

## INDIA'S PERFORMANCE IN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND HUNGER

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### **Abstract**

The paper is an attempt to analyse the performance of India in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with special reference to eradication of poverty and hunger. The goal 1(one) of MDGs aims at eradication of poverty and hunger with the target of halving the number of people below poverty line (lived on less than \$1.25 a day) and hunger between 1990 and 2015. India is a signatory to the Millennium Declaration adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2000 and committed to achieve the MDGs of ending poverty and other deprivations. However, home to one-sixth of the world population and fast growing population, poverty remains rampant in India. It has the highest number of extreme poverty in the world. Though, there is decline of poverty in India but still one-fifth of its population live below poverty line. India remains home to one quarter of the world's undernourished population. One in every three kids who are suffering from malnutrition is found in India and one-third of the world's food-insecure people live in India even though India is predicted to achieve its goal of halving hunger. In order to fight poverty and hunger, the government of India takes up schemes and programmes. However, poverty and hunger remain rampant and continue to exist. So, the paper argues that India plays an important role in fulfilling MDGs and in the success of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that has replaced MDGs after 2015 with the aim of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere.

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### **Keywords:**

Millennium Development Goals;  
Poverty;  
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Poverty Eradication in India;  
Sustainable Development Goals.

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## 1. Introduction

India, one of the greatest democracies in the world, is the seventh largest country by area and home to 1.27 billion population (2011 Census) which is one-sixth (around 17 per cent) of the world population and also hosts one-third of the total world's poverty. It is a very diverse country where caste system prevailed. Nearly 75 per cent of the total India's population lived in rural and depend on agriculture. It has the highest number of poverty in the world. One third of the world's 1.2 billion extreme poor lived in India alone in 2010 and has the highest number of under-five deaths in the world. In 2012, over 270 million Indians still trapped in extreme poverty. One quarter of the world's undernourished population, over a third of the world's underweight children, and nearly a third of the world's food-insecure people live in India alone. Based on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report 2014, the majority of people living on less than \$1.25 a day belong to Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. About 40 percent of world people below the poverty line live in South Asia and about 30 percent live in India in 2011 based on Policy Research Report 2015.

The first goal of the MDGs is to half the people below poverty line and hunger between 1990 and 2015. However, about 800 million people still live in extreme poverty and suffer from hunger, over 160 million children under age five have inadequate height for their age due to insufficient food, 57 million children of primary school age are not in school, half of global workers are still working in vulnerable conditions, one in three people (2.4 billion) still use unimproved sanitation facilities in 2015, including 946 million people who still practise open defecation (United Nations: 2015). So, the performance of India in MDGs has great impact in the overall performance of the world. The goals and principles of MDGs are reflected in India's development priorities. They are particularly embodied in the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan economic development in India. The vision of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan reflects a development process which ensures broad-based improvement in the quality of life, especially the poor, Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities and women (Fazal: 2013). Nevertheless, India is still struggling from many deprivations such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy, sanitation, disease and many others which the MDGs sought to overcome. MDGs ended in 2015 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has replaced MDGs of development agendas and aims to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2015. Even though India has half

the number of people below poverty line still there are huge numbers of people below poverty line living less than \$1.25 a day. So, the question is, will India be able to remove poverty in all its forms? What are the issues and challenges India faced in eradicating poverty and hunger? Will the goals of SDGs be achieved without eradicating poverty in India in all its form?

## **2. Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals**

MDGs are the development agendas adopted by the United Nations on September 5, 2000. The declaration has eight developmental goals, 18 targets and 48 measurable indicators to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and women empowerment, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development. MDGs are set to form the core of the international development agenda to measure a country's progress in terms of eradication of poverty and hunger, universal primary education, gender equality and women empowerment and ensuring an equitable human development. It is a time bound goals for global development with its deadline in 2015 i.e. for 15 years. After the expiry of MGDs, SDGs replaced MDGs and target to fulfill its objectives by 2030.

