

Briefing Paper

# Youth and Adaptation in Nepal



# Acknowledgement

## **"YOUTH AND ADAPTATION IN NEPAL"**

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# List of Abbreviations

|               |                                                         |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ACE</b>    | : Action for Climate Empowerment                        |
| <b>CBD</b>    | : Convention on Biological Diversity                    |
| <b>CBS</b>    | : Central Bureau of Statistics                          |
| <b>COP</b>    | : Conference of Parties                                 |
| <b>DRR</b>    | : Disaster Risk Reduction                               |
| <b>DRR</b>    | : Disaster Risk Reduction                               |
| <b>GBF</b>    | : Global Biodiversity Framework                         |
| <b>GBYN</b>   | : Global Youth Biodiversity Network                     |
| <b>GGA</b>    | : Global Goals on Adaptation                            |
| <b>GoN</b>    | : Government of Nepal                                   |
| <b>IPCC</b>   | : Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change             |
| <b>LAPA</b>   | : Local Adaptation Plan for Action                      |
| <b>MoFE</b>   | : Ministry of Forests and Environment                   |
| <b>NAP</b>    | : National Adaptation Plan                              |
| <b>NAPA</b>   | : National Adaptation Programme of Action               |
| <b>NDC</b>    | : Nationally Determined Contribution                    |
| <b>PTSD</b>   | : Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder                        |
| <b>SDGs</b>   | : Sustainable Development Goals                         |
| <b>SFDRR</b>  | : Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction          |
| <b>UNDP</b>   | : United Nations Development Programme                  |
| <b>UNFCCC</b> | : United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| <b>UNICEF</b> | : United Nations Children's Fund                        |
| <b>WHO</b>    | : World Health Organization                             |

# Executive Summary

Despite minimal contributions to the global emission, Nepal is positioned as one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, facing severe and recurrent climate-induced hazards such as floods, landslides, and droughts. The country's unique geography, fragile ecosystems, and socio-economic vulnerabilities exacerbate its climate. Youth are one among the most vulnerable groups, which make up nearly half, i.e., 46.1% of the total population in Nepal. This discussion paper on Youth and Adaptation explores the multifaceted relationship between youth and climate adaptation, analyzing the disproportionate impacts of climate change on young people, national and global policy, and institutional structures in relation to youth and highlighting both the challenges and opportunities for enhancing their participation in adaptation efforts. A mixed research approach has been implemented to prepare this policy discussion paper.

Findings reveal that climate change adversely affects youth across multiple dimensions. Health and education are two primary sectors in which youth are impacted disproportionately and differentially. These impacts have further been exacerbated by overlapping forms of inequality, including gender, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geography, and others. Despite being one of the most affected groups, their involvement in policy and decision-making remains limited, often reduced to tokenistic participation or informal volunteerism. The review of national/global policy and institutional framework also reflects that youth are recognized as crucial stakeholders in climate action, while very few have translated this recognition into concrete mechanisms, financing structures, or inclusive governance systems that enable meaningful youth engagement in climate adaptation efforts. Though the current international and national policies acknowledge youth as important stakeholders and agents of change, they fail to address their real vulnerabilities, disproportionate burdens, and differential impacts of climate change.

To leverage the participation and leadership of youths in climate adaptation, this paper recommends operationalization of a dedicated institutional mechanism for youth engagement in the climate space, tailoring adaptation programs to local contexts and intersectional needs, strengthening youth capacities, equitable financing, and ensuring inclusive, decentralized, and participatory planning and decision-making processes. Youth should be engaged as active stakeholders in all phases of the adaptation process, but not just as passive beneficiaries.

# 01.

## Introduction

Nepal is among the countries most vulnerable to climate impacts, and the severity of these impacts on communities depends on their adaptive capacities, which are shaped by socioeconomic factors such as access to resources, age, gender, and other social and financial determinants, a phenomenon known as differential impact. The impact is compounded for youth and children, with disproportionate vulnerability, particularly those exposed to multiple hazards, those experiencing discrimination based on gender, disability, indigeneity, displacement, those living in remote areas, or other, often intersecting factors (UNICEF, 2023). Vulnerable and marginalized communities, including youths, who constitute nearly half, i.e., 46.1% of the country's population (MoFE, 2019), are positioned at heightened risks due to the structural inequalities, economic uncertainties, and limited opportunities to resilience building (CBS, 2021). Youth comprising the largest proportion of the total population in the country underscore the importance and need to integrate and engage them in climate adaptation; their meaningful and active participation in adaptation will enhance both effectiveness and equity of climate actions (UNDP, 2021).

