



A Study On Fisherwomen Co-Operative Societies In Visakhapatnam District Of Andhra Pradesh, India.

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Abstract:

The fisheries sector in coastal regions like Andhra Pradesh, India, holds immense importance for livelihoods, particularly for fisherwomen who often remain marginalized. Fisherwomen cooperative societies have emerged as vehicles for empowering these women and fostering sustainable fishing practices. However, challenges impede their effectiveness and sustainability. This study delves into the fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh, examining their organizational structures, socio-economic impacts, promotion of sustainable practices, and encountered challenges. Through surveys and data analysis, the study assesses employment opportunities, nature of activities, and problems faced by these societies. Findings reveal limited direct employment opportunities but potential for indirect roles in marketing and exports. While all societies engage in fish cultivation, marketing challenges persist due to reliance on middlemen and limited awareness. Production hurdles include seed quality and technical knowledge, while financial constraints hinder growth. Lack of infrastructure affects marketing efforts, necessitating interventions like cold storage and transportation facilities. Addressing these challenges through policy initiatives can enhance the resilience and sustainability of fisherwomen cooperative societies, contributing to the socio-economic development of fishing communities and broader society.

Keywords: Fisherwomen, co-operative societies, functioning of Fisherwomen co-operative societies, Problems in the Cooperative Societies etc.

Introduction:

The fisheries sector in India, particularly in coastal regions like Andhra Pradesh, plays a pivotal role in providing livelihoods to millions of people. Among these, fisherwomen constitute a significant yet often overlooked segment, actively engaged in various aspects of the fishing value chain. Recognizing the importance of empowering fisherwomen and promoting sustainable fishing practices, the establishment of fisherwomen cooperative societies has emerged as a promising strategy.

Visakhapatnam District, situated along the eastern coast of Andhra Pradesh, boasts a rich maritime heritage and a vibrant fishing industry. In recent years, the district has witnessed the formation and growth of several fisherwomen cooperative societies, aiming to enhance the socio-economic status of women involved in fisheries activities. These cooperative societies serve as platforms for collective action, enabling women to pool resources, access markets, and advocate for their rights within the fisheries sector.

However, despite their potential, fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam District face various challenges and constraints that hinder their effectiveness and sustainability. Issues such as limited access to credit, inadequate infrastructure, gender disparities in decision-making and environmental degradation pose significant obstacles to the realization of their objectives. Understanding the dynamics of these cooperative societies, their organizational structures, impacts, challenges, and opportunities is crucial for devising targeted interventions and policy initiatives to support their growth and development.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the phenomenon of fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh, with a focus on understanding their organizational structures, socio-economic impacts, promotion of sustainable fishing practices, and the challenges they encounter.

Background of the study

Visakhapatnam District, located in the coastal region of Andhra Pradesh, is known for its vibrant fisheries sector, with fisherwomen constituting a significant workforce. Despite their integral role, fisherwomen often face socio-economic challenges, including limited access to resources and marginalization within the fishing communities. Against this backdrop, the study aims to explore the dynamics of fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam District.

Scope of the study

The scope of this study on fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam encompasses an examination of the roles, challenges, and impacts of cooperative societies on fisherwomen's livelihoods and empowerment in the region. The study will investigate the organizational functioning, problems and effectiveness of these cooperative societies in providing financial, social, and market support to fisherwomen.

Need and Importance of the study

The study on fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam is imperative for empowering fisherwomen, promoting sustainable fisheries management, advancing gender equality, and informing policy support. By investigating these cooperative societies, the research aims to understand their role in providing fisherwomen with access to resources, market opportunities, and social networks, thus enhancing their livelihoods and decision-making power.