SDGs are the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on, "The future we want" held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012. It is a post-2015 Development Agenda which replaced the MDGs development agenda after its expiry in 2015 and carried forward beyond 2015 to not only substantial reduction of deprivations such as poverty, hunger, etc., but also to end them in a sustainable way. It has 17 goals and 169 targets to achieve within 2030. Its goals include: end poverty in all its forms everywhere, end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all, achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation,

reduce inequality within and among countries, make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all Levels and lastly to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. So, the SDGs aim at poverty eradication and other deprivation, leaving no one behind, while making development economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The SDGs offer major improvement on the performance and achievement of MDGs. According to International Council for Science on 'Review of Targets for the SDGs: The Science Perspective', SDGs addresses barriers to sustainable development that MDGs neglected such as inequality, weak institutional capacity, unsustainable consumption patterns and environmental degradation. The SDGs provides an opportunity to renew and incorporate efforts to meet national and global aspirations within 2030. So, for India the SDGs are an opportunity to eradicate poverty and hunger.

### **3. India's Overall Performance in MDGs**

India's MDGs framework is based on the 2003 United Nations Development Goals (UNDGs) guidelines that recognise 53 indicators (Anant: 2014). India, since its adoption of MDGs in 2001, has made some progress towards reaching the goals but achievement across the Goals varies. India has targeted to achieve maternal mortality by three quarters, control of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, increased forest cover and halved the proportion of population without access to clean drinking water. However, based on Social Watch Report 2014, India is lagging behind in fulfilling majority of the targets. India is lagging behind in goal 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 of eradication of poverty and hunger, universal primary school enrolment and completion and achieving universal youth literacy by 2015, empowering women through wage employment and political participation, child and infant mortality, improving access to sanitation to eliminate open defecation and infant mortality and maternal mortality. However, India is one of the few

countries that have reduced its carbon dioxide emissions in relation to its GDP. India's carbon emission fell from 0.65 kg of carbon dioxide per \$1 of GDP in 1990 to 0.53 kg in 2010.

In the 1990s, India has made some progress on poverty reduction, gender parity in school enrollment, infant and child mortality, sanitation and empowerment of women but the progress is also because of economic liberalisation, privatisation and greater integration. Child remains under-nourished; gender bias exists in higher education; millions of girls remained unschooled even though there is progress on gender parity in school enrolment (Mundle: 2011). Between 1990 and 2012, two billion people worldwide gained access to improved sanitation. But there are still large number of population i.e. 82 per cent, resorting to open defecation live in populous countries of India and Nigeria. At least one member of the 40 per cent rural households in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan, which have a functional toilet, chose open defecation. In these five states alone, 30 per cent of the world's population who defecate in open lived (Sharma: 2014). The National Sample Survey (NSS) 2012 shows that 43.4 per cent of households at all India level had no latrine facilities, and 59.4 per cent and 8.8 per cent households in rural India and urban respectively had no access to sanitation (Social Statistics Division: 2015). It is estimated that to meet the goal on halving the proportion of people without sanitation, 21 million people in India should gain access to toilet (Teltumbde: 2010). However, the percentage of households without sanitation facility is likely to be 47.31 per cent against the target of 38.09 per cent by 2015. So, India would not be able to fulfill the target of halving the numbers of people without sanitation. There is only little progress on maternal health; infant and child mortality rates remain high although there has been universal reduction in it. India ranked 137<sup>th</sup> among 178 countries in 2012 in terms of maternal and child health. India has the highest number of under-five deaths in the world with 1.4 million children dying before age five. India still accounts for 17 per cent of maternal deaths while the global maternal mortality ratio (MMR) dropped by 45 per cent between 1990 and 2013. India targets to bring down maternal mortality to less than 109 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015. And to reduce extreme poverty, the Government of India has adopted schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) which give work for Rs 100 per day for 100 days in a year and adopted principle of *Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas* (Together with All, Development for All), for the development of the country and calling for improved sanitation, health, education, financial

inclusion, security and dignity of all, especially women. The Government is also prioritising improving environmental development with respect to water, air, soil and the biosphere.

The number of people living below the poverty line and child and maternal mortality rates are reducing. However, it is argued that the poverty reduction claims are the debatable measurements and methods for assessment (Jacob: 2010). The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a national policy to universalise primary education, has increased enrolment of students in schools but there is also high increase of the rate of dropouts of students. There is increase in the performance in reduction of HIV/AIDS on one other hand and there is incidence of increase HIV/AIDS on the other hand. So, the quality of achievements of the goals has been questioned and the performance of India is also far from satisfactory.

