

## **Oil, Environment and Nigeria's Niger Delta: Issues and Dilemmas**

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### **Abstract**

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**T**he problem of the Niger Delta is not unconnected with the impact of the oil exploration activities of the oil companies and the state of affairs in the region, in terms of the living conditions or standard of living of the people, environmental wholesomeness and the availability of the basic and essential social amenities. The paper will however dwell on the relationship between oil, environment and the Nigeria's Niger-Delta and this was subjected to empirical analysis.

**Keywords:** *Oil, Niger Delta and Dilemmas*

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### **Background to the Study**

The Niger Delta region which happens to produce the mainstay or life blood of the Nigerian economy has, in all sincerity and objectivity, nothing much to show for the abundance of natural endowment. If it is not an overstatement, it is worse than some of the non – oil producing but oil benefiting areas in other parts of the country. These poor life quality, unemployment, environmental degradation and dearth of life enhancing infrastructures and facilities have led to perceived alienation and the result of which is the frequent or high incidence of violence and social disorder in that part of the country. This is owing to their realization from experiential lessons of other groups that expression of their grievances through violent means as armed conflict with neighbouring communities, kidnap of and attack on oil workers, bunkering and vandalizing pipelines and even attacks on deployed law enforcement and security agents was the only and most effective means by which attention could be drawn to them. This is corroborated by the statement of an indigene: “Those who make peaceful change impossible will make violence change inevitable”.

The response of government has not help matters. It has been harsh in return and involved military reprisal carried out in the case of Odi Community in Bayelsa State. This rather than improve the situation has worsened it. One expects that with the advent of democratic situation, there would be some improvement and stemming of the tide of disturbances in the region. On the contrary, it is no less than it was under the military. One wonders why! This therefore open one's eyes to the fact that the solution to this crisis is not mere military or repressive alternative; again, the role and impact of various commissions and interventionist agencies with social development mandate in the region set up by the Federal government at different dispensations are called into question. This will assist our understanding the fundamental issue in the region as well as assist the government to look in a new direction for a more effective approach or solution other than breathing threats and acting cruel.

### **Literature Review**

Nigeria is a major player in the world energy market. It is the seventh largest producer of oil in the world. It supplies a fifth of United States oil imports. It is further becoming an important supplier in the global liquefied natural gas (LNG). Instability in world oil supplies and the critical link of oil to the international economy has made Nigeria and more generally African oil to be more strategic. Oil and gas is the lifeblood of the nation's revenue, economy and national survival. It accounts for about 40% of the Gross Domestic Product and 70% of government revenue. (Ikelegbe, 2005:1).

The facts of the above statistics provide an excellent insight into the strategic importance of oil to the fiscal basis of the Nigerian State. Thus, this section seeks to interrogate the link between the oil resource and the sustenance or accentuation of ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which produces over 90% of the oil extracted in the State (Kubeyinje and Neziyanya, 1999:1). This analysis is significant to the study because of a few significant factors; first, it was observed by Collier and Hoeffler (1998:568 – 569) that, the incident of primary commodity exports and specifically mineral wealth in States has been found to be associated with conflict and occurrence of civil wars. Secondly, is the assertion by Reno (2003: 44 – 45) that the exploitation of natural resources has played a prominent part in conflict in Nigeria.

Oil was first discovered in Nigeria in 1956 at Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State and in the Ogoni region by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). Afterwards, a number of oil companies including Chevron Nigeria Limited moved into the area and further stakes were made in the 1960s and 1970s. Ever since its discovery, in 1956, it is estimated that over USD300 billion has accrued the Federal Republic of Nigeria from sales of crude oil over forty years of exploration (Ikpatt and Scott, 2001:3).

Given this enormous capital accumulation, it should have been expected that the oil bearing communities of whose land oil was extracted would have been more materially prosperous and better off than their ethnic counterparts in the State. But unfortunately, the reverse is the case. As noted by Obi (2002: 108) “In spite of the overwhelming contribution of the oil minority areas of the Niger Delta to Federal Revenues, they have been excluded from direct access to oil revenues, expect through federal and ethnic majority benevolence”. Consequently, the region by 1990s was one of the least developed and poorest in the Nigerian State (Ikelegbe, 2005:7).