This paper documents the impacts of climate change on youth in Nepal, analyzes the policy and institutional framework, and provides recommendations for youth-centered adaptation strategies.



*“Youth are defined differently worldwide: The United Nations defines youth as individuals within the age group of 15 to 24 years, whereas in Nepal, individuals between 16 and 40 years are identified as youths (GoN, 2015).”*

# 02.

## Methodology

The study uses a mixed-methods approach to understand youth vulnerabilities and engagement in climate adaptation in Nepal. A literature review analyzed national and international climate and youth-related policies, identifying systemic challenges, gaps, and opportunities. Five key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from the Ministry of Forests and Environment, a UNDP, an adaptation practitioner, the National Youth Council, and a youth activist, guided by structured questions. An online survey gathered primary data from 38 youths (ages 18–35; 52.6% male, 47.4% female) across all seven provinces, documenting community-level adaptation actions, participation barriers, and recommendations. Additionally, a youth dialogue on “Youth, Intersectionality, and Policy Responses to Climate Change and Adaptation” captured perspectives through a panel discussion and interactive sessions with young people from diverse regions.



*“As per Nepal’s Annual Health Report (2022), the cases of dengue have increased by nearly fivefold (e.g., 54,784 cases in 2022 vs. 540 in 2016), particularly affecting children and youths due to exposure risks (Rai & Rai, 2023).”*

# 03.

## Findings

### 3.1 Impact on Youth and Children's Health (Physical and Mental)

Changing climate increases the risk of adverse health impacts, including heat stress, respiratory problems, water and vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria, disproportionately affecting the youth.

Heat-related deaths are expected to increase from a baseline of four deaths per 100,000 people annually to 53 deaths per 100,000 people annually by 2080 in Nepal (WHO, 2016). Similarly, the incidence of diarrheal diseases is increasing during the rainy summer season with the rise in temperature and precipitation (Bhandari, 2015), resulting in poor health and the development of young people. As one of the participants of the youth dialogue reports, Beyond physical health impacts, youths experience psychosocial stress related to climate shocks and livelihood uncertainties, with rising cases of anxiety, depression, and lack of mental health services. According to a global survey conducted amongst 10,000 people, 75% of the youths in the age group of 16 to 25 years fear for the future due to a changing climate, with nearly half reporting functional impairment (Hickman et al., 2021). In developing countries, one in every three children shows symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after climate disasters (UNICEF, 2023).



*"Many children and youth tend to lose their lives during the period of extreme events and disasters due to their high exposure and sensitivity; around 50% of those who died or were injured due to the climate-related hazards over the past five years were mainly children and youth (UNICEF, 2022)."*

### 3.2 Impact on Education

Increasing climate-induced disasters and extreme events have adversely affected access to education and its quality for most young people. According to a U-Report survey conducted in 2021, 78 per cent of young respondents (15–24 years) from Nepal claim that their education and/or studies have been affected by climate change. According to a 2023 report on youth and climate in Nepal, young people stopped going to school and university for up to three months a year due to the direct effects of climate hazards. School dropout is another rising concern, with child migration, child labour, and child marriage among key challenges intensified by climate hazards (UNICEF, 2022). The study by Plan International (2022) shows that nearly 30% of youths have reported that their schools were closed, damaged, or destroyed due to climate-related events, while 80% of them experienced school disruption, and 25% of their textbooks or study materials were damaged or destroyed due to severe climate impacts. A study in Melamchi revealed that 73% experienced difficulties in attending schools due to road damage, and among them, 41% of children stayed at home due to fear and distress (Parajuli et al., 2021).

### 3.3 Policy Landscape and Existing Structures

#### 3.3.1 International Policies and Conventions related to Climate Adaptation and Youth:

In response to the growing impacts of climate change, several international frameworks and conventions have been established to guide mitigation, adaptation, and resilience-building. Over time, youth engagement in climate action has gained recognition and been mandated through global policies. Frameworks such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Paris Agreement, Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE), and the Global Goals on Adaptation (GGA) emphasize meaningful youth participation. The establishment of the UN Youth Office further reflects efforts to mainstream youth concerns. Additionally, instruments like the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework, and the Convention on Biological Diversity highlight the role of youth. Together, these frameworks provide a foundation for governments to align global commitments with local actions, ensuring youth inclusion in building a sustainable, climate-resilient future.

