



# Hunger In the Land

Practical and Sustainable Solutions

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria faces a severe hunger crisis that demands immediate and coordinated responses. With over 26.5 million Nigerians projected to face food insecurity in 2024, the situation is exacerbated by inflation, conflict, and climate change. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) has been at the forefront of addressing these issues, providing strategic recommendations and highlighting the urgent need for action.

### **Current State Of Hunger In Nigeria**

The scale of food insecurity in Nigeria is alarming. According to NESG, food prices surged by over 40% in 2024, contributing significantly to multidimensional poverty across the nation. An estimated 133 million Nigerians experience extreme poverty, with significant regional disparities exacerbating the problem. The conflict-affected northeast region is particularly vulnerable, with 4.8 million individuals at risk of severe hunger.

#### **Key Drivers Of Food Insecurity**

Inflation



Inflation, especially in the context of food prices, poses a significant threat to Nigeria's economic stability and the well-being of its citizens. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported a staggering 130% increase in the prices of staple foods such as rice, beans, garlic, and yams. This sharp rise in food prices has made essential commodities unaffordable for many Nigerians, exacerbating the already dire food security situation.

#### **Factors Contributing To Rising Food Prices**

I. Currency Devaluation: One of the primary drivers of inflation in Nigeria is the devaluation of the Naira. As the local currency weakens against major global currencies like the US dollar, the cost of importing goods, including food items, increases. Given Nigeria's heavy reliance on imported food products, any fluctuation in the exchange rate directly affects food prices.

**ii. Supply Chain Disruptions:** Various factors, including inadequate infrastructure, poor road networks, and inefficiencies in the supply chain, contribute to increased transportation costs. These costs are often passed on to consumers, resulting in higher food prices. Additionally, logistical challenges and disruptions caused by insecurity in different regions further strain the supply chain.

**iii. Increased Production Costs:** Farmers face escalating costs for inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. Inflation in these input costs, driven by global price increases and supply shortages, makes agricultural production more expensive. Farmers, in turn, raise the prices of their produce to cover these costs, contributing to overall food inflation.

iv. Climate Change and Environmental Factors: Erratic weather patterns, including droughts and floods, have significantly impacted agricultural productivity. Poor harvests due to unfavourable weather conditions lead to reduced supply of essential food items, pushing prices upward. Environmental degradation and desertification further exacerbate the situation, reducing arable land and agricultural output.

**v. Insecurity and Conflict:** Ongoing conflicts, particularly in the northeast and other regions, disrupt farming activities. The displacement of farmers and destruction of farmland lead to reduced agricultural output, creating shortages in the food supply. The instability also makes it difficult to transport goods safely, increasing costs and prices.

#### **Impact On The Population**

**I. Increased Poverty Levels:** With the prices of staple foods rising, many Nigerians find it increasingly difficult to afford basic necessities. The higher cost of living reduces disposable income, pushing more people into poverty. According to NESG, an estimated 133 million Nigerians are experiencing extreme poverty, with food inflation being a significant contributing factor.

**ii. Nutritional Deficiencies and Health Issues:** As food prices soar, households may resort to cheaper, less nutritious options, leading to poor dietary diversity. This can result in malnutrition, especially among vulnerable populations such as children and pregnant women. Nutritional deficiencies can have long-term health implications, affecting physical and cognitive development.

**iii. Social Unrest and Instability:** Rising food prices can lead to social unrest and instability. When basic food items become unaffordable, public dissatisfaction can escalate into protests and riots. Historical precedents show that food price hikes have been a catalyst for social upheaval in various countries, and Nigeria is not immune to such risks.

#### iv. Economic Inequality:

Inflation disproportionately affects low-income households, widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Wealthier individuals and families are better able to absorb increased costs, while poorer households struggle to make ends meet. This growing economic inequality can have broader societal implications, undermining social cohesion and stability.

### **Mitigating Strategies**

I. Economic Policies and Interventions: The government must implement effective economic policies to stabilize the Naira and control inflation. This could involve measures to improve foreign exchange reserves, diversify the economy, and reduce dependency on imports. Monetary policies aimed at controlling inflation should be complemented by fiscal policies that support

agricultural productivity.

