

Original Paper

Analysis of the Link between Central Government and Local Government in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Union Parishad

Samia Akter^{1*} & Md Mahmud Hasan Mamun²

¹ Jahanhignagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

² University of Information Technology and Sciences, Dhaka, Bangladesh

* Samia Akter, Jahanhignagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Local government is one of the most significant parts of the central government. In the past, the control of central government over local government was minimal. Afterward, several presidential orders were notified to raise the power of local government. However, power and authority of local government were increased with pen and paper but not in practice. In this study, the scenario of the Union Parishad was analyzed as a part of local government, since it has to perform many activities with the scarcity of resources. The objective of this analysis is to investigate the nature of the relationship between the effects of limited resources to the activities of Union Parishad. In this research, data was collected from some local government representatives and some personnel of Ishwardi Upazila, Bangladesh through questionnaire and interview. First, the study reveals that local government always faces several particular problems due to lack of resources in case of distribution of relief cards to the poor villagers, a donation in disaster and exceptional circumstances, a contribution in educational and religious institutions, etc. The graphical analysis demonstrated the scenario between the requisitions of the Union Parishad to the central government and the percentage of those requisitions actually fulfilled. The outputs of this study summarized that the actual supply from central government was minuscule than the demand of Union Parishad. Hence, it could not deliver services accurately. Some recommendations have been provided to overcome the problems of a Union Parishad, which include that the government should enhance Annual Development Programme (ADP) allocation to ensure people's participation in formulating and implementing development projects, and the control of the Union Parishad over the local resources has to be increased.

Keywords

central government, local government, Bangladesh, Union Parishad, demand analysis, case study, ADP

1. Introduction

The central government has to perform many functions. However, it is unable to accomplish several tasks in different circumstances, which is why the central government created the local government. In the context of the Local Government, central-local government relations have always been an issue (Khan, 2009a). Naturally, the relationship between central and local government has been authoritative in Bangladesh. The colonial bequest and disappearance of democratic government at center is the main reason for this. Bangladesh has a historical and consequential custom of the local government (Khan, 2009a). The structure and functions of local government have been evolved in consonance with the socio-economic and political transformation of the country. Nevertheless, the Bangladesh Constitution (Articles 9, 11, 59, and 60) made provisions for establishing local government as an inseparable organ of administering state affairs to safeguard democratic values and to secure economic and social justice (Khan, 2011). The absolute source of rules, regulations, and ordinances relating to the local government of Bangladesh consist of these four articles of the constitution. The local government in Bangladesh today is weak and especially so in rural areas. The Union Parishad has no direct control of generating resources from their limited jurisdictions (Khan, 2011). In case of Union Parishad, authority over the appointment and payment of salaries of the staff is held by the central government. The Union Parishad receives allocations for projects through the central government's ADP. The distribution is additionally at risk of political interference. The Union Parishad authorities typically do not have any pre-planning that what proportion of fund they will obtain which will support the future development work. In local government, all the powers center around one person.

The local government bodies or more specifically the Union Parishad always faces several particular problems due to lack of resources during the distribution of relief cards to the poor villagers. Local government has a responsibility to support the local peoples like the supply of fresh, safe, and arsenic-free water, developed transportation systems, and donation in educational and religious institutions. However, due to financial scarcity, it is not possible for them to satisfy rural people adequately. If the Union Parishad could overcome the running financial scarcity and administrative corruption through the enhancement of decentralization procedure, then it could be a powerful part of the local level development (Khan, 2009b). A careful review of the responsibilities and authority of the Union Parishad shows that it alone renders and maintains all those services within a defined local limit. Yet it enjoys very little power compared to its responsibilities. Nevertheless, it has been persistently deprived of exercising its limited power due to bureaucratic influence and lack of political will. Consequently, it has fallen far short of meeting expectations of the people which reminds us to strengthen local government system, and this would help to promote democracy and good governance

(United Nations, 2000). The study focuses on identifying how the shortage of fund affects Union Parishad in their effective functioning. It is desired that the findings of the survey will enable us to discern significant barriers about Union Parishad's effective functioning and recommend measures to overcome them.