**Table 1: International Frameworks and Conventions on Youth and Climate Adaptation**

| S.N. | International Frameworks and Conventions | Article/Clause                                                                             | Provisions on Youths and Adaptation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | UNFCCC                                   | Article 6 and Article 6 (a) (ii)                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasizes education, training, public awareness, and participation with a focus on youth engagement.</li> <li>Article 6(a)(ii) urges parties to involve youth in climate response strategies.</li> <li>YOUNGO official youth constituency under the UNFCCC established to ensure and mainstream youth engagement in the UNFCCC processes.</li> </ul>              |
| 2    | UN Youth Office                          | GA Resolution 76/306                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established under the UN Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda", it is the UN Secretariat's first specialized office on youth matters</li> <li>Works on youth rights, agency, and their meaningful engagement in climate governance.</li> <li>Supports youth advisory councils, climate education, and financing for youth-led adaptation initiatives.</li> </ul> |
| 3    | ACE                                      | Article 6 of UNFCCC, Decision 17/CP.22 (2016)<br>Glasgow Work Programme on ACE (2021–2025) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes youth as key stakeholders for policy design and implementation.</li> <li>Promotes engagement of youths across all six ACE components, including education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation.</li> </ul>                                                                    |
| 4    | Paris Agreement                          | Article 12<br>COP 21 Decision Text (1/CP.21), P 83                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlights the importance of education, public awareness, and training in addressing climate change.</li> <li>The preamble promotes participation and access to information, supporting youth involvement in adaptation.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                |
| 5    | GGA                                      | Article 7 of the Paris Agreement, Article 7.5<br>COP 28 (2023), GGA Framework              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhances adaptive capacity through participatory approaches; youth are implicitly included in adaptation planning and implementation of youth-led initiatives.</li> <li>Underscores the importance of ensuring meaningful engagement of youths in NAPs, local adaptation strategies, and community-level actions.</li> </ul>                                       |
| 6    | SDGs                                     | SDG 4, Target 4.7<br>SDG 11, Target 11.b<br>SDG 13, Target 13.3, 13. b                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourages integrated policies for climate resilience with youth participation.</li> <li>Emphasize capacity-building and engagement with youth and marginalized communities in climate adaptation.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                      |

| S.N. | International Frameworks and Conventions | Article/Clause                                                                             | Provisions on Youths and Adaptation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7    | SFDRR                                    | Paragraph 36(a)(ii);<br>Priority 1,<br>Paragraph 24 (h)<br>Priority 2,<br>Paragraph 27 (h) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes the role of youths in disaster risk governance and decision-making; encourages youth engagement in community resilience.</li> </ul>                                                                                        |
| 8    | CBD                                      | Article 13<br>GBF's Goal D, Target 22                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes youth-led biodiversity conservation and ecosystem-based adaptation initiatives; youth as co-creators of the solution.</li> <li>Recognizes the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GBYN) for youth participation.</li> </ul> |

### 3.3.2 National Policies on Youth and Climate Adaptation

To address the climate crisis, Nepal has advanced various mitigation and adaptation strategies, policies, and programs at all governance levels, in line with constitutional mandates. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) ensures environmental protection through Article 30, while Article 51(g) guides sustainable resource use, disaster response, and community engagement, indirectly addressing climate adaptation and mitigation. Article 51(j) emphasizes youth empowerment through employment, entrepreneurship, and participation in development. These provisions establish a foundation for integrating youth into climate action and align with international frameworks, including the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and the GGA. Guided by the vision of strengthening adaptive capacity and resilience, Nepal has introduced several adaptation-related policies and programs, outlined below:

**Table 2:** Summary table; Youth Inclusion in Climate Adaptation Policies in Nepal

| S.N. | National Policy/ Frameworks                       | Youth Specific Provisions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | The Constitution of Nepal 2015                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasizes education, training, public awareness, and participation with a focus on youth engagement.</li> <li>Article 6(a)(ii) urges parties to involve youth in climate response strategies.</li> <li>YOUNGO official youth constituency under the UNFCCC established to ensure and mainstream youth engagement in the UNFCCC processes.</li> </ul>                                                                                                         |
| 2    | National Youth Policy, 2015                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad focus on youth empowerment; environmental protection is identified as one strategic area, but lacks focus on climate adaptation.</li> <li>No formal youth engagement mechanisms in adaptation planning (example: NAPs, LAPAs).</li> <li>No funding mechanisms or linkages with sectoral ministries.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                          |
| 3    | Climate Change Policy 2019                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth are identified as a vulnerable group.</li> <li>Mentions of participation and inclusion of youths in planning and climate-related programs, but lack formal representation in climate governance structures.</li> <li>Promotes awareness, skill building, and climate targeting the youth.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                    |
| 4    | LAPA Framework, 2019                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth are included in a large group of marginalized and vulnerable groups.</li> <li>Highlights the inclusion of youth in LAPA development and implementation.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 5    | NAP, 2021                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth are recognized as agents of change, included under “inclusive and equitable development”.</li> <li>Mentioned in different thematic areas (education, DRR, green jobs), programs target awareness, behavioral change, entrepreneurship, capacity building, innovation, and leadership.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
| 6    | NDC 3.0, 2025                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youths are identified as key stakeholders.</li> <li>Promotes integration of climate education, green jobs, and traditional knowledge into curricula by 2030 to strengthen and capacitate youths.</li> <li>Plans for youth-led research and mobilization of 4,000 adaptation resource persons.</li> <li>Mandates gender-responsive and youth-inclusive LAPAs at the local level.</li> <li>Promotes youth entrepreneurship in climate-smart sectors.</li> </ul> |
| 7    | DRR Policy and Strategic Action Plan (2018- 2030) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes youth leadership and engagement in DRR.</li> <li>Made provisions for capacity building of the youth clubs and organizations.</li> <li>Weak formal integration of youths into the nation or local DRR structures.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 8    | 16th Periodic Plan (2024/25–2028/29)              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledges climate change and DRR as cross-cutting issues and mentions youth in human resource development and green jobs.</li> <li>Emphasizes resilience building and local adaptation; minimal direct reference to youth roles in adaptation governance.</li> <li>Offers an opportunity to institutionalize youth engagement through coordination.</li> </ul>                                                                                             |

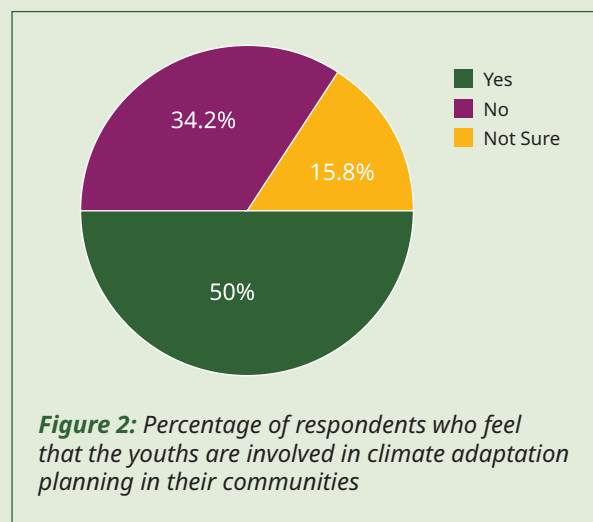
Both international and national climate policies acknowledge youth as an important stakeholder and emphasize their participation in policy processes. Instruments such as the UNFCCC, Paris Agreement, ACE, and Nepal's Constitution and adaptation frameworks mandate youth involvement in governance, consultation, and decision-making. Yet these frameworks often stop at youth participation and engagement. They rarely go further to recognize and address the differential vulnerabilities and disproportionate impacts that climate change has on young people, even though they are already identified as a vulnerable group. At the national level, Nepal's constitutional provisions and policies set a strong foundation for environmental protection and youth empowerment. But in practice, they emphasize participation, entrepreneurship, and employment creation without clearly linking these efforts to climate-related risks and vulnerabilities that young people face.

The policies fail to identify that the youth are not a homogeneous group; they face differential challenges shaped by age, gender, socio-economic status, education, and location (urban/rural, mountain/terai). Climate change threatens their livelihood opportunities, education continuity, migration patterns, and mental health, yet these dimensions are not systematically integrated into policy frameworks. Instead, youth are broadly referenced as “agents of change” or “future leaders,” with limited recognition of their current lived realities and how climate-induced crises undermine their rights and well-being. By framing youth as “future leaders,” the policies overlook the urgent fact that young people are already experiencing climate-induced loss and damage today. This gap reflects a symbolic rather than substantive inclusion of youth within climate policies. Although their voices are welcomed in discussions and policy-making processes, the real challenges they face as a vulnerable group are often overlooked. Unless policies recognize the unique economic, social, cultural, and psychological impacts that climate change has on young people, the responses will remain surface-level and ineffective.

