

# Women's Socio-Cultural Resilience and Leadership Progression: A Case of West Pokot Sub County, West Pokot County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

In the contemporary global context, the issue of women's equal participation in leadership roles remains pertinent. Despite positive strides in recent years, women remain underrepresented, especially in top leadership positions. This may be due to socio-cultural beliefs. Limited research has been conducted on women's leadership and socio-cultural resilience and leadership progression, specifically within West Pokot Sub County. Therefore, the study's main objective was to examine women's socio-cultural resilience and Leadership Progression in West Pokot sub county, West Pokot County, Kenya. Intersectionality theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Resilience theory by Michael Rutter (1986) theories grounded this study. This study used descriptive exploratory research design. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect the primary data from the respondents. The sample size comprised 387 community women and 12 community women group leaders in West Pokot sub-county; hence the total sample size was 399 respondents. The general sample size was divided into two groups (community-women and women group leaders) through stratified sampling. Then the community women were selected through a simple random sampling technique while the women group leaders were selected through purposive sampling technique. To facilitate data collection, necessary permissions were obtained from the Director of Post Graduate Tharaka University, Tharaka University Ethics Committee and NACOSTI. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 28.0 and presented through tables and pie charts while qualitative data was organized thematically and presented narratively. The study established that though there is an improvement in women's leadership progression, there are still cultural barriers that include stereotypes, lack of education for girls, traditional gender roles, and patriarchy that hinder women progression in leadership. Further results have shown that socio-cultural resilience had each statistically significant effect on women's leadership progression ( $\beta = 0.504$ ). It is recommended that the government and other stakeholders create awareness and develop policies that advocate and foster gender inclusivity in all matters including education.

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural, resillience, leadership, leadership progression, empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

The world's socio- economic and political progress depend on women empowerment and progression in leadership; a country cannot advance if its women are highly disempowered by socio-cultural and economic barriers (Hasin, et al, 2018). Female equality often entails encouraging them to be financially independent, to have high self-esteem, to be self-sufficient, to have the ability to face socio- cultural challenges, to encourage active engagement in socio-cultural and economic development activities, and to live freely just like their male counterparts. Many reasons contribute to women's disempowerment and lack of leadership progression including violence, illiteracy, health problems, unequal educational chances, and low socio-cultural progress (Mandal, 2018). In the current world, the need to discuss women's rights and their equal participation in professional life remains significant. Many developing countries have launched projects to overcome these barriers to women leaership progression and improve sustainable development by empowering women. Despite decades of insightful research and the positive developments seen in recent years, women are still underrepresented, especially in leading management positions (Glass et al, 2019).

In North America, socio cultural and societal norms play a significant role in shaping women's economic, political and socio-cultural resilience. While some socio-cultural beliefs and practices may provide sources of strength and support, others may reinforce gender inequalities and limit women's Progression (Higgins, 2023). Research done in the United States (US) by Hannon (2023) shows how socio-cultural factors influence women's ability to cope with adversity and navigate systems of power and oppression. Many women around the world face experiences of trauma and violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and war-related trauma.

In Asia, the experience of women entrepreneurs sharpens their leadership approaches, the obstacles they face, and their tenacity. The significance of Socio-Cultural resilience in overcoming challenges and attaining success using surveys and interviews with women entrepreneurs, (Li Wei 2020). Empowering Women: Strategies for Leadership Progression in West Asia, Initiatives aimed at promoting women's education, workforce participation and political representation, as well as strategies for overcoming socio-cultural resilience and fostering an inclusive environment for women leaders in West Asia. This promoted women's Socio-Cultural resilience in leadership progression across different regions of Asia, addressing the diverse challenges and opportunities women encounter in their leadership journeys, (Fatima, 2017).