**ii. Support for Local Agriculture:** Investing in local agriculture is crucial to reducing reliance on imported food. This includes providing subsidies and financial support to farmers, improving access to agricultural inputs, and promoting modern farming techniques. Enhancing agricultural productivity through research and development can help increase yields and stabilize food prices.

**iii. Infrastructure Development:** Improving infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, can reduce transportation costs and supply chain inefficiencies. Investments in roads, storage facilities, and transportation networks are essential for ensuring that food products reach markets efficiently and at lower costs.

**iv. Social Safety Nets:** Implementing social safety net programs can provide immediate relief to those most affected by food inflation. Cash transfers, food assistance programs, and nutritional support for vulnerable populations can help mitigate the impact of rising food prices and ensure food security.

v. Climate Resilience and Sustainability: Developing climate-resilient agricultural practices and investing in sustainable farming methods can help mitigate the effects of climate change on food production. This includes promoting crop diversification, irrigation systems, and soil conservation techniques to enhance productivity and reduce vulnerability to weather fluctuations.

## **Climate Change**



Climate change has emerged as one of the most significant challenges affecting agricultural productivity and food security globally. In Nigeria, erratic weather patterns and environmental degradation have severely impacted the agricultural sector, leading to reduced crop yields, food shortages, and increased food insecurity. Understanding the specific ways in which climate change influences agriculture and food security is crucial for developing effective mitigation and adaptation strategies.

#### **Impact of Erratic Weather Patterns**

I. Unpredictable Rainfall: One of the most immediate effects of climate change in Nigeria is the unpredictability of rainfall patterns. The agricultural calendar, traditionally based on predictable rainy and dry seasons, is becoming increasingly unreliable. Excessive rainfall can lead to flooding, waterlogging of crops, and soil erosion, while insufficient rainfall results in drought conditions, both of which negatively impact crop yields.

**ii. Droughts:** Prolonged periods of drought are becoming more frequent and severe in many parts of Nigeria. Drought conditions lead to water scarcity, affecting both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture. Crops such as maize, millet, and sorghum, which are staples in Nigeria, are particularly vulnerable to drought stress, resulting in significant yield losses.

**iii. Heatwaves:** Rising temperatures and heatwaves associated with climate change can have detrimental effects on crop growth and productivity. Extreme heat can cause heat stress in plants, leading to reduced photosynthesis, stunted growth, and lower yields. Heatwaves also exacerbate water evaporation from soil and plants, increasing irrigation demands and stressing water resources.

**iv. Increased Pests and Diseases:** Climate change alters the distribution and life cycles of agricultural pests and diseases. Warmer temperatures and increased humidity create favourable conditions for the proliferation of pests such as locusts, armyworms, and aphids. These pests can cause extensive damage to crops, further reducing agricultural productivity and food availability.

## **Environmental Degradation**



**I. Soil Degradation:** Environmental degradation, including soil erosion, deforestation, and desertification, is exacerbated by climate change and human activities. Soil degradation reduces soil fertility and water retention capacity, making it more challenging to sustain agricultural productivity. Unsustainable farming practices, such as overgrazing and improper land use, contribute to soil erosion and degradation.

**ii. Desertification:** Northern Nigeria, in particular, faces the threat of desertification due to the encroachment of the Sahara Desert. Desertification results in the loss of arable land, making it increasingly difficult for farmers to grow crops. This leads to reduced agricultural output and food shortages in affected regions.

**iii. Loss of Biodiversity:** Climate change and environmental degradation contribute to the loss of biodiversity, which is vital for maintaining resilient ecosystems and agricultural systems. The decline in pollinators, such as bees, and other beneficial insects negatively impacts crop production and yields. Biodiversity loss also affects the availability of traditional crop varieties that are more resilient to changing climatic conditions.

## **Impact on Agricultural Productivity**

**I. Reduced Crop Yields:** Erratic weather patterns and environmental degradation have led to significant reductions in crop yields. Staple crops such as rice, maize, cassava, and yams have experienced lower productivity due to inadequate water supply, heat stress, and increased pest infestations. Lower yields translate to reduced food availability and higher food prices, exacerbating food insecurity.