### 3.3

#### Gaps and Challenges for Youth Engagement in Climate Adaptation

Youth are highly vulnerable to climate change, experiencing disrupted education, declining health, economic instability, and forced migration, which jeopardize both their present well-being and future opportunities. In Nepal, while numerous climate mitigation and adaptation programs exist, youth-specific strategies are limited, restricting their meaningful participation and leaving their actual vulnerabilities largely unaddressed. Surveys indicate that 34.2% of respondents feel youth have not been involved in adaptation planning, while 15.8% are unsure, suggesting nearly half are excluded from decision-making processes. Similarly, according to the study by British Council in 2023 only 22% of youth are familiar with Nepal's NAP or LAPA, despite 89% recognizing climate change as a critical threat, reflecting gaps in information dissemination, communication, and coordination between authorities and youth. A majority of youths (around 67%) feel unprepared to participate in adaptation efforts due to limited technical training, mentorship, and capacity-building opportunities. Youth participants stress the importance of climate education, green skills, entrepreneurship, research, advocacy, and leadership development. Vulnerabilities are heightened for young women, marginalized groups, and rural or indigenous youth, who face greater climate risks yet have limited access to resources. Rural youths, for instance, are three times more vulnerable than urban peers yet have only half the access to adaptation support (IPCC, 2022). Structural barriers such as language, digital access, and limited information restrict youth participation to a few individuals. So far, youth engagement has mainly occurred through informal initiatives like awareness campaigns, afforestation, local enterprises, research, and events, with minimal institutional support or funding. According to the study by the British Council, nearly 58% of youth report that youth-led adaptation projects are underfunded, restricting their scale and sustainability. Despite these challenges, 81% express interest in leading climate initiatives if provided with capacity-building, resources, and platforms for advocacy.



# 04.

## Conclusion

Despite contributing least to the climate crisis, youths are among its most affected and underrepresented groups. Their limited adaptive capacity and overlapping vulnerabilities, such as gender, geography, disability, and socio-economic status, expose them to severe risks, from disrupted education and health to migration and economic instability. While youths are often treated as passive beneficiaries, they are also co-creators of climate solutions, driving grassroots innovations and climate justice advocacy. Yet, structural and systemic barriers, such as limited resources, underrepresentation in governance, intergenerational gaps, geographic barriers, financial constraints, and the digital divide, continue to restrict their leadership and inclusion. Despite these challenges, youths are leading different initiatives at the grassroots levels, launching climate-smart innovations and research, and engaging in climate justice advocacy. To adapt and mitigate the consequences of climate change, different policies, frameworks, and programs have been developed over the years at the national and international levels. Although the policies acknowledge youth participation, their inclusion often remains symbolic. Policies emphasize engagement, entrepreneurship, and employment but rarely address the unique vulnerabilities of youth, who face differential risks shaped by gender, socio-economic status, education, and geography.

This paper reaffirms that addressing youth vulnerabilities and realizing their potential requires a fundamental shift in how climate adaptation is conceptualized and implemented. Youth must no longer be viewed as a homogeneous or passive group; rather, they should be engaged as diverse, dynamic, and indispensable stakeholders in building a climate-resilient Nepal. Therefore, the way forward must be rooted in inclusion, equity, and justice. This involves developing youth-centered adaptation strategies that are evidence-based, participatory, and grounded in intersectionality. It also demands that youth have better access to capacity-building, digital infrastructure, technical support, and sustainable finance, particularly those from marginalized and climate-vulnerable backgrounds. Empowering youth in climate adaptation is not just a strategic necessity; it is a moral and democratic imperative.

# 05.

## Recommendations

**Some of the major recommendations to operationalize youth-centric climate adaptation in Nepal are as follows:**

- i. Institutionalize the youth engagement in climate action: Institutionalize meaningful youth engagement in climate action across all governance levels by strengthening formal and informal bodies, while conducting youth-focused needs assessments using disaggregated data and participatory methods to better capture vulnerabilities and inform evidence-based policymaking.
- ii. Develop youth-tailored programs and policies: Youth-specific programs and policies should be developed to address their unique vulnerabilities and needs, considering community diversity. A bottom-up, contextualized approach with meaningful youth engagement should guide planning, implementation, monitoring, and decision-making.
- iii. Build Youth Capacity and Leadership: Invest in youth-focused capacity-building programs, including green skills, climate literacy, communication, advocacy, entrepreneurship, leadership, and ethics. Provide regular internships, mentorship, and research opportunities to harness youth potential while allocating a dedicated fund to support youth-led initiatives, research, and enterprises in climate resilience and sustainability.
- iv. Concretize the roles of Youths: Recognize youth as co-creators and key stakeholders in climate adaptation, leveraging their skills and creativity for inclusive, effective solutions and ensuring meaningful engagement in planning, implementation, monitoring, and decision-making.
- v. Enhance understanding of the unique vulnerabilities of youth and children: Improve disaggregated data collection and participatory research to better capture the distinct vulnerabilities of youth and children and inform targeted, evidence-based policies and interventions.

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