

# Refugee Food Security Perceptions on Food Rationing Practices in Refugees Camp in Western Tanzania

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## **Abstract**

*This paper is based on the study on perception of refugees on food availability, accessibility, and utilization, forms of food rations. It assesses coping strategies on reduced food rationing and food security for refugee in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Kasulu district, Kigoma region in Western Tanzania. Data collection involved a total of 395 refugee households in the study area who were interviewed using structured questionnaires. The collected data were processed and analysed using SPSS software in which descriptive statistics, mainly frequencies were produced and the results presented in bar charts. The study revealed that, the common form of food rationing in practice was in-kind food ration, the most preferred form was a combination of both In-kind food ration and Cash. It was also revealed that the existing food aid ration was not satisfactory for family use. The food prices in the camp market were not affordable for the family food consumption especially for the majority with low incomes compounded with large families. As a result, upon receiving rationed food they partly sold it in order to get cash which they used to buy other basic goods in the market; or simply exchanged goods in-kind in order to meet human wants.*

**Keywords:** Refugee food security, food ration, refugee camp, Tanzania

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Western Tanzania is currently hosting refugee in three camps - Nyarugusu Camp (houses 156,464 refugees); Nduta Camp (hosting 115,726 refugees); and Mtendeli Camp (accommodating 44,712 refugees) (UNHCR, 2018). These camps are overcrowded and the services are overstretched (Obodoruku, 2017). Political instability and violence in neighbouring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have driven thousands of refugees into Tanzania. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that nearly 243,000 Burundians have taken refuge in Tanzania since conflict broke out in the capital of Bujumbura in April 2015 (URT, 2019). According to Obodoruku (2018), the continuous inadequacy of food for refugees has been a pattern, this is evidence from 2010 a study conducted by Community and Household Surveillance (CHS) in northwestern Tanzania, on a Programme Outcome Monitoring in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in collaboration with

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World Food Programme (WFP), as well as the UNHCR stated that there was lack of sufficient food for refugees. While conducting interviews with refugees in Nyarugusu camp, they voiced their concerns of the inadequacy of food supply by UNHCR and MHA (Obodoruku, 2017). While in 2016, the WFP noted that the Super Cereal that was shared for refugees in Nyarugusu camp was temporarily reduced in the months of March, June, July, October, November and December 2015 as a result of the pipeline breaks [deficiency of consistent or adequate distribution of food because of the gap/lack of subsidies (WFP 2016), (Obodoruku 2017).

Refugees in Nyarugusu camp lack sufficient food (UNHCR, 2017); their maize's rations were reduced 70 percent predominantly in the July 2017 distribution (WFP, 2017). It is fundamental to note that refugees depend on food assistance predominantly from the WFP (Obodoruku, 2017 and 2014) and the international community (UNHCR, 2016). UNHCR (2017) reported that there has been inadequate food for refugees due to the lack of fund constraints. Refugees in Tanzania camps have uncounted constant food reduction constantly for months and years (Obodoruku, 2014). WFP (2017) dispenses food such as pulses, vegetable oil, Super Cereal (SC) and salt in order for refugees to meet a minimum necessary dietary intake of 2,100 calories for a person daily (WFP, 2017). Nevertheless, UNHCR (2017a) stated that, as of March 31, 2017, the proposed 100 percent once-a-month food aid to refugees in camp was met. On the other hand, in August, the UN News Centre (2017) reported that the funding shortage had resulted in the reduction of food rations for approximately 320,000 refugees in northwest Tanzania. This could lead to longstanding, life-changing effects, such as severe malnutrition or rising susceptibility to disease. UNHCR (2018) noted that the continuous magnitudes of refugees from Burundi to Tanzania had led to food shortages and rations being cut because the Burundian situation is underfunded.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The process of community empowerment has been used to inform empowerment theory, which recognizes community members as experts of their environments while exploring key challenges within them in order to uncover solutions to the barriers they identify, underscoring their ability to navigate such identified challenges (Hatfield, 2012). A study by Hand and Kaiser (2019), showed that it is important to note that when using this framework, the purpose of empowerment is not to teach participants new information, but to support them, which begins by first learning what they already know (Hatfield, 2012). Thus, not only has empowerment theory been used to address limited agency among refugee populations as they are disproportionately vulnerable, particularly to issues of food insecurity (Hatfield, 2012), but it also supports the promotion of greater wellness and social justice by facilitating social change through working to address structural barriers to individual and community agency (Whiteside, 2009).