Review of Literature

1. **Gopal, Hapke and Edwin (2023)** in their study highlight the transformative impact of commercial development and technological advancements on fish food systems across the Global South, with significant repercussions for the livelihoods of small-scale producers and food security among vulnerable populations. Emphasizing the understudied aspect of social relations within these transformations, particularly in the context of the ring seine fishery in Kerala, India, the authors employ feminist studies of gender and technology and feminist commodity chain analysis to investigate these dynamics. They find that while traditional labor arrangements persist, increased competition and differentiation among fishermen, alongside changes in processing, distribution, and trade, have reshaped women's economic roles within the fishery. Despite efforts to intervene in governance structures at various levels to address long-term profitability and sustainability concerns, women, disproportionately impacted by these changes, face challenges accessing fish resources for post-harvest activities, such as marketing and fish drying.
2. **Kavya Shibu and Amrutha R Krishnan (2022)** describe two prominent FAD (Fish Aggregating Device) assisted fishing practices in Kerala: Padal fishing in backwaters and Kolachel Fishery targeting squids in marine waters. These methods involve the deployment of artificial structures to create habitats conducive for fish feeding and breeding. However, the concentration of adult fish around FADs leads to overfishing of juvenile fish, significantly depleting fish populations. Consequently, the non-selective Kolachel fishing practice has been banned in Karnataka. In response, a modified version of Padal fishing, serving as a fish sanctuary, has been implemented to replenish depleted fish stocks.
3. According to **Plamoottil and Win (2017)** successful fishing in the wild relies heavily on understanding the behavioral patterns of fish and the ecological conditions of their habitats, including topography. Traditional fishermen have developed numerous indigenous fishing gears based on this knowledge acquired from nature. These indigenous fishing gears are crafted with a deep understanding of local ecosystems and fish behavior, allowing fishermen to effectively catch fish while minimizing environmental impact. Examples of such indigenous gears may include handcrafted traps, nets, and hooks, tailored to suit specific fish species and habitats. Through generations of experiential learning and adaptation, these traditional fishing methods have not only sustained livelihoods but also contributed to the conservation of natural resources by promoting sustainable fishing practices.
4. **Nithya and Sujathkumar (2015)** an investigation was carried out to examine the socio-economic status of fishermen in the Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi districts of Tamil Nadu, India. The study uncovered significant demographic and occupational characteristics within the fishing community. Notably, 41.68 percent of individuals belonged to the middle-aged category, while 51.67 percent had attained only primary-level education. Impressively, a vast majority (93.3 percent) possessed over 15 years of experience in the fishing industry. Trawlers emerged as the primary fishing vessels for more than 50 percent of the fishermen surveyed. Additionally, a striking 90 percent relied solely on fishing as their primary source of income, with 25 percent reporting annual earnings between Rs. 1.5 and 2 lakh. Most fishermen exhibited a moderate level of exposure to information sources, engagement with the extension system, economic motivation, and a scientific orientation.
5. **Kanaga and Sivasankar, (2015)** in their 2015 study, Kanaga and Sivasankar investigated the challenges faced by fishermen in Therespuram engaged in marine fisheries. Their findings highlighted several key obstacles, including high fishing expenses, issues with co-workers, and operational inefficiencies. Particularly during lean periods, fishermen struggled with poverty, unemployment, and limited access to credit, largely due to debts incurred from acquiring fishing vessels and equipment. The study suggests that government intervention providing alternative employment opportunities could alleviate fishing pressures, reduce poverty, and address financial burdens. Moreover, establishing effective cooperative societies and fishermen's associations is recommended to improve working conditions and foster a more harmonious environment for the fishermen.

Statement of the problem

The fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam represent a critical aspect of socio-economic empowerment and community development. However, despite their potential significance, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the functioning, challenges, and effectiveness of these cooperative societies. This study aims to study issues faced by fisherwomen cooperative societies in Visakhapatnam, including employment opportunities, Nature of activities and problems facing by the Fisherwomen

Objectives

1. To assess the functioning of Fisherwomen co-operative societies in Visakhapatnam.
 - i) To study the Employment Opportunities In Fisherwomen Co Operative societies
 - ii) To Study the Nature of Activity Co-Operative Societies
 - iii) To know the Problems In The Cooperative Societies

Research Methodology

Study Area: The research focuses on Anakapalli district of Andhra Pradesh, encompassing six mandals: Anakapally, Atchuthapuram, Mungapaka, Chodavaram, Rambilli, and K. Kotapadu. One village was selected from each mandal for detailed investigation.

Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this study.

Primary Data: Primary data was collected through surveys conducted among fisherwomen in selected villages.