A number of factors accounts for this rather unfortunate fate of oil bearing communities all of which are rooted in historical development of the Nigerian State. Obi (2002:105) notes that “the most significant of this (factor) till date has been the replacement of agriculture by oil, as the basis of capitalist accumulation and State reproduction in Nigeria”. Prior to this tie, the fiscal basis of the Nigerian economy has been sustained by proceeds accrued from the sale and export cash crops produced by the defunct three regions in the State.

According to Obi (2002:105), by 1965, the export based cash crop economy fell into a crisis resulting from a fall in global commodity prices. This adversely affected the regions as centres of political and economic powers, deriving from their dependence on cash crop exports. Thus, the government of the North and Western region s ran budget deficits as a result of this crisis as noted by (Falola 1988:43) was that the region began to look to the Federal government for aid. By the mid 1960s the economic basis of regionalism had began to wane (Obi, 2002:105).

This period coincided with three very significant events in Nigeria's political history all of which played prominent roles in shaping and structuring the phenomenon of ethnic violence and that of relations in the Niger Delta. These were the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region complemented by the “new” global want for oil, the Military coup of 1966, and lastly the Nigerian Civil War of 1967.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper will make use of the class theory as a framework to explicate the reasons or causes that account for the occurrence of conflict in the Niger Delta since the work argues that the crisis in the Niger Delta will likely continue with the repressive and alienating character of the Nigerian State. The class theory analysis is invariably linked with the works and writings of the Karl Marx.

Marx's class theory rests on the premise that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles (Marx 169:34). According to this view, ever since human society emerged from its primitive and relatively undifferentiated state and it has remained fundamentally divided between classes who clash in the pursuit of class interest. In the world of capitalism, for example, the nuclear cell of the capitalist system, the factory is the prime locus of antagonism between classes (exploiters and exploited). Class interests and the confrontations of power that they bring in their wake are to Marx the central determinant of social and historical process. His analysis continually centers on how the relationship between men are shaped by their relative positions in regard to the means of production, that is, by their differential access to scarce resources and scarce power. He notes that the unequal access need not at all times and under all conditions lead to active class struggle (Marx, 1969:186). But be considered it clear that the potential for class conflict is inherent in every differentiated society, since such a society systematically generates conflicts of interest between persons and groups differentially located within the social structure and more particularly in relation to the means of production.

Going from the above, it is pined that an appreciation of the Marxian class theory analysis is the most appropriate analytic paradigm for conflict – oriented phenomena. At the core of this theory is he attempt at historical analysis aimed at revealing not only the patterns and regularities in empirical events, but also the interrelationship in the institutional configurations of society. Using this framework, this study will demonstrate that the conflict situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria arises as a result of the different ideological perspectives of the classes which make up the region. This difference in ideological perspectives invariably leads to struggles, violence and otherwise, between classes in the advancement of their goals and interest.

### **Multinational Oil Corporations and the Phenomenon of Ethnic Conflict in the Niger Delta**

This section seeks to analyze the role of multinational oil corporations in the continuation, accentuation and sustenance of ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. As earlier noted, with the discovery of oil in 1956 at Oloibiri and in the Ogoni region in 1957, multinational oil corporations began to move into the Niger Delta region for prospective investment and other exploitative purposes. As Simbeye (2002:2) notes, “Nigeria is one of the world's major crude oil producer with over two million barrels per day, the highest in Africa. This attracted Transitional Corporations (TNCs) such as Chevron, Texaco, Totalfinal, Elf, Exxon – Mobil, Agip and Royal Dutch Shell.