The article, which contains five sections, begins with this introduction and then the literature review. The third section highlights the methodology of the study, and the penultimate chapter discusses the findings of this research.

2. Literature Review

During the pre-Mughal era, village councils were competent bodies. The control exercised by the central government over them was marginal (Siddiqui, 2005). During medieval age, village administration was controlled under the Village Panchayat. At this time, the central government controlled village level government, and thereby it lost its self-sufficient nature (Siddiqui, 2005). Later during the Mughal period, the revenue collection system became more systematic, and the local administration became more dynamic in this regard. In this period, Sarkar/Chakla, and Pargana became the nerve centers of general and revenue administration. The inception of the British rule weakened the traditional independent village government system. The British rule made the Panchayat a local police body; it had little to do with public welfare. The Bengal Local Self-Government established Union Committees to raise funds. Such power was conferred for administrative convenience only. Under the Basic Democracy Order during Pakistan period, union council was under the complete political control of the central government. The Presidential Order No.7 promulgated in 1972, dissolved all existing local government committees (Khan, 2011). The Union Council was renamed as Union Panchayat (later as Union Parishad) The Presidential Order No. 22 specified that each union composed of several villages would be divided into three wards where three Union Parishad members would be elected from each ward. During post-independence period, the orders and ordinances relating to functions and taxation power of the Union Parishad were the maintenance of the Basic Democracy Order (Panday, 2011).

2.1 Legal and Institutional Framework

Bangladesh's constitution of 1972 made provisions for establishing local government as an inseparable organ for administering state affairs to safeguard democratic values. Article 59, Chapter III of the Constitution states that local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with the law (Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1998). Thus, it is clear that the constitution through article 59 has ensured the transference of power to local government bodies (Panday, 2011). The primary legislation defining the powers of rural government includes the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 1983. The present law dealing with the Union Council is The Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 (The Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009).

Table 1. Structural Framework of a Union Council (The Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009)

Major Functions Under Union Parishad	Political Representation	Line Department Control	Financing
38 Functions, ill-defined, including Planning, coordination, and monitoring of the ADP; Construction and maintenance of small-scale infrastructure; Law & order, dispute settlement; Registration of births & deaths.	One chairman, twelve members (both elected one for each of nine wards, and three women members each representing three wards).	Line department responsible for separate services; Officers accountable to their line departments, not to Union Parishad members.	Powers to collect taxes; Allocation of ADP grants for local development; Special relief funds released on a discretionary basis; The grant covers half-recurrent costs.

2.2 Problems and Challenges

The Union Parishad has no direct control over the resources generated from their limited jurisdictions. Due to the scarcity of resources as well as the fund, the Union Parishad is largely dependent on the central government (Absar, 2006). The Union Parishad receives allocations for projects through the central government's Annual Development Programme Block Grant. Block Grants are small, and their distribution among the unions is subject to much competition. This grant is administered at the Thana level, and the Thana Development Council Committee decides on the allocation of this grant for projects proposed by the union (UNCDF, 2003). Block grant must be used correctly in specific areas determined by the central government. This pre-determined sector allocation limits the scope of local level planning and flexibility of local bodies to utilize financial resources (United Nations, 2005). This also runs contrary to the concept of functional autonomy of local government units. The allocation is additionally at risk of political interference. The interference by Member of Parliament within the Union Parishad affairs has weakened the independence of Union Parishad. Most of the times, they often dictate the development activities without consulting with the local elected representatives. The Member of Parliament of the ruling party has the tendency to interfere the development planning of Union Parishad and try to take some personal advantages from the fund of the Union Parishad (Bhuiyan, 2011; The Journal of Local Government, 2005; UNCDF, 2003).

In case of Union Parishad, the central government holds authority over the appointment of staff and payment of salaries of them (Khan, 2009). A wide range of functions has been ascribed to the Union Parishad in law where some functions assigned to Union Parishad are overlapped with those of central government departments. For example, considerable duplication in the local infrastructure responsibilities of the Union Parishad and departments such as Local Government Engineering Department and Department of Public Health Engineering (Absar, 2006; UNCDF, 2003). Corruption of

the bureaucrats and the ministers are seriously undermining the sustainability of the local development projects (Khan, 2011). Unfortunately, the chairmen and members have to bear the blame for corruption though they are less liable for them.