Secondary Data: Secondary data was gathered from various sources, including apex-level federations, the Directorate of Fisheries, district-level Fishery Cooperative Federation, and specific Fishery Women Cooperative Societies in Visakhapatnam district.

Sample Size and Selection

Sample Size: The total sample size comprised 300 fisherwomen, One village was chosen from each mandal in the district, resulting in a total of six villages for data collection. The selected villages were: Mettapalem (Anakapally mandal), Pudimadaka (Atchuthapuram mandal), Vadrappalli (Mungapaka mandal), Laxmipuram (Chodavaram mandal), Kothapatnam (Rambilli mandal), and Jjanggalayacheruvu (K. Kotapadu mandal). In each village, 50 respondents who were members of fisherwomen cooperatives were purposively selected for inclusion in the study.

Sampling Method: A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select respondents.

Data Analysis: The collected data underwent analysis using statistical measures such as averages and percentages. Averages were calculated to understand central tendencies, while percentages were used for comparative analysis and to quantify responses.

Limitations

- The study was limited to a specific geographic area and may not be generalizable to other regions.
- There might be potential biases in self-reported data collected through surveys.
- External factors such as weather conditions or socio-political events could have influenced the data collected.

Data Analysis

1. Employment Opportunities

TABLE – 1.1 Details of Employment Opportunities in Fisherwomen Co-Operative Societies

Sl. No.	No of societies	Employment	Percentage
1	K. Kotapadu	1	3.33
2	Rambilli	1	3.33
3	Munagapaka	1	3.33
4	Chodavaram	1	3.33
5	Anakapally	1	3.33
6	Achutapuram	1	3.33
	Total	06	20

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.1 the data obtained reveals that in majority of the societies employment situation in addition to the direct fish catching activities among the fishing community as is observed through the field study is negligible since most of the activities are being carried out only with the members of the fisherwomen families. The management and maintenance of records of the fishing co-operative societies are being manned mostly by the educated members of the fisherwomen families without the involvement of any outsider. Only in case of few societies (6) i.e. 20 percent for maintaining society records driving four wheelers, watchman they have appointed outside persons paying them monthly wages. This aspect may be considered a major drawback in this family-oriented avocation since the scope for generating additional direct employment opportunities being very limited. However it cannot be denied there is a possibility of indirect employment opportunity in areas like marketing, exports, transport segments, fish feed preparation, office maintenance etc. It is suggested that the fisherwomen cooperative can ponder upon in this direction for reaping long term benefits for the fishermen community.

2. NATURE OF ACTIVITY

Table – 2.1 Details of the Nature of Activity Of Fisherwomen Co-Operative Societies

Sl. No.	Particulars	No. of FWCS	Percentage
1	Fish cultivation	72	100.00
2	Direct Marketing	24 Middlemen 06	100
3	Providing credit	06	20.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 2.1 projects the nature of activities undertaken by fisherwomen co-operative societies in the study area. From the table it is evident that main activities of fisherwomen co-operative societies were namely fish cultivation, marketing of fish and providing credit to the society's members. All the societies surveyed were found to be totally involved in fish cultivation which distinctly throws light on the fact that the societies were responsible for the purchase of fish seeds and its cultivation. Apart from fish cultivation activity 24 fisherwomen co-operative societies were also marketing their fish catch without the help of middlemen whereas six societies i.e., 1/5 of societies were dependent on middlemen services for marketing of fish catch. This may be due to the lack of awareness of the members managing the societies to the right channel for direct marketing of fish catches and hence they were forced to rely on middlemen for their marketing needs. Such dependency on others can have a direct impact on the erosion of profitability and exploitation of fisherwomen community. Further it can be observed that only six societies were lending credit to their members from the reserve fund of the societies. Lending of such credit facilities to its members is a healthy practice since most of them are from poor background with low means of personal resources. Other fishing societies should also emulate such positive practices to all its members in conjunction with banks and other lending institutions. This will go a long way in augmenting fishing operations and thereby help the fishing community to reap the benefits extended. From the analysis it is clear that the main activities of the societies were mainly fish cultivation i.e., the type of fish to be produced and its marketing. It was also observed that the fish cultivation varied between societies depending on the sources of water resources availability.