As a result of the activities of these multinational corporations engaged in oil production, it is generally speculated that the Nigerian State has been able to accumulate about 300 billion dollars as returns from crude oil sales. This could have not only solved all the problems of Nigeria but of the whole black, sub – Saharan Africa. The Nigerian people could easily be among the richest in the world. Instead the money has been stashed away by greedy officials; the people have not seen a cent of this immense wealth” (Weston 2004:2). Thus, as Calvocoress (1997:615 – 617) observes “Nigeria's economic problems arise not from lack of

resources but from its over-optimistic use of single source of wealth (crude oil) which value or worth had depreciated for reasons mainly beyond the country's control. The misuse of crude oil resources was mined were callously neglected and oppressed. Secondly, there was the increasing need to engage in reckless exploitation of this mineral resource in order to sustain the entrenched caliber of self – centered and corrupt traditional political and military elites and other cadres of neo – elite.

The above assertion by Calvocoress shed light on a number of factors which better elucidate the motives or reasons for conflict in the Niger Delta. First of all, it is gathered that despite the abundance of wreath derived from sales of crude oil, the Niger Delta communities, on whose land the oil is mined, continue to suffer because of the neglect and oppression by the State. This assertion is supported by Douglas et al (203:2) who notes that “oil revenues currently provide 80% of government income, 5% of export receipt and 90% of foreign exchange earnings; paradoxically, the oil producing States within Federated Nigeria have benefited the least from oil wealth”. Secondly, it can be gathered from Calvocoress that the circumstances or conditions under which the oil has been extracted or mined for exploitative purpose has been reckless. Also noted elsewhere by Fabiyi (2001:4) “Oil spill disaster has been a major source of agitation and a threat to national unity and survival; it generated crisis between the oil companies and the host communities.

It is therefore pertinent to note that the exploration and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta have not only benefited the Nigerian State but have also been beneficial to the multinational oil corporations operation in the Niger Delta. Consequently, there is an invariable relationship between the State and the multinational oil corporations who drill the oil from the Niger Delta. This link arises on the reliance of the State on the activities of the multinational corporations to generate oil (for export sales) from the region which the State uses to pursue personal goals and interest. As noted by Ikpatt and Scott (2001:3) “transnational oil conglomerates have systematically played roles as cohorts with government in entrenching regional destination as a means of maximizing profit and are considered avaricious by local communities.

The relationship between the multinational oil corporations and the State as well as a few of its activities has always put them in direct confrontation with the Niger Delta communities. The assertion supported by Ikelegbe (2005:13) who argues that “the Ijaws (as with other ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta) see MNC activities and facilities as a means of getting at the Federal government who has disadvantaged them”. The attacks on MNCs are also because they are seen as part of the problem of inequitable treatment, neglect, disinheritance and deprivation. The Ijaws then are in part fighting for ownership of oil wells and commensurate benefits from the MNCs. These conflicts have at different times escalated so much as to generate a reign of insecurity, oil production disruptions and violence.

While highlighting the activities of the multinational oil corporations which engender violence, Onduku, (2001:3) observes that “the operations of the oil multinationals shows that most of the host communities are crises – crossed by pipelines and gas flared burned around

the clock at ground level. For instance, in Ogoni, shell locations lie part in the middle of villages in front and back gardens that should lay a particular responsibility on shell to be absolutely cautious in its operations. Environmental activists opine that the company remains willful and negligent.

Given these situations, one can correctly submit that the activities of the multinational oil corporation working in the Niger Delta region have not only sustained the phenomenon of ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta but have also shaped, sharpened and accentuated the dimension in which the violence is carried out. These activities have therefore made security one of the greatest challenges in the Niger Delta.

### **Hypothesis of Study**

To understand better what aspect of the relationship between oil, environment and the Nigeria's Niger Delta, we at this juncture make tentative statement which will be subjected to empirical analysis and interpretation.

1. The Nigerian oil industry is dominated by multinational oil corporations that collaborate with Nigerian governing elite.
2. The Niger Delta crisis will likely continue with the repressive and alienating character of the Nigerian State.
3. The less the perception of alienation and exploitation, the greater the degree of cooperation and relative peace. However, only the first hypothesis will be subjected to empirical testing and analysis.