**ii. Livestock Production:** Climate change also affects livestock production, which is a critical component of Nigeria's agricultural sector. Heat stress, reduced water availability, and degradation of grazing lands impact livestock health and productivity. Livestock diseases, exacerbated by changing climatic conditions, further threaten animal husbandry and food security.

**iii. Fisheries:** Nigeria's fisheries sector is not immune to the effects of climate change. Rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and changes in water salinity and oxygen levels impact fish populations and their habitats. Reduced fish stocks affect both commercial and subsistence fishing, threatening the livelihoods of fishing communities and the availability of fish as a source of protein.

## **Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies**

I. Climate-Resilient Agriculture: Promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices is essential for mitigating the impact of climate change. This includes adopting drought-tolerant crop varieties, implementing water-efficient irrigation systems, and practicing conservation agriculture techniques such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and agroforestry. These practices help improve soil health, water management, and overall agricultural productivity.

**ii. Sustainable Land Management:** Implementing sustainable land management practices can combat soil degradation and desertification. This involves reforestation, afforestation, and the use of soil conservation techniques such as terracing, contour ploughing, and the establishment of windbreaks. Sustainable land management helps restore soil fertility, reduce erosion, and enhance the resilience of agricultural systems.

**iii. Early Warning Systems:** Developing and implementing early warning systems for weather and climate-related events can help farmers make informed decisions and take proactive

measures to protect their crops and livestock. Weather forecasting, climate information services, and extension services can provide timely information on weather patterns, pest outbreaks, and best practices for climate adaptation.

**iv. Diversification of Livelihoods:** Encouraging the diversification of livelihoods can reduce the vulnerability of farming communities to climate change. This includes promoting alternative income-generating activities such as agroprocessing, handicrafts, and ecotourism. Diversification helps spread risk and provides additional sources of income, enhancing the resilience of rural households.

v. Policy and Institutional Support: Effective policies and institutional support are crucial for addressing the challenges posed by climate change. This includes formulating and implementing climate-smart agricultural policies, providing financial incentives and subsidies for climate-resilient practices, and strengthening agricultural research and extension services. Collaboration between government, private sector, and civil society is essential for fostering innovation and scaling up climate adaptation efforts.

## Conflict



Conflict is a significant driver of food insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern region where ongoing violence has severely disrupted farming activities and displaced large populations. The consequences of these conflicts extend beyond immediate human suffering, profoundly affecting agricultural productivity, livelihoods, and overall food security. This section discusses the various dimensions of how conflict exacerbates food insecurity in Nigeria.

## Impact of Conflict on Agricultural Activities

**I. Displacement of Farmers:** Ongoing conflicts in the northeast, primarily driven by insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP, have forced many farmers to abandon their lands. Displacement interrupts agricultural cycles, leading to reduced planting and harvesting activities. When farmers are unable to tend to their crops or livestock, it results in significant declines in agricultural output.

## ii. Destruction of Farmland & Infrastructure:

Conflict often leads to the deliberate destruction of farmland, irrigation systems, storage facilities, and other agricultural infrastructure. Such destruction not only reduces immediate food production but also hampers future agricultural activities. Rebuilding damaged infrastructure is costly and time-consuming, delaying the recovery of agricultural productivity.

**iii. Loss of Agricultural Inputs:** Farmers in conflict zones often lose access to essential agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and tools. The looting of these resources by armed groups further compounds the challenges faced by farmers. Without these inputs, even those who remain on their land struggle to maintain productivity levels.

**iv. Restricted Market Access:** Conflict zones typically experience restricted access to markets due to insecurity and damaged transportation networks. Farmers are unable to sell their produce, resulting in financial losses and reduced motivation to engage in agricultural activities. Additionally, consumers in conflict areas face difficulties accessing food, exacerbating food shortages and price inflation.

## Displacement and Its Effects on Food Security

**I. Internal Displacement Camps:** Many displaced individuals end up in internal displacement camps, where access to food is often limited and dependent on humanitarian

aid. The concentration of displaced populations in camps creates additional pressure on limited resources and complicates the distribution of food aid.