Table 2.2 Details of Utilization of Facilities through Co-Operative Societies

Sl. No.	Facilities available	Respondents	Percentage
1	Traditional crafts	163	54.33
2	Health package	00	00.00
3	Supply of fish crafts and gears	85	28.33
4	Group insurance scheme	00	00.00
5	Fisheries training and extension	52	17.33
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 2.2 the success of the fisherwomen co-operatives ultimately depends on the efficiency, efforts, commitment and involvement of the fisherwomen in their activity. The fisherwomen co-operatives carry out and monitor the fishing activity of the member fisherwomen so as to maximize production and profitability to strengthen the financial base of the members and the co-operatives. The progress and prosperity of the fisherwomen co-operatives very much depend on the efficiency of fisherwomen. In view of the importance of fisherwomen's contribution to progress they should be encouraged and provided with all requisites covering financial, physical, technical and scientific support inputs etc., so as to maximize production and profitability to strengthen the financial base and business acumen of the fisherwomen community and their co-operative societies.

In order to ascertain the facilities provided to fisherwomen through fisherwomen co-operative societies a thorough analysis would be essential of the facilities available. From the table it is evident that majority of the societies 54.33 per cent were providing support in traditional crafts, while 28.33 per cent were supplying fish crafts and gears. It was also noticed that 52 societies are instrumental in providing training and extension services to its members. Such provision of training and extension services to its members by the fisherwomen co-operative societies is a welcome feature to boost the overall efficiency of the fisherwomen involved in fishing activities. It is also disheartening to note none of the societies had any group insurance scheme or health packages for its members. The absence of any such schemes shall be highly detrimental to the fisherwomen involved in fishing ventures in view of the risky nature of fishing activities and because of uncertainties involved in such activity it should be made mandatory since these individuals should be healthy and be able to tide over any risks of natural calamity involved in their activity by providing group insurance scheme for the benefit of these fisherwomen and fishing community in general.

3. Problems in The Organization of The Co-Operatives Societies

The fisherwomen co-operatives face many problems in their organization, which have hindered the growth and development of their business. As one of the principal purpose of this study is to enquire into the problems of fisherwomen co-operatives in the area of financial, production, and marketing, simple ranking method was adopted, based on the responses obtained during the field study and the fisherwomen co-operatives societies were asked to rank the reasons cited by them as most important, important, somewhat important and unimportant. Most important was given a scale value of 5, important 4, somewhat important 3, and unimportant 2, In order to study the relative importance given to the reasons, for each reason, the scale values were multiplied by the corresponding frequencies (number of societies) and summed up in the district.

Table 3.1 Problems Faced By The Sample Fisherwomen Co-Operative Societies

Problems	Most important	important	Somewhat important	Un important	Total	Rank
Production	10	14	8	6	38	1
Marketing	7	6	4	-	17	3
Finance	5	5	3	1	12	2
Miscellaneous	-	3	2	-	5	4
Total					72	

Source: Primary Data

Table 3.1 shows that among the problems specified by the fisherwomen co-operatives, the problem of production is ranked first by thirteen co-operatives while the financial and marketing problems occupying the second and third place respectively. Apart from these two societies were found facing miscellaneous problems in view of disunity among members of these societies and group clashes prevailing among them.

It is interesting to note that among the fisherwomen co-operatives in Visakhapatnam district only a few fisherwomen co-operative societies are seen to be facing the problem of marketing due to lack of awareness and proper means to market their fish catches on their own. Hence these societies are dependent on as the Andhra Pradesh fisherwomen co-operative societies (AFCOF) which is expected to purchase their entire produce. It is reported by the co-operatives that the AFCOF is not only purchasing their entire produce of fish catches of the co-operatives regularly but were also not delaying the payment for the fish sold to it.