### **Population and Sample**

The population is made up of the experts on oil and environment issues in three geopolitical zones (South – South, South – West and North West), the oil firms (specifically Shell petroleum and Chevron oil), and the Non – State actor. The Sample is however restricted to the Niger Delta indigenes, oil experts and peace keeping troops.

### **Methodology of Analysis**

In order to investigate the relationship between oil, environment and Nigeria's Niger Delta, the study has based its empirical analysis on the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The Sample size is however restricted to 220 though only 210 of the questionnaires were returned and which was used for the analysis.

### **Demographic Data of Respondents**

This relates to the personal data of respondents such as sex, age, educational background, working experience, marital status, employment status and indigenization status of respondents.



**Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents**

	Selected Respondents						Percentage	
	Niger Delta Indigenes		Expatriate Oil Workers		Peace – keeping Troops		Distribution	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	37	49	44	57	36	62	117	56
Female	38	51	33	43	22	38	93	44
	75	100	77	100	58	100	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Interpretation:** Table 1 reveals that 56 percent of the respondents are male while the remaining 44 percent are female.

**Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents**

	Selected Respondents						Percentage	
	Niger Delta Indigenes		Expatriate Oil Workers		Peace – keeping Troops		Distribution	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Below 15 years	18	24	16	21	14	24	48	23
15 to 20	23	31	19	23	28	48	70	33
20 to 25	24	32	27	35	3	5	54	26
26 and above	10	13	15	19	13	22	40	19
	75	100	77	100	58	100	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Interpretation:** Table 2 shows that 23 percent of the respondents fall below 15 years, 33 percent between 15 to 20 years, 20 percent between 21 to 25 years and 19 percent from 26 years and above.

**Table 3: Educational Background Distribution of Respondents**

	Selected Respondents						Percentage	
	Niger Delta Indigenes		Expatriate Oil Workers		Peace – keeping Troops		Distribution	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
SSCE	25	33	27	35	22	38	74	35
OND/NCE	14	19	16	21	24	41	54	26
HND/B.Sc	31	41	29	38	12	21	72	34
Msc/MBA	5	7	5	7	-	-	10	5
Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	75	100	77	100	58	100	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Interpretation:** Table 3 reveals that 35 percent of the respondents are SSCE holder, 26 percent are OND/NCE holders, 34 percent are B.Sc/HND holder while 5 percent are Master holders.

**Table 4:** Employment Status Distribution of Respondents

	Selected Respondents						Percentage	
	Niger Delta Indigenes		Expatriate Oil Workers		Peace – keeping Troops		Distribution	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.		No.	%
Self employed	8	11	5	6	-	-	13	6
Public sector	23	30	15	19	58	110	96	46
Private sector	19	25	57	75	-	-	76	36
Unemployed	25	34	-	-	-	-	25	12
	75	100	77	100	58	100	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Interpretation:** Table 4 reveals that 6 percent of the respondents are self employed, 46 percent are employed in the public sector, 36 percent in the private sector while 12 percent are unemployed.

**Table 5:** Indigenization Status Distribution of Respondents

	Responses	Percentage
Niger Delta Indigenes	75	36
Expatriate Oil Workers	77	37
Peace Keeping Troops	58	27
	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Interpretation:** Table 5 reveals that 36 percent of the respondents are Niger Delta indigenes, 37 percent are Expatriate Oil Workers while 27 percent are Peace Keeping Troops.

### Questionnaire Item View

This refers to the responses to the views expressed in the questionnaires that affect both formulated hypothesis and other allied views. These responses are tabulated and presented as follows:

**Questionnaire Item 1:** On the domination of oil industry by multinational oil corporations.

**Hypothesis I:** The Nigeria oil industry is dominated by multinational oil corporations that collaborate with the Nigerian governing elites.