The Union Parishads have lack of planning too and the event projects of them are stalled if the installments do not arrive on time, which is commonly the case (Khan, 2009b). Most Union Parishad receives the funds once the fiscal year is near to finish. In local government, all the powers are regulated and controlled by the chairman of Union Parishad along with the councilors of the Wards. However, in practice, only the chairman of a Union Parishad enjoys all the power and the members, as well as the councilors, have a minor role in the implementation of any development project or program in the locality [From Interview].

3. Methodology

The principal objective of this study is to explore how lack of financial resources affects Union Parishad activities at the time of service delivery. The fundamental research questions include:

- What is the typical scenario of the central-local government relations?
- What are the problems faced by local government (Union Parishad) in case of service delivery?
- How the shortage of fund affects service delivery in Union Parishad?

Data have been collected through Questionnaire Survey, In-depth Interview, and Group Discussion. The data used in this research was obtained from the UNO of Ishwardi Upazila, Chairman and Secretary of Solimpur, Dashuria and Paksey union, several school teachers, and some public under Ishwardi Upazila. Some relevant research articles and journals were reviewed during this study.

3.1 Study Area

The study area included mainly three unions from same Upazila, namely Ishwardi, under Pabna district. The locations were selected purposively considering easy access, availability of leading local representatives and some other conveniences into consideration.



Figure 1. Ishwardi Upazila, Bangladesh [Courtesy: Google Maps]

3.2 Sampling and Sample Size

Through purposive sampling method, the selected respondents for collecting data were the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) in Ishwardi Upazila, Chairman and Secretary of Solimpur, Dashuria and Paksey union, several school-teachers, and some residents of Ishwardi Upazila.

3.3 Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Six trained and skilled young persons were employed for data collection. The primary data was collected through interviews. Data were also collected from selected published research materials and reports of various local government commissions/committees. The preliminary data was computerized through data coding process for analysis. “Excel” program has been used for data analysis.

4. Analysis and Findings

The analysis of this research work is presented in two ways, which are as follows:

4.1 Theoretical Analysis

After reviewing some strategy and interviewing with some co-coordinator of local government of Bangladesh, it has been found that local government (Union Parishad) always faces several inevitable

problems due to lack of resources. The objective of this analysis is to find out how lack of resources affect Union Parishad activities and to what extent.

4.1.1 Distribution of Relief Cards to the Poor Villagers

As a democratic country, Bangladesh government has a liability for the poor and aged peoples of villages. That is why the central government supplies relief for impoverished villagers and aged persons. Nevertheless, the problem occurs during distribution among them. It is always seen that the provided fund is insufficient according to demand and sometimes demand is ten times of allotted relief. For example, after interviewing with a chairman in June 2013, he received only 200 relief cards. However, he had to distribute them among 2000+ peoples. It was a critical situation to distribute him.

4.1.2 Sanction of Fresh, Safe, and Arsenic-Free Water

Water is life; hence, pure water is the first requirement to lead a life. Local government faces the problem in supplying of fresh, safe, and arsenic-free water to the villagers. Naturally, villagers use the dirty water of a pond or canal for their diurnal purposes, sometimes for dinking also. Sufficient tube wells and deep-tube wells are required to change their habit. However, local government does not get adequate funding for installing of tube wells.

4.1.3 Problems in Transportation Systems

The roadway is the primary transportation system in local areas, and maximum roads are WBM (water bound macadam) roads. Bituminous roads are essential to transport heavyweight goods from the local area to the urban. Also in rainy season, proper maintenance is required as the way may be damaged due to soil erosion. However, local government cannot afford sufficient funding for road constructions and maintenances due to a shortage of the budget coming from central government.

4.1.4 In Disaster and Special Cases

Local government has a responsibility to support the local peoples in disasters like in the rainy season, in winter, storm, flood and riverbed erosion, etc. These natural disasters occur accidentally, and local people become helpless in those situations. However, the local government cannot provide immediate relief to mitigate the problems. They have to wait for the fund of the central government. If a local government has sufficient funding, then they can easily handle those dangerous situations.