#### **4. An Overview Of Poverty and Hunger in India**

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon in India. The regions which are mostly inhabited by tribal or rocky or dry and densely populated have more poverty. More than 60 per cent of poverty lives in Southern Bihar, Southern Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Southern Uttar Pradesh and 41-60 per cent of poverty exists in other areas of Bihar, parts of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, inland Maharashtra, northern Tamil Nadu and eastern and central Uttar Pradesh. These regions are tribal inhabitants, semi-arid densely populated and historically neglected areas (Nirupam Bajpai and Sangeeta Goyal: 2004). Since 1990 there is reduction of poverty in India. The percentage of people below the Poverty Line is 45.3 per cent in 1993-94, 37.2 per cent in 2004-05 and 21.9 per cent in 2011-12. During the 20 years from 1983 to 2004-05, there was incidence of rapid decrease of poverty in India. In 2004-05, 28 per cent of people in rural areas and 26 per cent of people in urban areas lived below poverty line which was 47 per cent and 42 per cent in rural and urban in 1983. However, more than 300 million people remained under poverty in 2004-05. Two-third of the world extreme poor lived in five countries viz., India, China, Nigeria, Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2010, and one-third of the 1.2 billion global extreme poor lived in India alone. About 33 per cent of India's population still lives in extreme poverty (less than \$1.25 per person per day). Because of rapid population growth, it is difficult to reduce the number of poverty at a rapid pace. In 2005, around 41.6 per cent people of India lived below poverty line i.e. income below US \$ 1.25. Based on 2011

census, 69 per cent of the total population of India lives in rural areas and the poverty head count ratio 2011-2012 points out that 81 per cent of the poor live in rural India. According to Global Hunger Index (GHI) report, India's hunger index rises from 22.9 per cent in 1996 to 23.7 per cent in 2011. "Based on NSSO Survey on Household Consumer Expenditure 2011-12, the all-India Poverty Head Count Ratio (PHCR) has declined by 15 per cent from 37.2 per cent in 2004-05 to 21.9 per cent in 2011-12. However, still 1 in every 5 persons in India is below the national poverty line" (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Government of India: 2014). Over 270 million Indians trapped in extreme poverty in 2012 (United Nations: 2015). One in every three kids who are suffering from malnutrition lived in India. Around 42 and 58 per cent of the kids below five years of age in India are undernourished and underdeveloped.

## **5. India's Performance in Poverty Eradication and Hunger**

The first target of MDGs is to reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half between 1990 and 2015. The indicators for target 1 are: poverty headcount ratio i.e. proportion of population whose per-capita income is below the national poverty line, poverty gap ratio and the share of the poorest quintile in national consumption. And the target 2 is to halve the proportion of people who are suffering from hunger between 1990 and 2015. The indicator of this target is the prevalence of underweight children under three years of age.

### **5.1. India's Performance in Target 1**

In 1990, the all India Poverty Head Count Ratio (PHCR) is 47.8 per cent. To meet the goal of halving the numbers of poverty, India has to reduce the PHCR level to 23.9 per cent by 2015. Globally, during the year from 1990 to 2015, the number of people living in extreme poverty has declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion to 836 million and the proportion of undernourished people in the developing regions has fallen by almost half since 1990, from 23.3 per cent in 1990–1992 to 12.9 per cent in 2014–2016 (United Nations: 2015). In India, during the mid 2000s there was fast decrease of poverty and this helped India half the incidence of poverty since 1990. Based on Tendulkar Committee Recommendations, the Planning Commission of India estimated the all-India poverty ratio at 29.8 per cent for the year 2009-10. In the same period the rural poverty declined from 41.8 to 33.8 per cent and urban poverty from 25.7 to 20.9 per cent. In rural areas, the highest level of poverty was reported to be STs with 47.4

per cent followed by the SCs with 42.3 per cent while in the urban areas the SCs are the poorest with 34.1 per cent followed by STs with 30.4 per cent .Official poverty estimates released by Planning Commission also reveals that Poverty Head Count Ratio (PHCR) has declined by 15 per cent from 37.2 per cent in 2004-05 to 21.9 per cent in 2011-12. There is significant decline in poverty ratio in both rural and urban areas during this period as the rural PHCR declined by 16 per cent from 41.8 per cent to 25.7 per cent and urban poverty decline by 12 per cent from 25.7 per cent to 13.7 per cent. India has halved its extreme poverty from 49.4 per cent in 1994 to 24.7 per cent in 2011. By 2011-2012, India has reduced the people below poverty line to 21 per cent. So, India has achieved the target of reducing the numbers of people below poverty by half. However, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation argued that one-fifth of the Indian population is still below poverty line in 2014. Rising inequality and divergent growth experiences have led to increase poverty in India (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: 2015). Even though India has halved the numbers of people below poverty line, lots of poverty still remained, and hold maximum numbers of poverty in the world and over 270 million Indians are under extreme poverty in 2012. There is also increase of new poverty in India with its population growth. The fast population growth in India makes it difficult to reduce poverty even though India has halved the numbers of people below poverty line from 1990.