Table 3.2 Problems of Production Faced By the Sample Fisherwomen Co-Operative Societies

Reasons	MI	I	SWI	UI	Total	Rank
Non- availability of quality seeds	3	2	1	1	07	1
Low quality of feed	2	1	1	-	04	2
Lack of technical knowledge	1	1	-	-	02	3
Floods and cyclones	-	-	-	-	-	4
Total					13	

MI- Most Important, I-Important, SWI- Somewhat Important, UI- Un-Important

Source: Primary Data

Table 3.2 reveals that as one of the main purpose of this study is to enquire into the problems of fisherwomen co-operatives in the specific area of production pertaining to the study is being analyzed with respect to the aspects of non-availability of quality seeds, low quality of feed, lack of technical knowledge and floods and cyclones. Simple ranking method was adopted. During the field study the sample fisherwomen co-operatives societies were asked to rank the reasons on the above score as most important, important, somewhat important, and unimportant. Most important was given a scale value of 4, important 3, somewhat important 2, and unimportant 1, in order to examine the relative importance given to the reasons, for each of the reason; the scale values were multiplied by the corresponding frequencies (number of societies) and summed up in the district. It may be observed from the above table that among the problems non availability of quality seed is ranked first, the problem of low quality of feed and lack of technical knowledge are ranked as second and third. Respectively. There has been no problem pertaining to Floods and cyclones in this study area as the sample respondents were commonly using traditional crafts and gears and that too they were

confined only to inland fishing the problems cited are an obstacle to the co-operatives to improve the quantum of fish production of the co-operatives. From the above it is quite clear that the major problems in FWCS's are no availability of quality seed, low quality of feed and lack of technical knowledge which are responsible for the decrease in production of fish entivation in Visakhapatnam district. It is therefore suggested that the government should ensure supply of reliable fish seeds and quality fish feed to the fisherwomen co-operative societies in the study area in order to enhance their overall fish production and for ensuing its sustainability.

Table 3.3 Financial Problems Faced by the Sample Fisherwomen co-Operative Societies

Sl. No.	Reasons	Particulars of fisherwomen co-operative societies	Percentage
1.	Non- availability of required finance	04	50.00
2.	Lack of financial support from commercial and co-operative banks	02	25.00
3.	Lack of direct finance from government	--	00
4.	Shortage own funds	02	25.00
	Total	08	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 3.3 examine the financial problems of fisherwomen co- operatives in the study area with respect to non-availability of required finance, lack of financial support from commercial and co-operative banks, lack of direct finance from government and shortage of the required own funds information was elicited from the sample fishermen co-operative societies. From the responses obtained it was evident. That the main sources of finance for the sample fisherwomen co-operatives were their own funds, government contribution and finances provided by banks. As the involvement of fisherwomen in the co-operatives is also not much encouraging, funds by way of share capital are highly limited and negligible. The government financial contribution to these societies is also limited leaving the co-operatives to depend on their own funds. Further obtaining loan from banks is also not that very much helpful to them, as the banks often insist that the fisherwomen co- operatives submit the details of their financial strength. Unfortunately, the fisherwomen co-operatives have not been able to do so because their financial soundness is questionable. Hence as long as the co-operatives do not have financial soundness, it is not possible to raise funds from commercial banks. From the table it is evident that 8 societies are seen to be facing financial problems due to lack of financial support from banks, government or their own funds and these have been hindering the development of these fisherwomen co-operative societies in Visakhapatnam district. Until and unless the government as a matter of policy extends liberal finance to them, these co- operatives cannot flourish and be able to reap the benefits of profitability and sustainability in their fishing endeavours.

Table 3.4 Marketing Problems Faced By the Sample Fisherwomen Co-Operative Societies

Sl.No	Market particulars	No. of FWCS	Percentage
1	Lack of adequate transport facilities	03	50.00
2	Problem of storage facilities	02	33.33
3	Price instability	01	16.66
4	Lack of demand	--	--
	Total	06	100

Source: Primary Data

From the Table 3.4 it is evident that six societies were facing mainly problems related to marketing. Of these inadequate transport facilities account for 3(50) percent and storage facilities 2(33.33) percent and price instability 1 (16.66) percent. It is of interest to note that though there is no lack of demand for fish yet the societies are facing the problem to dispose their catch at a reasonable price. This is basically due to lack of storage facilities and fish being a perishable product had to be disposed off in a compelling manner at the going price in the market which is often at a lower price than the normal price range so also sometimes due to excess fish catch supply being greater than demand the fisherwomen are forced to sell their catch at a lower price. Hence it is suggested that the societies should take initiatives or the

government should take necessary policy initiatives for providing cold storage and transportation facilities so as to enable the fisherwomen to market their fish catches at a fairly good price range and thereby earn a better income. From the foregoing analysis for themselves it can be clearly inferred that the main problems faced by Fisherwomen Co-operative Societies in the study area are namely, production, financial and marketing. It should also be noted that societies sometimes might face multiple problems but in this analysis the societies were specifically asked to report the main problems faced by them so as to identify the specific reasons related to their problems and suggest suitable remedial measures to mitigate or minimize such problems that come in the way of reaping higher profits.