4.1.5 Donation to Educational and Religious Institutions

The educational institution is necessary to spread out the light of knowledge. However, the educational and religious institutions are not self-dependent in local areas, and they need additional funding. Since the central government cannot provide sufficient funding for educational and religious institutions, it is the liability for local government to provide proper support to those institutions.

4.1.6 Problems in Tax Collection

The local government collects some tax from different sources such as vehicle tax, land tax, shop tax, taxation in the business, and tax from the market, etc. However, it cannot collect all taxes appropriately. There are several reasons for this problem. Sometimes tax collector does not pay the full collected tax,

and an influential person sometimes does not pay tax. Due to difficulties in tax collection, local government faces scarcity in their funds.

4.1.7 Insufficient ADP Allocations

A large part of the allocation of Union Parishad comes from ADP. However, ADP funds were always insufficient compared to Union Parishad functions. Most of the times if this fund is used properly in one sector then other sectors are deprived of this fund. Thus, Union Parishad always faces challenges along with this insufficient budget at the time of service delivery. The following table shows ADP allocation in Dashuria, Paksey, and Solimpur union:

Table 2. Use of ADP Allocations for Selected Three Unions in 2012-2013

Union Parishad	Communication		Agriculture		Education		Infrastructure, Water supply & sanitation		Total (Tk.)
Dashuria	975000	75%	325000	25%	-	0%	-	0%	1,300,000
Paksey	420000	42%	-	0%	220000	22%	360000	36%	1,000,000
Solimpur	759000	69%	187000	17%	-	0%	154000	14%	1,100,000

4.1.8 Bureaucracy

It is the primary obstruction between Local & Central governments and between the local government and the local peoples. Due to administration, local government does not receive the full amount of any relief and cannot distribute appropriately among the peoples. From the interviews with the chairmen of the Union Parishads, it has been summarized that the local government is more vulnerable to bureaucracy than the central government.

4.2 Graphical Analysis

The local government has some demands or requisition of funding supports in order to continue its functions. In this section, first, the demands and the lacking of the local government will be adequately examined. Figure 2 has described the target of the Union Parishad that how they would like to fulfill their demands from specific resources. It was found that for 2012-2013, the Union Parishads estimated that they would manage their fund 70% from the central government and 30% from the tax collection. However, later, the central government provided only 36% support of their total demand [Figure 3]. In addition, the Union Parishad was able to manage only 12% fund from the tax collection. Furthermore, Figure 3 demonstrated that the local government faced a lacking of financial support of the amount of 52% during 2012-2013.

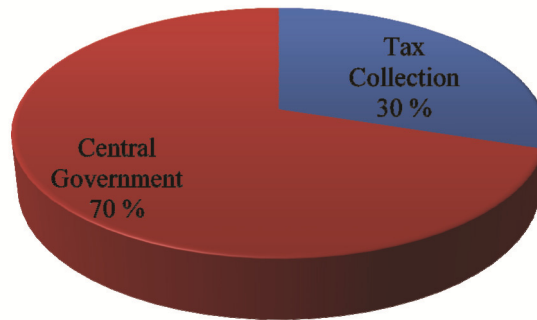


Figure 2. Target to Fulfill Demand for Selected One Union Parishad in 2012-2013

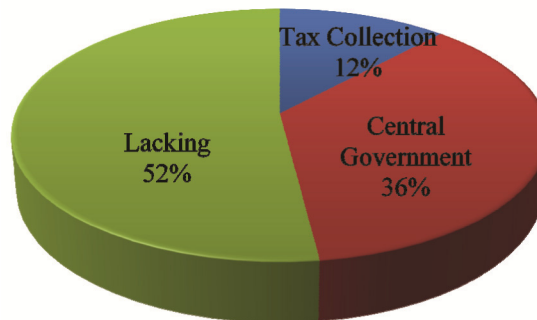


Figure 3. Actual Supply for Selected One Union Parishad in 2012-2013

The sector-wise deficit of the demand and supply for the three Union Parishad for 2012-2013 is illustrated in Figure 4. It was observed that the highest disparity occurred in Road Construction sector where the demand was 30 lakh BDT but only 13 lakh BDT was used in this sector. The scenario of the other sectors was almost similar to this sector. Just in public health sector and education sector, the demand was fulfilled by slightly greater than 50%. However, the remaining sectors were fulfilled by less than 50% of their demands.