**Table 1.** Population of India (2017 and historical)

Year	Popula tion	Year ly % Cha nge	Yearly Chang e	Migr ants (net)	Med ian Age	Ferti lity Rate	Dens ity (P/K m <sup>2</sup> )	Urb an Pop %	Urba n Popul ation	Countr y's Share of World Pop	World Popul ation	Indi a Glo bal Ran k
2017	1,342,512,706	1.18%	15,711,130	-377,200	26.9	2.45	452	32.8%	439,801,466	17.86%	7,515,284,153	2
2016	1,326,801,576	1.2%	15,751,049	-377,200	26.9	2.45	446	32.4%	429,802,441	17.85%	7,432,663,275	2
2015	1,311,050,527	1.27%	16,013,205	-519,600	27	2.48	441	32%	419,938,867	17.84%	7,349,472,099	2



2010	1,230,984,504	1.47 %	17,331,642	- 565,900	25	2.8	414	30.3 %	372,901,884	17.76 %	6,929,725,043	2
2005	1,144,326,293	1.67 %	18,169,044	- 441,300	24	3.14	385	28.8 %	329,516,783	17.55 %	6,519,635,850	2
2000	1,053,481,072	1.86 %	18,521,218	- 143,400	23	3.48	354	27.4 %	288,365,219	17.2 %	6,126,622,121	2
1995	960,874,982	1.99 %	18,054,641	- 135,600	22	3.83	323	26.5 %	254,314,016	16.75 %	5,735,123,084	2
1990	870,601,776	2.17 %	17,703,330	9,000	21	4.27	293	25.5 %	221,979,229	16.4 %	5,309,667,699	2

Source: Worldometers (www.Worldometers.info) taken from Worldometers, <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population/>

## 5.2. India's Performance in Target 2

Percentage of underweight children is the main indicator for this target 2 of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger between 1990 and 2015. Based on Social Statistics Division, India country Report 2015 on "Millennium Development Goals", the proportion of underweight children below 3 years in 1990 is 52 per cent. To meet the MDGs by 2015 the proportion of under-weight children should decrease to 26 per cent. India has a huge amount of underweight children at the initial stage so it makes India difficult to half the number of underweight children. Reduction of hungry children in a country where the underweight children at initial stage is high will be more difficult to achieve than the country with a lower initial incidence of underweight children. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) shows that, the proportion of underweight children below 3 years declined from 43 per cent in 1998-99 to 40 per cent in 2005-06. However, the rate of declining is very slow and with this rate India is difficult to achieve the goal of halving the proportion of underweight children below 3 years by 2015. Some research found out that in 2015, more than 40 per cent of India's children will suffer from hunger and undernourishment and in the poorest states the incidence of hunger, underweight children remain as high as 50 to 65 per cent. According to United Nations Report on "India and the

MDGs, 2015”, one quarter of the world’s undernourished population, over a third of the world’s underweight children and a third of the world’s food-insecure people lived in India.

The government of India takes up schemes and programs to reduce poverty and hunger for the past few decades. The government of India launched Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana (PMGY), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) launched in September 2005 and came into effect in 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006, National Food Security Mission (NFSM) launched in October 2007, Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) / National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) launched in 24<sup>th</sup> September 2013 (Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY)), Indira Awaas Yojana (IAJ), Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) launched in 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2005, Annapurna Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) launched in 1975, Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY), Swarn Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), National Food for Work Programme (NFWP), etc. However, poverty and hunger remain rampant in India and higher in rural India i.e. twice that of urban areas, and higher among STs, SCs and religious minorities such as Muslims.