**ii. Strain on Host Communities:** Displaced populations frequently seek refuge in host communities, placing additional strain on local resources and infrastructure. The sudden increase in population can lead to competition for food, water, and other essentials, increasing food insecurity for both displaced persons and host communitymembers.

**iii. Loss of Livelihoods:** Displacement disrupts livelihoods, pushing many into poverty. Farmers, who once depended on their land for sustenance and income, are particularly vulnerable. The loss of livelihoods due to displacement has long-term consequences for food security, as families struggle to meet their basic needs and invest in future agricultural activities.

## **Security Challenges and Food Production**

**I. Insecurity and Farming:** The persistent insecurity in conflict zones makes it dangerous for farmers to work their fields. Fear of attacks, abductions, and violence prevents them from planting, tending, and harvesting crops. This insecurity reduces the overall food production capacity of affected regions.

**ii. Impact on Livestock Farming:** Livestock farming is also severely impacted by conflict. Armed groups often steal livestock or kill animals during raids. The loss of livestock, which serves as both a source of food and income, further diminishes food security and economic stability for rural households.

**iii. Psychological Impact on Farmers:** The trauma associated with conflict can have lasting psychological effects on farmers and their families. Fear, stress, and trauma can reduce productivity and willingness to engage in farming activities. This psychological impact adds another layer of complexity to the challenges faced in restoring agricultural productivity in conflict zones.

### Humanitarian Response and Challenges

I. Humanitarian Aid: International and local organizations play a crucial role in providing humanitarian aid to conflict-affected populations. This includes food assistance, agricultural support, and psychosocial services. However, accessing conflict zones to deliver aid is often fraught with challenges, including security risks, logistical difficulties, and limited funding.

**ii. Rebuilding Agricultural Capacity:** Rebuilding agricultural capacity in conflict-affected areas requires substantial investment in infrastructure, inputs, and training. Farmers need support to rehabilitate their lands, access seeds and tools, and adopt resilient farming practices. Long-term support is essential for restoring food production and ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

**iii. Policy and Coordination:** Effective policy and coordination among government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and local communities are critical for addressing the food security challenges posed by conflict. Policies should focus on immediate relief efforts, as well as long-term strategies for agricultural recovery and development.

## **Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies**

**I. Peacebuilding and Security:** Addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting peacebuilding efforts are essential for restoring stability and security. Ensuring the safety of farmers and communities is a prerequisite for reviving agricultural activities and improving food security.

**ii. Resilient Agricultural Practices:** Promoting resilient agricultural practices can help farmers adapt to the challenges posed by conflict. This includes diversifying crops, adopting climate-smart agriculture techniques, and improving water management. Resilient practices can enhance productivity and reduce vulnerability to future shocks.

**iii. Community-Based Approaches:** Engaging local communities in conflict resolution and agricultural recovery efforts is crucial. Community-based approaches can foster trust,

enhance social cohesion, and ensure that interventions are contextually appropriate and sustainable.

**iv. Support for Displaced Farmers:** Providing targeted support to displaced farmers, including access to land, inputs, and training, can help them rebuild their livelihoods. Programs that facilitate the reintegration of displaced persons into agricultural activities are vital for long-term food security.

### 4.Economic Policies



The high dependence on oil revenue and food imports, combined with inadequate support for local agriculture, has left Nigeria vulnerable to global market fluctuations.

Nigeria's economy has long been characterized by its heavy dependence on oil revenue and food imports, which has created significant vulnerabilities. These economic policies have led to an over-reliance on external factors, making Nigeria susceptible to global market fluctuations. The lack of adequate support for local agriculture further exacerbates these vulnerabilities, impacting food security and economic stability.

#### **Dependence on Oil Revenue**

**I. Monoculture Economy:** Nigeria's economy is predominantly driven by the oil and gas sector, which accounts for a substantial portion of government revenue and foreign exchange earnings. This monoculture economy has led to a lack of diversification, making the country highly vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. When oil prices drop, government revenues fall sharply, leading to budget deficits and reduced public spending.