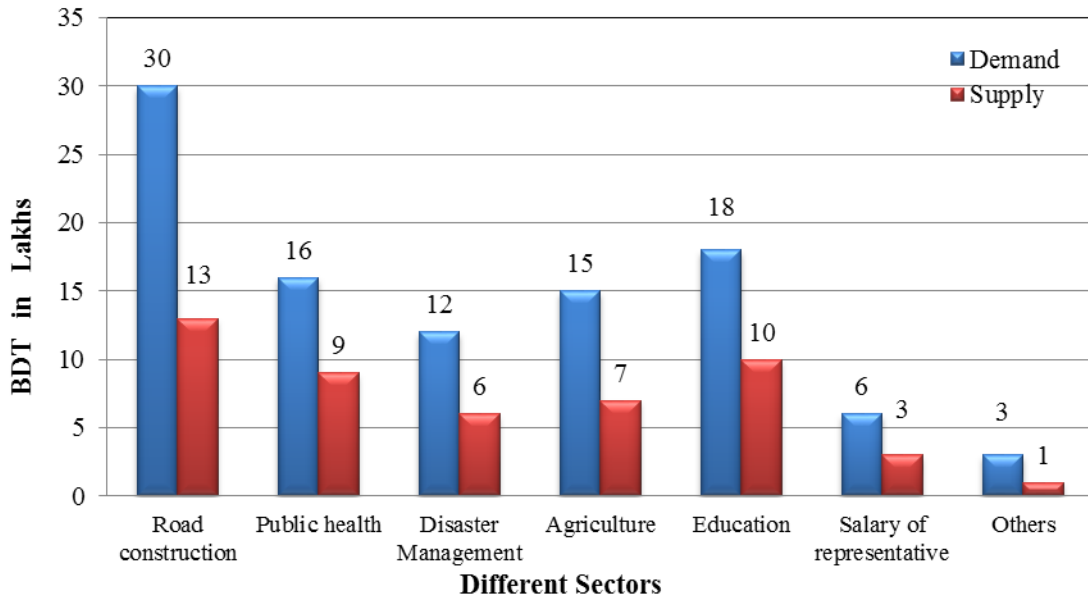


Figure 4. Sector-Wise Demand and Supply for One Union Parishad in 2012-2013

The identified and implemented schemes of the three Union Parishads for the period of 2012-2013 were described in Figure 5. It was observed that 142 particulars were identified in the construction of the roads; however, only 59 schemes were implemented. In most of the cases, the Union Parishad was unable to carry out the identified schemes. Finally, from above analysis, it can be inferred that lack of resources affects Union Parishad activities at an extreme rate.