## **6. Issues and Challenges**

There are many factors that act as hurdles to the performance of India in achieving MDGs. One of the important factors is the huge and faster population growth. India is a country with huge population and the population is growing faster than the economy. India has halved the people below poverty but huge chunk of population remain poor. As the number of people at the initial stage is high, it becomes difficult to remove hunger. Apparently, large number of people suffering from deprivations such as poverty and hunger, without proper sanitation continue in India. Corruption is also one of the main factors challenging India in achieving MDGs. Because of corruption, most of the funds that are sanctioned for the development are not reaching to the targeted people and increase the imbalances between rich and poor. Only few funds reached to the poor and the funds did not reach to the really needed poor people. Corruption in India remains high and become an obstacle in the development process. Caste system is also another obstacle. It reflects in policy formulation and development in most of the part is caste based. People belonging to SCs and STs are lagging behind in terms of education and health sectors and

are poorer than higher caste. These people are neglected and marginalised. Development mostly concentrated on the upper caste group and thus led to huge development gap between the upper and the lower caste. United Nations in 'India and the MDGs: Towards a Sustainable Future for All', points out five factors that influence India's performance and attainment of MDGs: broad-based and employment-creating economic growth, adequate allocation of resources towards the social sectors and basic services, strong design and effective implementation of MDG related programs, creating basic infrastructure for better access and delivery of MDG related services and women's empowerment.

Social Watch Report 2014 gives three main factors for the shortfalls in achieving MDGs, namely, inadequate funding, inappropriate administration and ignorance of policy and governance issues. In India there is a drop of total expenditure for family welfare, health, water and sanitation. The expenditures have been declining from 9.10 per cent to 7.01 per cent in 2000-2001 to 9.80 per cent to 7.73 per cent in 2012-2013. During the same period, social welfare and nutrition has declined from 5.07 per cent to 4.75 per cent. So, inadequate funding leads to slow performance of India in MDGs. The state governments are not getting adequate resources and do not have freedom to mobilise funds from the international sources and market to address social sector needs. The central government on the other hand is controlling the state government through centrally sponsored schemes impacted on the performance of India in MDGs. There are other problems such as leakage, misappropriation of funds and lack of inclusiveness in the developmental model. The government is promoting non-inclusive growth instead of enabling the people to acquire basic needs such as food, water, sanitation and health care (Bhaskara: 2014). India's growth is also not accompanied with development. Lack of job opportunity is another alarm for the fall of India's performance in MDGs. Limited employment generation in spite of high growth has slowed India's performance in poverty and hunger eradication; impacted on health and sanitation. In India there is not much job opportunity leading to discouragement of school enrollment. After getting higher education, there is not surety of getting job. The formal sector employs only 12 per cent to 13 per cent of the country's workforce. The remaining 88 to 87 per cent rely on agriculture and informal sectors with uncertain earnings. Employment in the formal sector has declined even though there is economy growth from 28.113 million in 1999 to 27.549 million in 2008. Divergent growth experiences

and increasing inequality on the other hand contribute to the concentration of poverty in poorer states. Wrong policy implementation is also affecting India's performance in MDGs. Lack of access to food and distribution system contributes to the increase of hunger and malnutrition in India. Lack of infrastructure development is another challenge in fulfilling the MDGs. In India, there is inadequate road connectivity, health facilities, electricity and drinking water and sanitation facility are very poor. It is therefore necessary that the basic infrastructure should be developed first to meet the development agendas.

## **7. Conclusion**

The government of India launched various schemes, policies and programmes to achieve the MDGs. However, India could not achieve most of the goals. There are various factors that hamper the performance of India in achieving MDGs such as caste, corruption, misappropriation of funds, lack of good governance, unawareness, huge population, fast population growth, etc. Alleviation of poverty is the first priority for India and to achieve MDGs the government of India launched anti-poverty programs and other schemes but huge number of poverty still remains in India despite many schemes and programs. India has achieved the goal of halving extreme poverty. However, there is increasing number of people below poverty line and large number of poverty still exists. Globally, the goal of MDGs in halving the number of people living below poverty line has achieved. It is right to say that India has achieved the goal of halving the people living below poverty line but failed to achieve the target of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger between 1990 and 2015. There is still huge number of poor and hunger remains and holds maximum number worldwide. One-sixth of the total population and one-third of the world's poor lived in India alone. Over 270 millions in 2012 are under extreme poverty. MDGs has ended but India could not achieve most of the goals. SDGs, the post-2015 development agenda, has replaced the MGDs and aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms in a sustainable way. In fulfilling the SDGs, India holds an important weight because of its huge population. SDGs provide an opportunity to end poverty in India and without India achieving SDGs' targets, SDGs cannot be achieved globally.

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