**ii. Volatility and Economic Shocks:** The global oil market is inherently volatile, and price shocks can have severe repercussions for oil-dependent economies like Nigeria. The 2014-2016 oil price crash, for instance, led to a recession in Nigeria, highlighting the risks associated with over-reliance on a single commodity. Such volatility affects fiscal planning and economic stability, with far-reaching impacts on various sectors, including agriculture.

**iii. Foreign Exchange Reserves:** Oil revenue significantly influences Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves. A decline in oil prices reduces the inflow of foreign currency, leading to a depletion of reserves. This affects the country's ability to import essential goods, including food, and can lead to currency depreciation and inflation.

#### **Dependence on Food Imports**

**I. Import Bill and Trade Deficit:** Nigeria spends a substantial amount on importing food items such as rice, wheat, fish, and sugar. This high import bill contributes to the trade deficit and puts pressure on foreign exchange reserves. The reliance on imports also exposes the country to global price fluctuations, which can lead to increased food prices and inflation.

**ii. Food Security Risks:** Dependence on food imports undermines food security by making the country vulnerable to disruptions in international supply chains. Events such as global economic crises, trade restrictions, or geopolitical tensions can hinder food imports, leading to shortages and price spikes. This vulnerability was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when global supply chains were disrupted, affecting food availability and prices.

**iii. Neglect of Local Agriculture:** The focus on food imports has resulted in the neglect of local agriculture. Inadequate investment in agricultural infrastructure, research, and development, as well as insufficient support for smallholder farmers, has stifled the growth of the

agricultural sector. As a result, local food production remains low, and the country continues to rely on imports to meet its food needs.

## Inadequate Support for Local Agriculture

**I. Insufficient Investment:** Despite the importance of agriculture to Nigeria's economy and food security, the sector has historically received insufficient investment. Limited funding for agricultural research, extension services, and infrastructure development hampers productivity and innovation. Farmers lack access to modern farming techniques, quality inputs, and efficient irrigation systems, which are essential for boosting yields and resilience.

**ii. Policy Inconsistencies:** Agricultural policies in Nigeria have often been inconsistent and poorly implemented. Frequent changes in policy direction and a lack of continuity undermine the effectiveness of agricultural programs. Moreover, bureaucratic hurdles and corruption can delay or divert resources intended for agricultural development.

**iii.** Access to Credit and Financial Services: Smallholder farmers, who constitute the majority of Nigeria's farming population, face significant challenges in accessing credit and financial services. High-interest rates, stringent collateral requirements, and limited availability of rural banking services restrict their ability to invest in their farms. Without adequate financial support, farmers cannot adopt modern technologies or expand their operations.

**iv. Infrastructure Deficits:** Poor infrastructure, including roads, storage facilities, and market access, impedes agricultural productivity and profitability. Inadequate transportation networks increase the cost of moving goods from farms to markets, leading to post-harvest losses and reduced incomes for farmers. The lack of storage facilities exacerbates food wastage and reduces the availability of food in the market.

### **Policy Recommendations**

I. Diversification of the Economy: To reduce dependence on oil revenue, Nigeria must diversify its economy by developing other sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services. This requires creating a conducive business environment, investing in infrastructure, and promoting value addition in non-oil sectors. Diversification will enhance economic resilience and reduce vulnerability to global oil price fluctuations.

**ii. Support for Local Agriculture:** Enhancing support for local agriculture is crucial for achieving food security and reducing reliance on imports. This involves increasing investment in agricultural research, extension services, and infrastructure development. Providing subsidies and financial incentives to farmers can help boost productivity and encourage the adoption of modern farming practices.

**iii. Access to Credit and Financial Services:** Improving access to credit and financial services for smallholder farmers is essential for agricultural development. The government should work with financial institutions to create tailored credit schemes with favourable terms for farmers. Expanding rural banking services and providing financial literacy programs can also help farmers access the resources they need.