Food security interventions in camps aim to prevent malnutrition in the population, especially among women, young children and other vulnerable groups, and to stabilise their food security situation, mainly through food assistance. If markets are well established and accessible, it is particularly important to choose the most appropriate form of food assistance (in-kind food, cash, vouchers, or combination). Interventions are also organised to assess and monitor the food security and nutrition status of the population. In addition, food security programming promotes food security by means of longer-term interventions that, for example, seek to increase food production. Food security programmes work closely with livelihood programmes to provide longer term solutions and to promote self-reliance (UNHCR, 2018).

A study by Whitaker (2008), the effort to increase overall compliance may require an exchange of ideas and discussion of new proposals to ensure minimal standards of refugee protection around the world. As indicated by UNHCR (2019), the impact of underfunding is felt acutely in all areas of the Tanzania refugee response. With inadequate funding for the operation, RRP partners have had to divert the already limited resources leading to major gaps in the response. By the end of 2018, funding for the Burundi and DRC inter-agency refugee response in Tanzania stood at, respectively, 36 and 30 per cent. Specific impacts of chronic underfunding include a reduction in food rations below the minimum standard of 2,100 kcal per person per day for most of 2018.

Refugees in Nyarugusu camp unceasingly confront food scarcity. As of January 2018, WFP reduced food rations for refugees in Tanzania. WFP delivered simply 72 percent of the required 2,100 kilocalories (WFP, 2018). According to Bruin & Becker (2019), in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp the Refugee situation almost all of the respondents describe life in the camp as difficult. Based in all villages surrounding Nyarugusu Refugee Camp the respondent's and from local government stated that crime rates have increased since the establishment of the camp, rising further with the arrival of Burundian refugees in 2015, and that refugees may come to Tanzanian villages to steal and take things from villagers' belongings. The refugees are like robbers and may forcefully robe foodstuffs and other household items on the grounds that life in the camps is unbearable (Bruin & Becker, 2019). It is from this background that this study assesses the Refugee's Food Security Perceptions on reduced food rations in Nyarugusu Refugees Camp in Western Tanzania and recommends options for improved food rationing policy for refugees in camps.

### **3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was conducted in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp located in Kasulu District of Kigoma in Western Tanzania. This camp was selected due to the presences of many refugees with food insufficient claiming. The Refugee Food Security in refugee camp is very important. The surveyed population was 33,884

household’s refugees in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp at Kigoma western Tanzania (URT, 2020). The sample size of 395 was picked out of 33,889 household’s refugee’s population purposively. This study used a descriptive research design because the overall objective was to establish whether significant relationship among variables exist at some point in time. There structured questionnaire was adopted to collect data from the heads of households. The questionnaire was administered through interview schedule where by respondents were visited in their homes and some cases in their workplaces. Likert-like Scaled questions were included in the questionnaire. The collected data were processed and verified prior to analysis. Descriptive statistics, mainly frequencies were main data analysis methods and results were presented in form of bar charts for each theme of the study.

#### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Seven main thematic findings are briefly described based on frequency charts in Figures 1-7. Generally, the results revealed presence of challenges on reduced food rations in Nyarugusu Refugees Camp. This has resulted to grievances among refugees due to the resultant prolonged refugee food shortages.

##### 4.1 Refugee’s Perception on Food Availability

Based on the findings of present available food aid ration is satisfactory for the household: 74.6% (majority) of respondents disagreed, 15.5% somehow agree; while very few 2.5% highly agreed. On whether the available food price was affordable for the individuals or family food capacity; 60.6% being the majority disagreed while 27% strongly disagree. This implies that the present available food aid ration isn’t pleasant the individuals or circle of relatives use for entire forty-two days for one man or woman as shown in figure 1.

