

Enhancing Environmentalism for Sustainability

Kariuki Muigua

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Enhancing Environmentalism for Sustainability

Kariuki Muigua*

Abstract

The need to achieve sustainability has become urgent in wake of growing environmental challenges including the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Achieving environmental sustainability is vital in fostering harmony between humanity and nature in order to conserve the planet's natural resources and uphold the ecological balance, all while safeguarding the welfare of both present and future generations. One key approach towards fostering sustainability is the concept of environmentalism. This paper critically discusses the need to enhance environmentalism. It argues that environmentalism is a key ideal in fostering sustainability. The paper defines environmentalism and highlights its key tenets. It also examines the progress made and setbacks facing attainment of the ideal of environmentalism. Further, the paper offers proposals towards enhancing environmentalism for sustainability.

1.0 Introduction

With the growing threat of climate change and unprecedented environmental challenges facing the planet, achieving environmental sustainability has become more critical than ever¹. It has been noted that problems such as environmental degradation jeopardizes the health of ecosystems and the services they offer, such as clean air, water, food, and energy². In addition, unsustainable human activities, ranging from deforestation to pollution, are pushing countless species towards extinction and threatening the balance of our environment³. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) notes that environmental problems facing the planet including the triple planetary crisis of climate

* PhD in Law (Nrb), FCI Arb (Chartered Arbitrator), OGW, LL. B (Hons) Nrb, LL.M (Environmental Law) Nrb; Dip. In Law (KSL); FCPS (K); Dip. in Arbitration (UK); MKIM; Mediator; Consultant: Lead expert EIA/EA NEMA; BSI ISO/IEC 27001:2005 ISMS Lead Auditor/ Implementer; ESG Consultant; Advocate of the High Court of Kenya; Professor at the University of Nairobi, Faculty of Law; Member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) [June, 2024].

¹ Anderson. K., 'How to Achieve Environmental Sustainability' Available at <https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/company-guide/how-to-achieve-environmental-sustainability> (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

² Ibid

³ Ibid

change, biodiversity loss, and pollution have heightened the importance of forging a new relationship between people and the planet towards achieving sustainability⁴.

The concept of sustainability envisions creating and maintaining the conditions under which humanity and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations⁵. Environmental sustainability focuses on ecological balance⁶. It involves fostering harmony between humanity and nature in order to conserve the planet's natural resources and uphold the ecological balance, all while safeguarding the welfare of both present and future generations⁷. Environmental sustainability has also been defined as the ability to maintain an ecological balance in our planet's natural environment and conserve natural resources to support the wellbeing of current and future generations⁸.

Environmental sustainability encompasses a broad range of practices, from conserving natural resources and preserving biodiversity to reducing waste and emissions⁹. Environmental sustainability aims to foster responsible management of the environment and its natural resources to fulfill current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs¹⁰. It seeks to balance ecological, economic and social goals, such as reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy and ensuring

⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'The Triple Planetary Crisis: Forging a New Relationship Between People and the Earth' Available at <https://www.unep.org/news-andstories/speech/tripleplanetary-crisis-forging-new-relationship-between-people-and-earth> (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

⁵ United States Environmental Protection Agency., 'What is Sustainability.' Available at <https://www.epa.gov/sustainability/learn-about-sustainability> (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

⁶ Anderson. K., 'How to Achieve Environmental Sustainability' Op Cit

⁷ Ibid

⁸ 'What is Environmental Sustainability?'. Available at <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/sustainability/learn/environmental-sustainability#:~:text=Environmental%20sustainability%20definition,of%20current%20and%20future%20generations.> (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

⁹ Anderson. K., 'How to Achieve Environmental Sustainability' Op Cit

¹⁰ Patterson. N., 'What is Environmental Sustainability? Goals with Examples' Available at <https://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/stem/what-is-environmental-sustainability> (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

equitable resource access¹¹. It has been noted that the core principle behind environmental sustainability is the understanding that the health and well-being of humanity is intrinsically tied to the health of our environment hence the need for human beings to live within the planet's ecological means¹². Achieving environmental sustainability is therefore vital in conserving natural resources and protecting global ecosystems to support human health and wellbeing, now and in the future¹³.