**iv. Infrastructure Development:** Investing in rural infrastructure, including roads, storage facilities, and market access, is vital for enhancing agricultural productivity and reducing postharvest losses. Improving transportation networks will facilitate the movement of goods and reduce the cost of doing business for farmers.

v. Policy Coherence and Implementation: Ensuring policy coherence and effective implementation is crucial for the success of agricultural programs. The government should create a stable policy environment, streamline bureaucratic processes, and tackle corruption to ensure that resources reach the intended beneficiaries. Collaboration between government agencies, the private sector, and civil society is essential for coordinated and sustained agricultural development efforts.

vi. Promotion of Local Production and Consumption: Encouraging the production and consumption of locally produced goods can reduce reliance on imports and support local farmers. Public awareness campaigns and incentives for domestic food production can help shift consumer preferences towards locally sourced foods. Developing value chains and processing industries can also add value to agricultural products and create employment opportunities.

#### **NESG's Hunger Response Strategy**



To address the hunger crisis, NESG has proposed a comprehensive hunger response strategy that involves multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, the private sector, and civil society. Key elements of this strategy include:

**1. National Hunger Response Governance:** NESG emphasizes the need for a coordinated national hunger response that focuses on immediate food distribution to the most vulnerable populations. This involves leveraging the capabilities of agencies like the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the National Social Safety Net Coordinating Office (NASSCO).

2. Expanding the National Food Security Council: To ensure effective oversight, NESG recommends expanding the National Food Security Council to include governors from key food-producing states. This would facilitate better coordination and commitment at both the state and federal levels.

**3. Institutional Reforms:** NESG calls for a clear delineation of roles among critical institutions. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) is urged to

revert to its traditional role of ensuring price stability, while the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security should take the lead in food security interventions.

**4. Hunger Roundtables:** Drawing from the collaborative approach during the COVID-19 pandemic, NESG suggests convening Hunger Roundtables to pool expertise and resources from various sectors. This would help frame a robust national response to the current food crisis.

**5. Children-At-Risk Hunger Response:** With 83.5% of children under age 5 living in multidimensional poverty, NESG stresses the need for targeted programs like the Home-grown School Feeding Program and UNICEF-supported nutrition initiatives.

## **Agricultural Transformation**

To achieve long-term food security, NESG advocates for a transformation of Nigeria's agricultural sector. This includes:

**1. Improving Agricultural Productivity:** Investing in modern farming techniques, irrigation, and mechanization to boost yields.

**2. Enhancing Storage and Logistics:** Developing better storage facilities and transportation networks to reduce post-harvest losses.

**3. Supporting Local Production:** Promoting locally produced goods to reduce reliance on imports and ensure food availability during global market disruptions.

## **Recommendations for Policy Action**

To address the food security crisis, NESG recommends a multifaceted approach:

**1. Investment in Agriculture:** There is a need for substantial investment in agricultural research, technology, and infrastructure to boost productivity and reduce post-harvest losses. Improving irrigation systems and adopting climate-resilient farming practices are critical steps.

**2. Enhanced Security Measures:** Strengthening security in conflict-prone areas is essential to

ensure that farmers can safely cultivate and harvest their crops. This includes deploying security forces to protect agricultural zones and creating policies that support displaced farmers.

**3. Economic Stabilization:** Policies aimed at stabilizing the economy, controlling inflation, and supporting small-scale farmers through subsidies and credit facilities can improve food access and affordability.

**4. Infrastructure Development:** Developing rural infrastructure, including roads, storage facilities, and market access, is vital for efficient food distribution. This will help reduce losses and ensure that food reaches areas in need.

**5. Social Safety Nets:** Implementing robust social safety net programs can provide immediate relief to the most vulnerable populations. These programs should focus on direct food aid, cash transfers, and nutritional support to combat hunger and malnutrition.

## Conclusion

Addressing hunger in Nigeria requires urgent, coordinated efforts across multiple sectors. By implementing NESG's strategic recommendations, Nigeria can alleviate the immediate food crisis and build a more resilient and sustainable food system for the future. The focus must be on comprehensive policy reforms, improved agricultural practices, and effective governance to ensure that no Nigerian goes hungry.

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## **ABOUT THE NESG**

The NESG is an independent, non-partisan, non-sectarian organisation, committed to fostering open and continuous dialogue on Nigeria's economic development. The NESG strives to forge a mutual understanding between leaders of thought so as to explore, discover and support initiatives directed at improving Nigeria's economic policies, institutions, and management.

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