the benefits of covering more ground? Can CVCs that have completed their own liberation effectively contribute to freeing people in surrounding communities, so that a larger geographic area can be reached? How can that process best be supported?

What does MSEMVS' comprehensive intervention cost?

Annual costs of the intervention:

Program components	Annual cost (USD)
Community Vigilance Committee (CVC) in 16 villages Costs for rescue and return of trafficking victims; individual income generation projects for returned survivors; costs of legal cases; an organiser in each village; a reintegration coordinator for the cluster; a field coordinator for training of CVCs; a field coordinator for income generation; a project coordinator; costs for village and inter-village meetings and staff training; cellphones for staff; rent of field office; travel for coordinators and staff.	\$45,200
Eight transitional schools For children who have been in or at high risk of slavery. Construction of simple temporary classroom; basic school furniture, books, sports equipment, a first aid kit; salaries for two teachers per school; food and a cook for children's lunch.	\$38,600
Self-help groups in one third of the villages per year Focusing on women who are in, or at risk of, bonded labour to earn an independent income. Machinery/equipment and materials for training; Instructor fees for vocational training; costs of marketing of goods produced by groups.	\$6,600
Youth skills training Approx. 70 young people receive various skills training per year, typically 25 days. (Note: This is an added component, not included in the program that was studied).	\$6,400
Project management costs E.g. support staff, communications, office supplies.	\$7,000
Cost per year	\$103,800
Total cost over 3.5 years	\$363,300

The sample costs above are for the full range of activities described on pages 4 - 5 across a cluster of 16 villages, plus an additional youth training component. The needs in specific clusters will vary, but the costs described here are based on a few assumptions:

- 8 out of the 16 villages have enough out of school children that MSEMVS needs to set up three year remedial coaching in those villages.
- In each of the 16 villages, between 15 - 25 women are provided income generation training, covering 1/3 of the villages each year.
- There are high levels of bonded labour and trafficking. Some funds need to be spent on arranging rescues and reintegration support for returning victims.
- Once adults are out of debt bondage, they can work locally as daily waged labourers.
- The intervention in the cluster needs to run for 3.5 years so that everyone can come to freedom. Subsequent costs in order to maintain the participation of liberated groups within the wider network are minimal.

Estimated cost per person liberated:

Making an assumption that each participating village has 70 dalit households with an average of 5 members, the program reaches about 5,600 people. Based on this research, approximately 16.5% of these households are in bonded labour at the beginning and come to freedom through the program = 924 individuals liberated.

The total cost per person liberated is therefore \$393.

Important notes when considering these costs:

- 1 The benefits of the intervention are not limited only to those individuals who come out of slavery. All residents benefit from improvement of conditions in the village.
- 2 The strategy prevents other residents entering slavery. The numbers for this cannot be calculated. Also, given the model, the benefits should be inter-generational.
- 3 Individuals liberated within this rights-based model often go on to liberate others.
- 4 Through this model, communities claim access to government economic safety nets and they demand protection against trafficking and bonded labour from police and other officials. Through this, government policy enforcement is improved, which benefits others.
- 5 These costs do not include the expenses of the grantmaker to provide this grant but they do include the management costs of the local NGO. It does not include the indirect costs of the NGO.

Other factors affecting these costs within this specific context in India include:

The availability of India's economic safety nets By exerting well-organised pressure, the community group can ensure these are functioning better. Without this government assistance, the costs for people to transition to freedom and economic sustainability would be much higher. The costs provided above do not include the government's costs for providing these safety nets.

Access to local markets In this geographic area, there are ready markets for products of the self-help groups.

Availability of committed and capable staff within the communities Many from the same background, who are willing to devote their time on modest wages and often at great risk in order to transform their villages. Without their sacrifices, the intervention would be extremely costly, and might anyway be impossible to carry out.

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