In order to achieve environmental sustainability, it has been noted that it is imperative to strengthen environmental governance at all levels¹⁴. The climate, nature and pollution crises can only be tackled successfully if they become a top policy priority supported by legislation, inclusive decision-making, monitoring, and enforcement¹⁵. Environmentalism has been advanced a key concept towards strengthening environmental sustainability¹⁶.

This paper critically discusses the need to enhance environmentalism. It argues that environmentalism is a key ideal in fostering sustainability. The paper defines environmentalism and highlights its key tenets. It also examines the progress made and setbacks facing attainment of the ideal of environmentalism. Further, the paper offers proposals towards enhancing environmentalism for sustainability.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Anderson, K., 'How to Achieve Environmental Sustainability' Op Cit

¹³ What is Environmental Sustainability?., Available at <https://sphaera.com/resources/glossary/what-is-environmental-sustainability/> (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme., 'Triple Planetary Crisis' Available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-11/UNDP-Triple-Planetary-Crisis-Infographic_0.pdf (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Armstrong, K., 'The Social Dynamics of Environmentalism' Available at <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/the-social-dynamics-of-environmentalism> (Accessed on 07/07/2024)

2.0 The Ideal of Environmentalism

The concept of environmentalism covers the ideas of nature, ecological balances, and ecological growth as central to the survival of the human species¹⁷. Environmentalism stresses how humanity influences and alters nature and how this influence is detrimental to the well-being of both human beings and nature¹⁸. Environmentalism has also been defined as a political and ethical movement that seeks to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through a reassessment of humanity's relationship with nature¹⁹. Environmentalism advocates for the preservation, restoration, and improvement of the natural environment²⁰. It involves activism aimed at protecting the environment or improving its condition²¹.

Environmentalism shares the view of humanity as integral to nature; nature as empowering to humans; and of the relationship between the two as threatening to the integrity and viability of both nature and humanity²². Environmentalism sets out the need to restore a symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature which as of necessity requires fundamental alterations in human behavior and in the characteristics of social life²³. Environmentalism therefore emphasizes harmony between humanity and nature²⁴. It views humanity as part of nature, not as separate from it²⁵. Environmentalism

¹⁷ Choucri. N., 'Environmentalism' Available at <https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/141579/%5BChoucri%5D%201993%20Environmentalism.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Elliott. L., 'Environmentalism' Available at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/environmentalism> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

²⁰ Environmentalism., Available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environmentalism> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

²¹ Schlosberg. D., & Bomberg. E., 'Perspectives on American Environmentalism' Available at https://books.google.co.ke/books?hl=en&lr=&id=TS_eAAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&ots=JmQG9W880S&sig=vBq3zJ-i0HeE6p5XvkTX7Qjkqgk&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

²² Choucri. N., 'Environmentalism' Op Cit

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

envisioning a symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature and not an adversarial one²⁶.

Environmentalism acknowledges the need for harmony between humanity and nature. It recognizes that humans and nature are inextricably coupled and therefore there is need to create harmony between them²⁷. The idea of environmentalism recognizes that humans are an inseparable part of nature and that they cannot damage the planet without severely damaging themselves²⁸. Environmentalism seeks to ensure that nature is conserved and protected in order to sustain both the present and future generations²⁹. It has been noted that without harmony between humanity and nature, the environment is susceptible to threat from human action through pollution, environmental degradation, climate change, and loss of biodiversity³⁰. In addition, without this harmony, humanity may face the threat of extinction due to loss of vital resources provided by nature that are necessary for its survival including oxygen, food, water, and energy³¹.