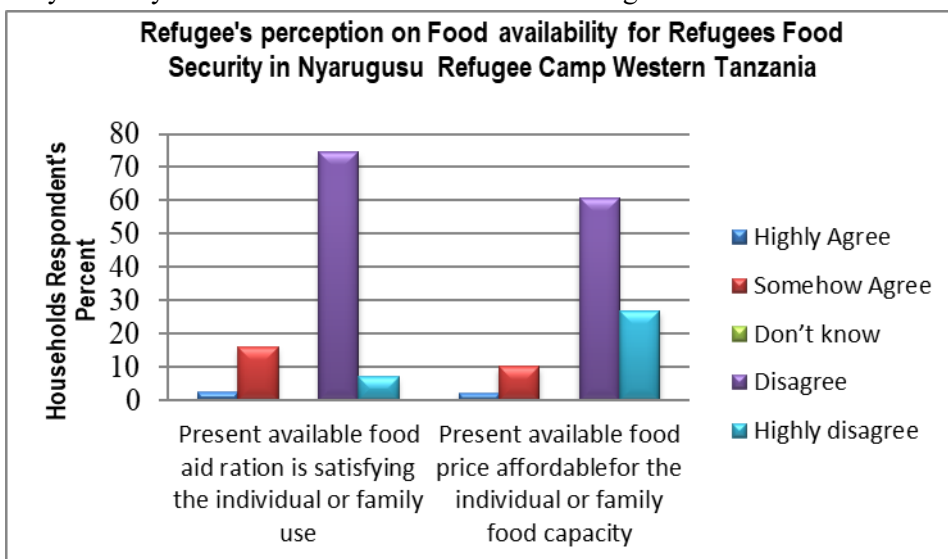


Figure 1: Food Availability

#### 4.2 Refugee’s Perception on Food Accessibility

The study wanted to establish on the availability and accessibility to food on daily consumption basis: 60.7%, the majority disagreed, 28.5% highly agreed, 10.1% somehow agreed; and 0.7% highly disagree. Those who commented on whether accessibility of food through markets was affordable for low-income individuals or family of refugees were as follows: 45.3% disagreed, 43.7% highly disagreed, 8% somehow agreed; and 3% highly agreed. It implies that, the majority of the respondents disagreed both on the availability and accessibility to food on daily basis; and they could not afford to buy it through markets due to their low incomes. Therefore, it showed the need for the government and other stakeholders to intervene in order to solve the frequent food shortages facing the majority of the refugees who earn low incomes.