Table 3.5 Problems of Respondents In Fishing Avocation

Sl. No.	Difficulties	FWCS	Percentage
1.	Non- availability quality seed	95	31.66
2.	Lack of information on market prices	57	19.00
3.	Scanty financial resources	35	11.66
4.	Lack of required and timely help from the governments and banks	25	8.33
5.	Inefficient management of co-operatives	9	3.00
6.	Lack of marketing facilities	26	8.66
7.	Lack of modern crafts	31	10.33
8.	Dependence on traditional fishing crafts	10	3.33
9.	Lack of infrastructure	12	4.00
	Total	300	100.00

Source: Primary Data

Table 3.5 exhibits the problems envisaged by the sample respondents of Fisherwomen Co-operative Societies in fish cultivation. From the table it is evident that 31.66 percent i.e., nearly 1/3rd of respondents viewed that lack of quality fish seeds as a major problem while lack of information on market prices and marketing has emerged as other significant problems being stated by 27.66 percent of the sample respondents and further scanty financial resources 11.66 percent lack of modern crafts and required and timely help from government and banks were also reported by 10.33 percent and 8.33 percent of the respondents respectively, while less than five percent each have stated other problems like lack of infrastructure, traditional fishing crafts and inefficient management of fisherwomen co-operatives.

Major Findings

1. Only 20% of societies hire outsiders for specific tasks like record maintenance, driving, and security.
2. Limited scope for direct employment but potential for indirect opportunities in marketing, exports, etc.
3. All surveyed societies are involved in fish cultivation, with varying levels of involvement in direct marketing (80% without middlemen).
4. Only a few societies offer credit facilities to members, which is beneficial for those from low-income backgrounds.
5. Majority provide support in traditional crafts (54.33%) and training services (52%).
6. Lack of awareness and proper marketing channels lead some societies to rely on external buyers.
7. Major production challenges include availability of quality seeds, feed quality, and lack of technical knowledge.
8. Lack of transport and storage facilities impact marketing efforts.
9. Excess supply sometimes forces societies to sell at lower prices.
10. Cold storage and transportation facilities suggested for better market access and pricing.
11. Production, financial, and marketing challenges identified as primary issues.
12. Lack of quality fish seeds, market information, and financial resources are significant concerns.

Conclusions

The examination of fisherwomen co-operatives reveals a complex landscape characterized by familial involvement, limited direct employment opportunities, and a heavy reliance on traditional methods of fishing. While these co-operatives play a vital role in fish cultivation, marketing, and providing credit to members, they face numerous challenges that impede their progress and sustainability.

One of the key challenges is the lack of awareness or access to direct marketing channels, leading some societies to depend on middlemen for fish marketing. This not only reduces profitability but also highlights the need for capacity-building initiatives to empower fisherwomen with the knowledge and resources to engage in direct marketing.

Financial constraints further hinder the growth of these co-operatives, with limited access to external funding sources such as commercial banks or government support. This underscores the importance of policy interventions to provide adequate financial assistance and infrastructure support to enhance productivity and profitability.

Moreover, the absence of group insurance schemes or health packages leaves fisherwomen vulnerable to the risks associated with fishing activities. Addressing these gaps in support services is essential to ensure the well-being and security of fisherwomen and their families. While fisherwomen co-operatives demonstrate resilience and commitment, addressing the identified challenges is crucial for their long-term success and sustainability. By providing targeted support in areas such as marketing, finance, and healthcare, policymakers can empower fisherwomen to thrive, thereby contributing to the economic development of fishing communities and the broader society.

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