The ideal of environmentalism seeks to control negative human impacts on the environment³². It is a movement that arose in response to global environmental crises

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ International Union for Conservation of Nature., 'In the Spirit of Nature, Everything is Connected' Available at <https://www.iucn.org/news/europe/201801/spirit-nature-everything-connected> (Accessed on 08/02/2024)

²⁸ International Council of Environmental Law., 'Recognition of Harmony with Nature' Available at https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/35463/ICEL_NOTE_HarmonyWithNature_March152021.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (Accessed on 08/02/2024)

²⁹ Song. W., & Cao. H., 'Historical Evolution and Reflections on Harmony between Man and Nature' Available at <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=120602#:~:text=Harmony%20between%20man%20and%20nature%20means%20that%20man%20needs%20to,to%20preserve%20nature%20while%20developing> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

³⁰ Chadzon. R., 'Nature Needs People and Here's Why' Available at <https://today.uconn.edu/2018/09/nature-needs-people-heres/#> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

³¹ International Science Council., 'Sustainable Human Development Means Living in Harmony with Nature.' Available at <https://council.science/current/blog/sustainable-human-development-means-living-in-harmony-with-nature/> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

³² Thompson. J., 'Environmentalism: Philosophical Aspects' *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences.*, 2001, pp 4679-4685

including pollution, loss of biodiversity, and climate change³³. It encompasses theories about the nature and causes of environmental problems, moral views about our relation to nature, and attempts to define and bring about an environmentally sound society³⁴. Enhancing environmentalism is therefore vital for sustainability.

3.0 Towards Environmentalism: Progress and Challenges

There has been some progress towards embracing environmentalism for sustainability. For example, ecocentrism has emerged as an ideal which recognizes the intrinsic value in all lifeforms and ecosystems themselves, including their abiotic components³⁵. This concept takes a much wider view of the world than does the idea of anthropocentrism, which sees individual humans and the human species as more valuable than all other organisms on the planet³⁶. Ecocentrism recognises the Earth as the ultimate source of value, meaning and enablement for all beings, including – but not only – human beings³⁷. It focuses on ecological integrity of the Earth's ecosystems, wild places, and natural processes upon which all beings are completely dependent³⁸. Ecocentrism is vital in fostering sustainability. It has been noted that to preserve a healthy environment for current and future generations, ecocentrism must prevail over anthropocentrism³⁹. The concept of ecocentrism, through its recognition of humanity's duties towards nature, is central to solving the planet's unprecedented environmental crisis including climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution⁴⁰.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Washington, W et al., 'Why Ecocentrism is the Key Pathway to Sustainability' Available at <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2901740/view> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ What is Ecocentrism? (A Definition), Available at <https://www.ecologicalcitizen.net/what-is.php?t=ecocentrism-definition> (Accessed on 08/08/2024)

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Open Global Rights., 'Ecocentrism: A Refusal to Compromise on Ecological Integrity' Available at <https://www.openglobalrights.org/ecocentrism-refusal-to-compromise-ecological-integrity/> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁴⁰ Ibid

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁴¹ embraces an ecocentric approach towards sustainability. The Agenda is determined to protect the planet from degradation including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change so that it can support the needs of present and future generations⁴². The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisions a world where humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected⁴³. At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which seeks to foster sustainability by promoting environmental conservation, economic development, and social progress⁴⁴. Realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is thus vital in enhancing environmentalism.

Similarly, the *Earth Charter*⁴⁵ advances an ecocentric worldview. The Charter recognizes that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings⁴⁶. It further notes that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people⁴⁷. The Earth Charter therefore embraces environmentalism by recognizing that environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible⁴⁸. The Charter is founded upon four principles: respect and care for the community of life; ecological integrity; social and economic justice; and democracy, nonviolence, and peace⁴⁹. Realizing these principles is key in fostering

⁴¹ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Earth Charter., Available at <https://earthcharter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Booklet-Earth-Charter-52-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

harmony between humanity and nature and enhancing environmentalism for sustainability.