In Africa, women have been the keepers of the communities and are always involved in community initiatives in various forms (Uduji, and Okolo-Obasi, 2020). Though it goes unnoticed, women's role in community development has become increasingly vital. In most communities, women presume leadership roles in community development and they bring in skills and knowledge that bring positive change to the community (Chin et al, 2016). Women are soldiers in establishing and maintaining key relationships and networks in their community. Nevertheless, women face sociocultural challenges in leading the communities and in many instances overcoming that resilience become their daily motivation in their community roles (Yeshaneh, 2023).

While their comprehensive approach has influenced the evolution and nature of community development, women's contributions have been neither widely acknowledge nor explicitly credited (Uduji, and Okolo-Obasi, 2020). The women remain underrepresented in decision-making due to discriminatory practices that include institutional barriers, socio cultural and practices, restrictive laws, and disproportionate access to resources, health, and quality education (Ilesanmi, 2018). For example, in Southern African Development Community (SADC), only 30% of women are engaged in politics (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). Dube (2022) reports that Africa had only 24% women's representation in leadership. While Rwanda had 60% of women occupying parliament while Nigeria had only 6%. In Uganda, Sperandio (2008) notes that only 34% of its national assembly are women, an indication that it has a hostile environment that discourages women from participating in politics. (UN Report, 2022)

The Kenyan scenario is not different, women continue to be side-lined in many aspects of society, particularly in administration and decision-making, despite significant advancements recognizing women's political, socio-cultural, and social equality. Women's Socio-Cultural resilience and Leadership Progression have become increasingly important topics in contemporary society. Women have faced significant challenges in leadership progression, including social norms, gender stereotypes, and socio-cultural challenges, among others (kinyanjui et.al. ( 2022). However, despite the great efforts that the government has made, about 29% of women have not been empowered, in line with the findings by the UN and the data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics published in 2020 (Porth et al., 2021). Women in rural areas of Kenya suffer more from poverty and social isolation than male do which affects their progression in leadership. Despite their contribution to society, women's decision-making power and political participation in rural households and communities continue to be constrained by discriminatory socio- cultural barriers. In West Pokot Sub County, as women seek to progress in leadership, they face unique socio-cultural challenges that are not always faced by their male counterparts. In this region, gender inequalities are particularly pronounced where women have been left to strive to access leadership positions as a result of socio-cultural practices that do not recognize the positions of a woman's role in leadership at the community level. Although several studies have laid emphasize on women economic empowerment, very little has been done on the relationship between socio- cultural resilience and women capacity to rise to leadership positions particularly in West Pokot Sub County. This research, therefore, sought to examine Women socio- cultural resilience and Leadership Progression in West Pokot Sub County.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is based in West Pokot Sub County. A descriptive exploratory research design was used. Combining descriptive and exploratory research designs makes research more trustworthy and reliable, and it lets the researcher customize research questions in a more detailed way. The study population consisted of women community members and Community women group leaders who live and work in West Pokot Sub County, Kenya. The Sub County has a population of about 92,592 women (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This formed the target population for this study where they were categorized into two groups which were community women group leaders and women community members. Stratified sampling technique was used to divide the women into two stratas: women community members and women group leaders. Then simple random sampling procedure was used to give each of the general women community members a chance to be selected while purposive sampling technique was used to select women group leaders because these are the targeted people with information that the study/researcher is interested in. The total sample size was 399 women from a target population of 92,592 as was computed using Slovin 1960 formula. Through purposive sampling, the researcher chose two women group leaders from each of the 6 wards, therefore leading to 12 sampled respondents. The general women community members formed a sample size of 387, was selected randomly across the 6 wards of the sub county. Using Slovin's sample size formula (Slovin, 1960) the sample for the study was calculated as follows.

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

- N = Target population,
- n = Sample size and
- E- Error of Tolerance (Level) 95%

$$N=92,592$$

$$N=92,592 / (1 + 92,592*0.05^2)$$

$$n= 92,592/ 232.48$$

$$n = 398.28$$

$$n= 399$$

To obtain primary data from respondents and other key informants, this study employed semi-structured questionnaires and interview schedule. The study employed structured questionnaires as the primary tool to gather data from community women members, incorporating a blend of open-ended and closed questions. On the other hand, interview schedule contained open ended questions that were used to collect qualitative data from key community women group leaders selected purposely by the study.