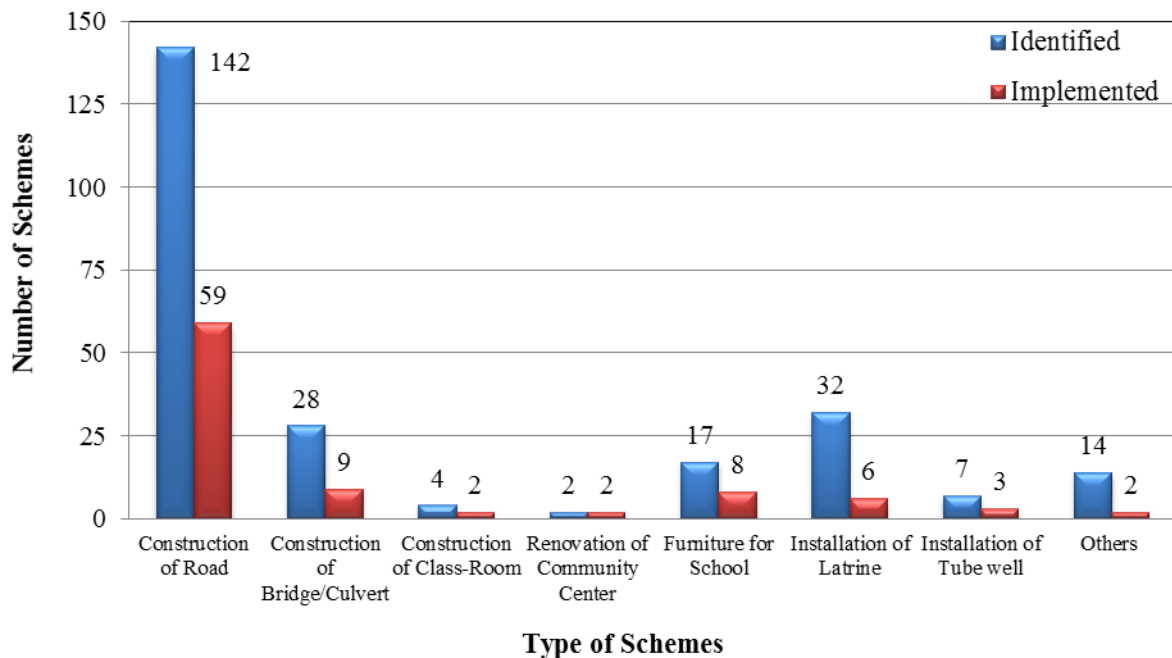


Figure 5. Type of Schemes Identified and Implemented by Three-Selected Union Parishads in 2012-2013

5. Conclusion

The central government heavily controls Union Parishad. Actual staffing and financial powers do not go with functional responsibilities. In practice, limited scheme selection and implementation responsibilities are officially or unofficially controlled by the Members of Parliament, Union Development Council Committee, and government regulations and financial support provided by the central government are minuscule in comparison with other countries. At present, ADP allocation to the Union Parishad is below two percent in Bangladesh where in the Philippines gets 40 percent allocation and in Thailand 35 percent (Bhuiyan, 2011). The Union Parishad has no hope of taking part in the negotiation of inter-governmental resource allocation decisions. The ADP fund, which is provided by the central government, is controlled by the UNO. Moreover, the central government is taking away resources from Union Parishad. However, they never give adequate allocation to the local government. In this way, the government should enhance ADP allocation for Union Parishad to 40 percent from less than two percent now to ensure people's participation in formulating and implementing development projects. The Union Parishad should also get the funds directly and not through Upazila Parishad in the form of blocks grants as at present. The control of the Union Parishad over the local resources has to be increased, and all income generated from local resources must go to the Union Parishad fund. If the central government wishes to obtain revenue from these sources, then it must take it from the local government. However, the government and political parties should work together to ensure direct ADP allocation and other funds to the Union Parishad to strengthen the local government's fund since an efficient local government could contribute positively to national development.

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List of Interviewees:

- 1) Ms. Naznin Hossain, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Ishwardi Upazila, Date: 20 December 2013.
- 2) Mr. Md Atiar Rahman, Chairman, Solimpur Union, Date: 22 December 2013.
- 3) Mr. Mohamad Aminul Islam Kanadi, Chairman, Dashuria Union, Date: 23 December 2013.
- 4) Mr. Mohammad Zakiul Islam (Topon Sardar), Chairman, Paksey Union, Date: 22 December 2013.
- 5) Mr. Md Mosharof Hossain, Personal Secretary, Solimpur Union, Date: 22 December 2013.
- 6) Mr. Md Jahangir Alam, Head Teacher of Primary School, Date: 20 December 2013.
- 7) Mr. Md Belal Hossain, Business Person, Date: 27 December 2013.

8) Mr. Md Amirul Chowdhury, Local Scholar, Date: 26 December 2013.

Definitions:

- ❖ Upazila = Sub-district Authority in Bangladesh.
- ❖ Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) = Chief Administrative Person of an Upazila.
- ❖ Union Parishad = Governing Authority of a Village in Bangladesh.
- ❖ Solimpur, Dashuria, Paksey = Name of three Union Parishads in Ishwardi Upazila.
- ❖ Pabna = Name of the District where Ishwardi Upazila is situated.
- ❖ Panchayat = Ancient Village Ruling Authority of Bangladesh.
- ❖ Chakla/Sardar = Leader of a Panchayat.
- ❖ Pargana=Alias of Village in Mughal Period.

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