**Table 6:** Responses on the Questionnaire

	Selected Respondents				Percentage Distribution	
	Code	Niger Delta Indigenes	Expatriate oil workers	Peace keeping troops	No.	%
Strongly Agree	1	29	37	17	83	40
Agree	2	26	22	21	69	33
Indifferent	3	11	9	6	26	12
Disagree	4	6	5	9	20	9
Strongly disagree	5	3	4	5	12	6
		75	77	58	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Analysis:** From table 6 above, 40 percent of the respondents strongly agree, 33 percent agree, 12 percent are indifferent, 9 percent disagree while 6 percent strongly disagree that the Nigeria oil industry is dominated by multinational oil corporations.

**Questionnaire Item 2:** On the repressive and alienating character of the Nigerian State

**Hypothesis II:** The Niger Delta crisis will likely continue with the repressive and alienating character of the Nigerian State.

**Table 7:** Responses on the Questionnaire

	Selected Respondents				Percentage Distribution	
	Code	Niger Delta Indigenes	Expatriate oil workers	Peace keeping troops	No.	%
Strongly Agree	1	22	37	12	71	34
Agree	2	26	23	9	58	28
Indifferent	3	17	7	13	37	17
Disagree	4	10	6	15	31	15
Strongly disagree	5	-	4	9	13	6
		75	77	58	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Analysis:** From table 7 reveals that, 34 percent of the respondents strongly agree, 28 percent agree, 17 percent are indifferent, 15 percent disagree while 6 percent strongly disagree that the Niger Delta crisis will likely continue with the repressive and alienating character of the Nigerian State.

**Questionnaire Item 3:** On the perception of alienation and perception

**Hypothesis III:** The less the perception of alienation and exploitation the greater the degree of corporation and relative peace.

**Table 8:** Responses on the Questionnaire

	Selected respondents				Percentage Distribution	
	Code	Niger Delta Indigenes	Expatriate oil workers	Peace keeping troops	No.	%
Strongly Agree	1	19	21	14	54	26
Agree	2	21	25	9	55	27
Indifferent	3	12	3	7	22	10
Disagree	4	11	15	18	44	21
Strongly disagree	5	12	13	10	35	16
		75	77	58	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Analysis:** from Table 8 reveals that, 26 percent of the respondents strongly agree, 27 percent agree, 10 percent are indifferent, 21 percent disagree while 16 percent strongly disagree that the less perception of alienation and exploitation, the greater the degree of corporation and relative peace.

**Questionnaire Item 4:** On the continued abduction of expatriate oil workers

**Questionnaire Item View 4:** The continued abduction of expatriate oil workers cannot be a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta region.

**Table 9:** Responses on the Questionnaire

	Selected Respondents				Percentage Distribution	
	Code	Niger Delta Indigenes	Expatriate oil workers	Peace keeping troops	No.	%
Strongly Agree	1	33	39	49	121	58
Agree	2	24	38	9	71	33
Indifferent	3	-	-	-	-	-
Disagree	4	7	-	-	7	3
Strongly disagree	5	11	-	-	11	5
		75	77	58	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Analysis:** From table 9 reveals that, 58 percent of the respondents strongly agree, 33 percent agree, none of the respondents are indifferent, 3 percent disagree while 5 percent strongly disagree that the continued abduction of expatriate oil workers cannot be a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta region.

**Questionnaire Item 5:** On invitation of international community.

**Questionnaire Item View 5:** There is no need for the invitation of international community to assist in finding lasting solution to the ethnic conflict in Niger Delta.

**Table 10:** Responses on the Questionnaire

	Selected Respondents				Percentage Distribution	
	Code	Niger Delta Indigenes	Expatriate oil workers	Peace keeping troops	No.	%
Strongly Agree	1	28	27	18	73	35
Agree	2	27	25	17	69	33
Indifferent	3	-	5	4	9	4
Disagree	4	11	12	16	39	19
Strongly disagree	5	9	8	15	32	15
		75	77	58	210	100

**Source:** Field Work 2008

**Analysis:** From table 10 reveals that 35 percent of the respondents strongly agree, 33 percent agree, 4 percent are indifferent, 19 percent disagree while 15 percent strongly disagree that there is no need for the invitation of the international community to assist in finding lasting solution to the ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta.