Data collection involved getting clearance from Tharaka University research Ethics Committee then obtaining a research permit from the National Council of Science and Technology (NACOSTI) before commencing the research process. Various institutions of interest were visited, and they were informed prior about the intention to collect data. These include visiting the women groups and the women community members. Participants were introduced to the research's purpose, and their consent to participate was sought. The study adhered to research ethical principles as participants were informed of their rights and obligations. The collected data from interviews and questionnaires was cleaned and coded into the computer and analysed using SPSS version 28.0 for windows. Descriptive statistics that include frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to offer summary of the research data. Qualitative data from interview schedules was analysed through thematic analysis and presented in a narrative manner. To answer the research objectives in relation to effect of the independent variable on dependent variable, simple regression analysis was done as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta X_i + \varepsilon$$

Where,

Y is the leadership progression

$\alpha$  is the constant/intercept

$X_i$  represents the independent variables (sociocultural, economic, and political resilience)

E is the error term.

## FINDINGS RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Questionnaire Response Rate

It was important to assess the need for assessing the adequacy of response rate to ensure reliability and validity of findings. The results are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1:Response Rate

		Questionnaires		Interview guide	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
	Completed	302	78.0	9	75
	Incomplete	85	22.0	3	25
	Total	387	100.0	12	100

Table 1 shows that a total of 387 questionnaires were distributed. The researcher was able to collect 302 fully completed questionnaires, while 85 were incomplete and not returned. Ching et al. (2020) suggests that, despite the existence of different acceptable response rate thresholds, the minimum should be 70%. Consequently, as the fully completed and returned questionnaire constituted 78% of the total, this response rate was considered appropriate and adequate for further data analysis to meet the study objectives. Similarly, 75% of interviewees were interviewed.

### Age of Respondents

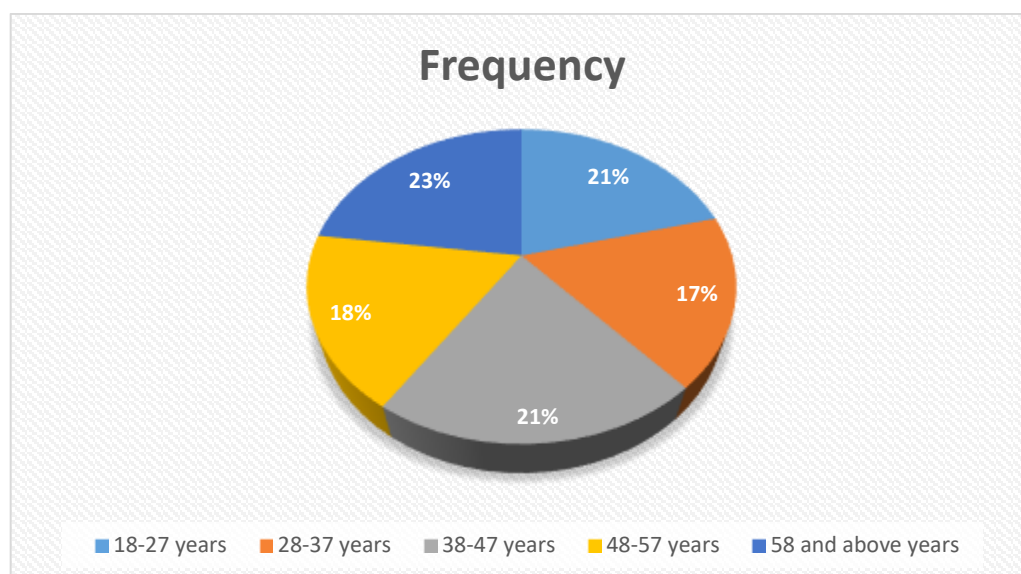


Figure 1:Age of Respondents

As shown in figure 2, respondents in this study are fairly evenly distributed across various age groups, with those aged 58 and above representing the largest share at 22.8%, followed by the 18-27 years and 38-47 years groups, both at 20.9%. The groups aged 28-37 (17.5%) and 48-57 (17.9%) have somewhat lower representation, yet it remains significant. The results show that there was balance and representative of the data collected from people fairly distributed across all the age groups.