Embracing environmental ethics is another key approach towards enhancing environmentalism for sustainability⁵⁰. Environmental ethics focuses on the moral relationship of human beings to the environment⁵¹. Further, it has been noted that environmental ethics considers the ethical relationships between humanity and the non-human world⁵². Environmental ethics helps to define humanity's moral and ethical obligation towards the environment⁵³. It guides how humanity should interact with the natural environment, including the nonhuman individuals that populate it and respond to environmental challenges more appropriately⁵⁴. Environmental ethics emphasizes for the increased and improved moral regard for nonhuman and ecological systems⁵⁵. Embracing environmental ethics is necessary for sustainability. It has been noted that economic and judicial interventions alone are not sufficient to address environmental challenges including climate change, pollution, loss of biodiversity, and environmental degradation⁵⁶. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), achieving sustainability requires a new environmental governance system and the engagement of the full spectrum of society and the employment of innovative approaches that protect the natural environment based on behavioural and ethical changes in environmental governance⁵⁷. Applying environmental ethics is therefore important in fostering sustainability.

⁵⁰ Environmental Ethics., Available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Laal. M., 'A Brief History of Enviroethics and Its Challenges' Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3714002/> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Hossain. S., 'Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development: An Analysis of Rampal Coal Power Plant in Bangladesh' Available at <https://philarchive.org/archive/HOSEEA-2> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Muigua. K., 'Nurturing Our Environment for Sustainable Development' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2016

⁵⁷ United Nations Environment Programme., 'The Role of Environmental and Spiritual Ethics in Global Environmental Governance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/resources/policy-and->

Environmental activism has also been embraced as a tool towards enhancing environmentalism⁵⁸. Environmental activism involves actions of individuals or groups that protect or aid the environment⁵⁹. It involves identifying issues that threaten the planet's viability, from community to global concerns, and then developing strategies to promote awareness or produce solutions that directly address such problems⁶⁰. It has been noted that environmental activism aims to create a harmonious living environment that can be handed down from generation to generation without succumbing to poor human stewardship⁶¹. It has been noted that environmentalism has inspired activist undertakings ranging from legal challenges and political lobbying to direct action and strategic alliances⁶². Environmental activism is therefore key in protecting the environment from damaging impacts of human activities⁶³.

However, despite the key role of environmentalism in fostering sustainability, it has been noted that environmental challenges are still prevalent including the triple planetary crisis of climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution⁶⁴. In light of these challenges, it is imperative to enhance environmentalism in order to achieve sustainability.

[strategy/roleenvironmental-and-spiritual-ethics-globalenvironmental#:~:text=Adopting%20an%20ethics%20and%20values,essential%20requirement%20for%20Sustainable%20Development](#) (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁵⁸ What is Environmental Activism and Why Does it Matter?., Available at <https://onlinedegrees.unr.edu/blog/environmental-activism/#:~:text=Regardless%20of%20how%20it's%20performed,succumbing%20to%20poor%20human%20stewardship.> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Willow. A., 'Environmental Activism' Available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea1311> (Accessed on 08/07/2024)

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'The Triple Planetary Crisis: Forging a New Relationship Between People and the Earth' Op Cit

4.0 Conclusion

Environmentalism is a key ideal towards achieving sustainability. It advocates for the preservation, restoration, and improvement of the natural environment⁶⁵. This ideal seeks to foster harmony between humanity and nature for Sustainable Development⁶⁶.

In order to enhance environmentalism, it is imperative to foster environmental sustainability⁶⁷. Conserving the environment is the foundation of environmental sustainability⁶⁸. In order for the environment to not only maintain a steady state for a long period of time, but ideally to improve over time as well, there must be a significant focus on strategies to improve environmental sustainability⁶⁹. Fostering environmental sustainability is key in maintaining and protecting the environment to promote longevity for the benefit of present and future generations⁷⁰. Environmental sustainability can be fostered by both individuals and organizations⁷¹. For individuals it is imperative to embrace sustainable lifestyles through promoting responsible production and consumption patterns, embracing renewable sources of energy, and switching to reusable products⁷². For organizations, sustainability can be enhanced by fostering energy efficiency and cutting down on single-use plastics in manufacturing⁷³. These measures are key in nurturing environmental conservation therefore enhancing environmentalism.