**Hypotheses Testing:** In the process of testing the formulated hypotheses, three - way analysis of variance (ANOVA) would be used. This involves the computation of F calculated and comparing same with F tabulated at 0.05 level of significant.

Hypothesis I, states that the Nigerian oil industry is dominated by multinational oil corporations that collaborated with the Nigerian governing elites.

**Null Hypothesis:** The Nigerian oil industry is dominated by multinational oil corporations that collaborate with the Nigerian governing elite.

**Alternative Hypothesis:** The Nigerian oil industry is not dominated by multinational oil corporations hat collaborate with the Nigerian governing elites.

**Table 5:** Hypothesis I Total Table

Niger Delta Indigenes	Expatriate oil workers	Peace keeping troops
29	37	17
26	22	21
11	9	6
6	5	9
3	4	5
75	77	58

- $T_1 = 75; T_2 = 77; T_3 = 58$
- Grand Total =  $T_1 + T_2 + T_3 = 75 + 77 + 58 = 210$
- $n =$  number of observation per group = 5                       $K =$  number of groups = 3  
 $N = nk = 5 \times 3 = 15$

4. Correction factor =  $\frac{G^2}{N} = \frac{(210)^2}{15} = 2940$
  5.  $EEY^2y = [29^2 + 26^2 + 11^2 + 6^2 + 3^2] + [37^2 + 22^2 + 9^2 + 5^2 + 4^2] + [17^2 + 21^2 + 6^2 + 9^2 + 5^2]$   
 $= 1683 + 1975 + 872$   
 $= 4530$
  6.  $T_1^2 + T_2^2 + T_3^2 = 75^2 + 77^2 + 58^2$   
 $= 14918$
- $$TRSS = \frac{T_1^2 + T_2^2 + T_3^2}{n} - CF$$
- $$TRSS = \frac{14918}{5} - 2940 = 43.6$$
7.  $RSS = TRSS - TS = 2940 - 43.6 = 2896.4$
  8.  $TRMS = \frac{TRSS}{K-1} = \frac{43.6}{15-3} = \frac{43.6}{12} = 3.6333$
  9.  $RMS = \frac{RSS}{N-K} = \frac{2896.4}{15-3} = \frac{2896.4}{12} = 241.3667$
  10.  $F \text{ cal.} = \frac{TRMS}{RMS} = \frac{3.6333}{241.3667} = 0.0148$

**Table 6:** Hypothesis I ANOVA Table

Source of Variation	Df	SS	MS	F cal.	Ftab (0.05)
Between treatment	2	43.6	3.6333	0.0148	3.8853
Residual	12	2896.4	241.3667		
Total	14	2940	208.5714		

11.  $F \text{ cal.} = 0.0148; F \text{ tab} (5\%) = 3.8853$

Since  $F \text{ cal.} < F \text{ tab.}$  we accept the Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and conclude that the Nigerian oil industry is dominated by multinational oil corporation that collaborate with the Nigerian governing elites

### Recommendations and Conclusion

In the course of this study, it has been discovered that even though the conflict situation in the Niger Delta is gaining new visibility and is taking new dimensions in its manifestations, its origins have root in historical factors. The first and most significant factor which engenders the ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta came as a result of the British imperialism and colonization of Nigeria.

It has also been discovered that other factors which engender ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta arise as a result of the multinational oil corporations operating in the region; unjust and discriminatory policies of government and the activities of other civil groups who in a bid to agitate for their rights often employ the use of violence.

In the light of the findings stated above, the following recommendations are put forward to help the Nigerian government ameliorate or lessen the ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta:

1. The Federal government should fulfill the economic, social and cultural rights of the minorities and indigenous people of the Niger Delta by providing adequate infrastructural facilities.
2. The Federal government should also develop effective mechanism to ensure the representation and participation of minorities and indigenous people in policy and decision making at all levels of development projects.
3. The Federal government should establish independent mechanism for monitoring the performance of oil companies as regard their contribution to development in the area they operate and ensure that the activities of multinational oil companies and their Nigerian affiliate comply with International Human Rights and environmental standards.

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