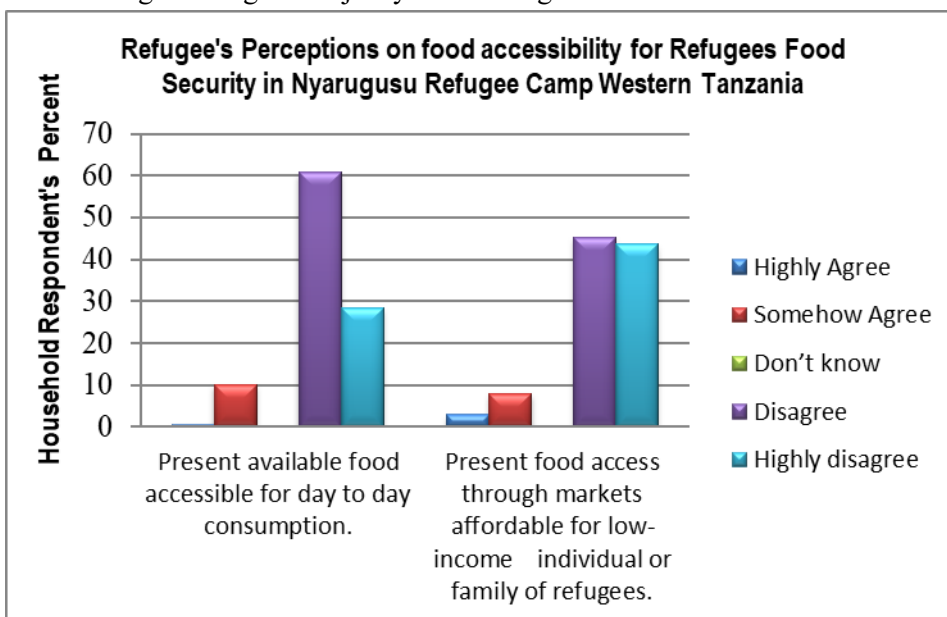


Figure 2: Food accessibility

#### 4.3 Refugee’s Perception on Food Utilisation

The findings on present received food for dietary intake: 71% disagree, 18.9% somehow agree, 8.1% highly disagree and 2% highly agreed. On quality and safety of received food; 99% somehow agreed, 0.8% highly agreed, and 0.2% highly disagree. Regarding part of food being utilized on selling to get money for other needs: 54.7% somehow agreed, 35.3% disagreed, 9.8% highly disagreed and 0.2% highly agreed. The end result implies that food utilization desires intervention for refugees to acquire quality food for proper consumption. It will also reduce refugees’ tendency of selling part of food aid to get money in order to buy better food and other basic needs (see Figure 3).

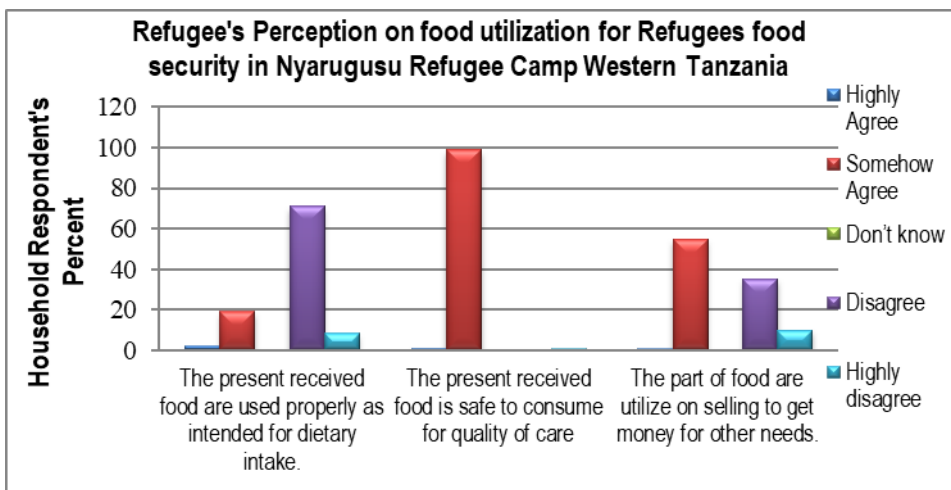


Figure 3: Food Utilization

#### 4.4 Refugee's Perception on Form of Food Assistance

Regarding perception on preferred form of food assistance in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp Western Tanzania; the study established that 59% of respondents said that, cash was most appropriate; while 11% preferred to be given food in-kind; and 23% preferred a a combination of food in-kind and cash (Figure 4).

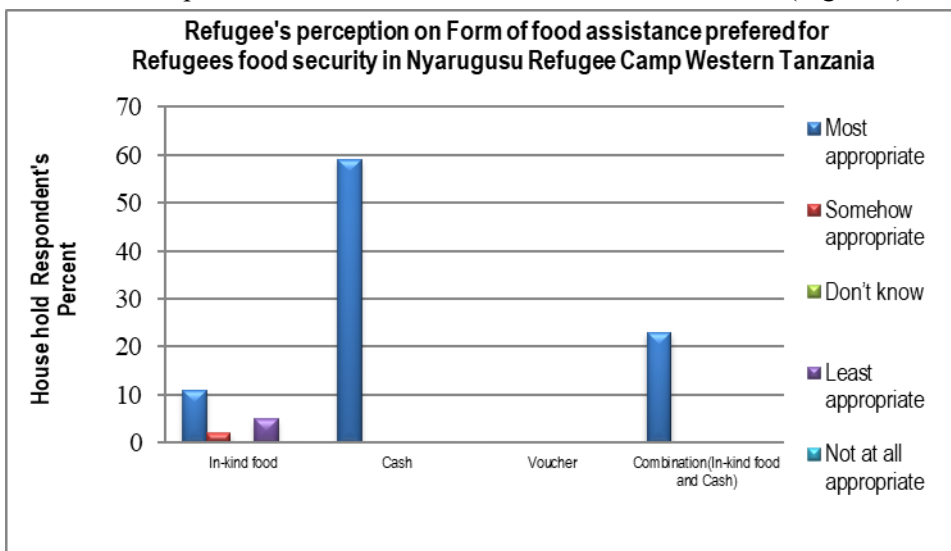


Figure 4: Refugee's Perception on form of food assistance preferred for Refugees food security in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp Western Tanzania