⁶⁵ Environmentalism., Op Cit

⁶⁶ International Union for Conservation of Nature., 'In the Spirit of Nature, Everything is Connected' Available at <https://www.iucn.org/news/europe/201801/spirit-nature-everything-connected> (Accessed on 08/02/2024)

⁶⁷ How to Improve Environmental Sustainability?., Available at <https://homework.study.com/explanation/how-to-improve-environmental-sustainability.html> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ The Importance of Environmental Sustainability., Available at <https://www.inspirecleanenergy.com/blog/sustainable-living/environmental-sustainability-definition> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid

It is also necessary to strengthen environmental governance⁷⁴. It has been noted that the current approach towards environmental governance in most countries is weak and fragmented and lacks coordination, thus hindering efforts to achieve Sustainable Development⁷⁵. As a result there is need to strengthen environmental governance at all levels⁷⁶. This goal can be achieved through strengthening the legal, policy, and institutional framework on environmental management⁷⁷; improving environmental enforcement, compliance, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting⁷⁸; and increasing awareness and a sense of shared responsibility on environmental management by involving all stakeholders including the private sector, the public, local communities, and indigenous peoples⁷⁹. It has been noted that by building robust environmental governance systems, we can safeguard the environment and human rights and work towards all the 17 SDGs⁸⁰.

Further, in order to enhance environmentalism, there is need to foster environmental litigation⁸¹. It has been noted that litigation is a viable tool in safeguarding environmental rights and fostering environmental justice⁸². Environmental litigation provides a mechanism for both private and public interest claimants to enforce environmental law, determine environmental disputes, obtain compensation for environmental damage and

⁷⁴ Enhancing Environmental Sustainability through Green Growth., Available at <https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2020-08/18.%20Chapter%2014%20Enhancing%20Environmental%20Sustainability%20through%20Green%20Growth.pdf> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ United Nations Environment Programme., 'About Environmental Rights and Governance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-governance/about-environmental-rights-and-governance> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁸¹ Muigua. K., 'The Role of Courts in Safeguarding Environmental Rights in Kenya: A Critical Appraisal.' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Role-of-Courts-in-Safeguarding-Environmental-Rights-in-Kenya-A-Critical-Appraisal-Kariuki-Muigua-17th-January-2019-1.pdf> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁸² Ibid

in the end, conserve and protect the environment⁸³. Through environmental litigation, it is possible to promote access to justice which enables the protection of environmental law and human rights and promotes accountability in public institutions⁸⁴. Environmental litigation can also drive environmental governance reforms therefore fostering sustainability⁸⁵. It is thus necessary to embrace environmental litigation in order to enhance environmentalism for sustainability.

Finally, it is necessary to embrace environmental ethics in order to enhance environmentalism for sustainability⁸⁶. The concept of environmental ethics recognizes the intrinsic value of nature, the interconnection of all living things, and the responsibility of humans to act in accordance with ethical principles in order to safeguard the environment⁸⁷. Embracing environmental ethics is vital in shaping societal attitudes, actions, and policies to protect and sustain biodiversity and ecological systems⁸⁸. Environmental ethics can help humanity to build better relationships with nature by recognizing its intrinsic value and not just its instrumental value⁸⁹. It is thus vital to cultivate environmental ethics by establishing harmony between humanity and nature, fostering an ecocentric approach towards environmental governance, and strengthening environmental education and awareness⁹⁰.

⁸³ Angote. O., 'Environmental Litigation in Kenya: A Call for Reforms' (2019) *Journal of cmsd* Volume 3(1)

⁸⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Global Climate Litigation Report: 2023 Status Review' Available at <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/global-climate-litigation-report-2023-status-review> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Environmental Ethics: Types, Importance, Examples., Available at <https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/environmental-ethics/> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Minter. B., 'Environmental Ethics' Available at <https://www.nature.com/scitable/knowledge/environmental-ethics-96467512/> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

⁸⁹ Michael. J., 'Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development: Ethical and Human Rights Issues in Implementing Indigenous Rights' *Macquarie Journal of International and Comparative Environmental Law*, 2005

⁹⁰ Muigua. K., 'Applying Environmental Ethics For Sustainability' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Applying-Environmental-Ethics-for-Sustainability.pdf> (Accessed on 09/07/2024)

Enhancing environmentalism for sustainability is therefore a realistic and achievable ideal. We should pursue this goal for Sustainable Development.

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