#### 4.5 Factors Affecting Implementation of Coping Strategies on Food Rationing

Five factors were employed to assess the extent they affected implementation of coping strategies as far as food rationing was concerned as follows. Firstly, the assertion that implementation was affected by lack of political good will from the government constituted 98.2% and 1.8% highly agrees responses respectively. Secondly, it was affected by restrictions of refugee accessing community market; 94.2% highly agreed and 5.8% agreed. Thirdly, responses for those who said it was affected by denial of permits to work or engage in income generating activities; 92.4% highly agree and 7.6% agreed. Divergent attention and overwhelming demand on UNHCR due to increased cases of conflicts globally included 83% of don't know, 9% of don't at all agree, 6.7% don't agree and 1.3% highly agree of all responses. Based on these results, it can be judged there were two main factors affecting the implementation of coping strategy on rationing approach in Nya rugusu refugee camp in western Tanzania. They included restrictions of refugee accessing community market; and the denial of permits to work or engage in income generating activities as shown in figure 5.

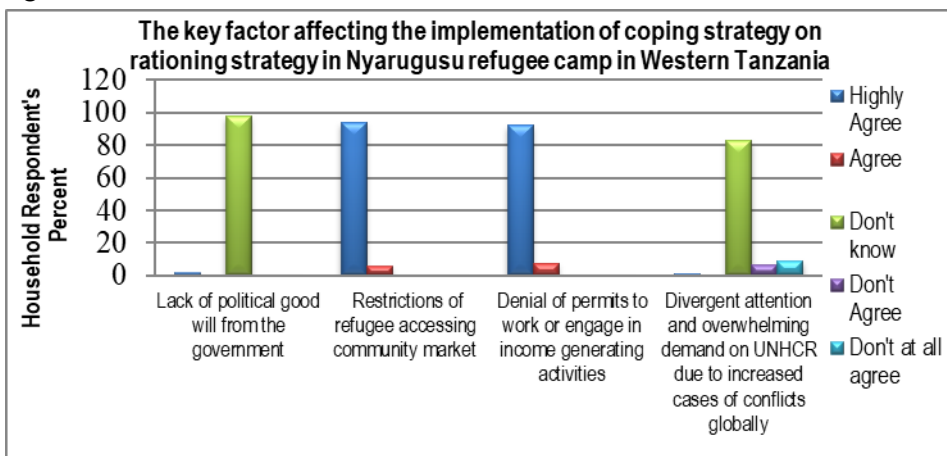
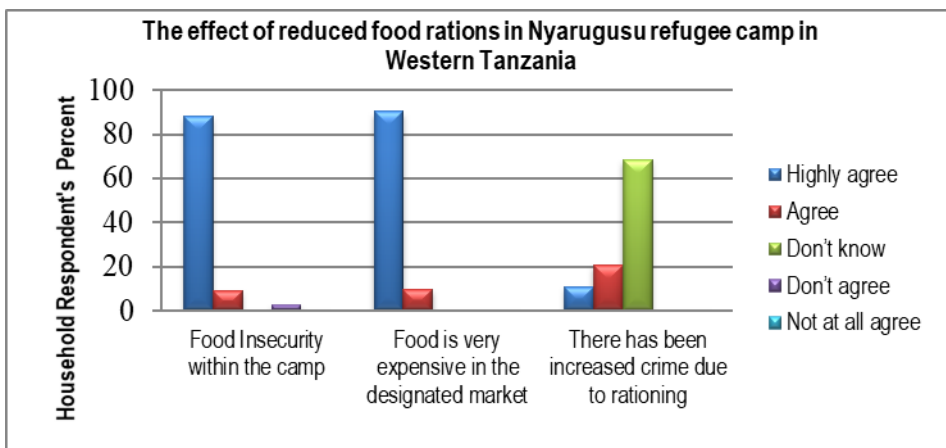


Figure 5: Key factor affecting the implementation of coping strategy on rationing strategy in Nyarugusu refugee camp in Western Tanzania.

#### 4.6 Effects of reduced food rationing

Figure 6 provides the main factors which attributed to reduced food rationing. Firstly, food insecurity within the camp supported by majority (88.3%) of the responses; ; while those who said it was due to food being very expensive in the designated market constituting 90.2% of those who highly agreed. The other factor stated by respondents was increased crimes due to rationing which secured 68.5% of the responses. These factors generally accounted for the overall reduction in food leading to low food utilization for dietary intake; and poor-quality health generally.

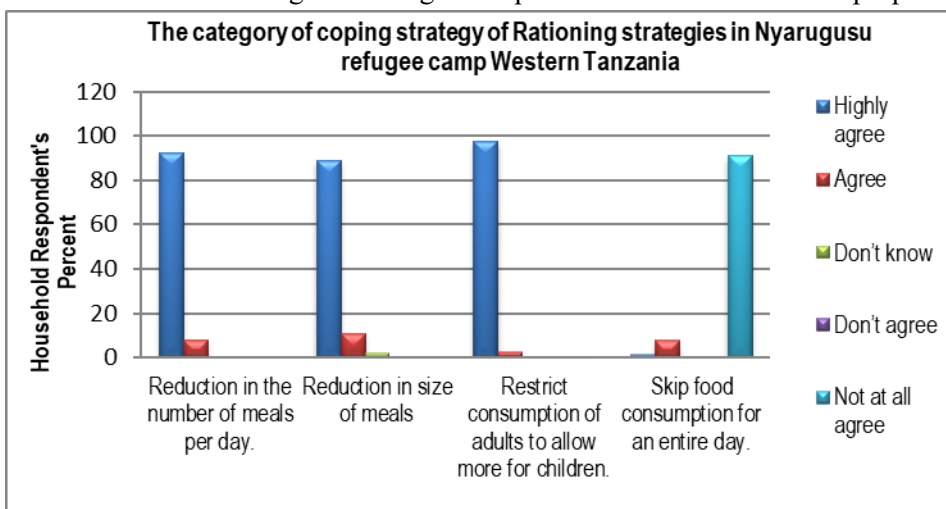




**Figure 6: The Effect of Reduced Food Ration in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Western Tanzania.**

#### 4.7 Coping Strategies against Food Rationing

The study established four ways used by respondents as coping strategies against food rationing as presented in Figure 7. It provides percentages for respondents who opted for: reduction in the number of meals per day (92%); reduction in size of meals (89%); restricted adults to consume meals in order to allow more food for children (97.6%). However, data showed that there were very few respondents who skipped food consumption for an entire day; for 91.1% of the respondents didn't agree with this option. These results suggest that, participatory research is necessary to be conducted in such camps in order to know the actual coping strategies being undertaken by refugees themselves rather than an external agent making assumptions for them which is not proper.



**Figure 7: The Category of coping Strategy of Rationing Strategy in Nyarugusu Refugee Camp in Western Tanzania.**



## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, the study findings confirm that reduced food rationing and food security exist in Nyarugusu refugee camp in Western Tanzania. Partly it is caused by unsatisfactory availability of food aid for individual and family use. Partly, due to high food price in the camp market which are not affordable for the individual and family as the majority of them have low incomes leading to inadequate food and inaccessible for day to day consumption. This challenge calls attention for special intervention as it even reduces food rationing. As a result, the recipient of such minimal food aid basically majority of refugee's households sell the little food received for exchange for other basic needs. Under such circumstances, refugees would prefer receiving cash, a combination of cash and food in-kind to receiving food alone. If done, according to refugee's perception, will suffice to meet coping strategies of food and other necessary basic human wants at the refugee camp. This recommends that, it is important participatory research be conducted frequently at refugees' camps in order to know the living conditions particularly the critical food conditions and other basic human wants facing refugees in order to take the appropriate intervention measures consonant with human rights as expounded by the United Nations.

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