### Respondent's Education Level

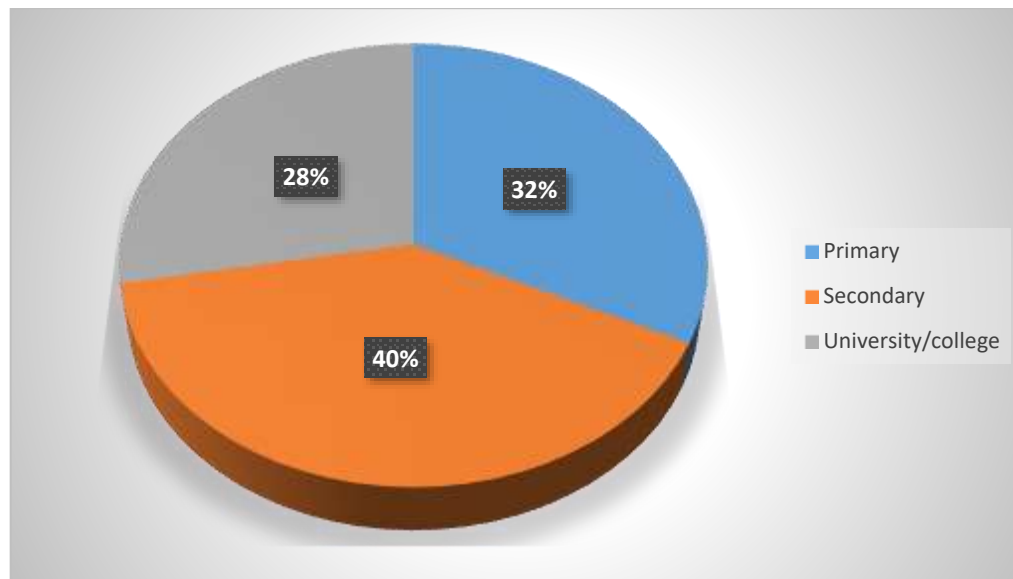


Figure 2: Respondent's Education Level

As for the education level of respondents as shown in figure 3, the largest share of participants (40.1%), had secondary education, followed by primary education (32.1%) and university/college education (27.8%). this represents a fairly educated women populace.

Table 5: Socio-Cultural Resilience Practices by Women in West Pokot Sub County, Kenya

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
I believe that women in my society are capable of challenging stereotypes about their roles and abilities	7.9	5.0	16.9	33.8	36.4	3.8576	1.19645
Many women in my community are resilient in the face of societal challenges and continue to pursue their goals	8.6	17.2	10.3	12.6	51.3	3.8079	1.43156
Cultural beliefs hinder the progression of women in leadership	14.2	11.3	10.9	10.9	52.6	3.7649	1.52314
In my society, systemic barriers such as lack of education and resources prevent women from achieving leadership roles	13.2	11.9	7.3	50.7	16.9	3.4603	1.27462
I have observed women in my community finding creative ways to overcome socio-cultural barriers	10.3	6.3	11.6	41.4	30.5	3.7550	1.24141
In my community, there is a growing recognition of the importance of women's leadership	12.9	7.9	12.6	43.7	22.8	3.5563	1.28180

I have seen women in my society defy stereotypes and succeed in roles traditionally dominated by men	13.9	7.9	12.9	41.7	23.5	3.5298	1.31087
I have observed women balancing cultural expectations with their personal and professional ambitions	11.9	7.9	14.2	41.7	24.2	3.5828	1.26731
I believe that stronger support networks would help more women in my community achieve leadership positions	7.3	4.0	12.6	38.4	37.7	3.9536	1.14896
I have seen women advocate for change and challenge systemic barriers in their communities	11.3	7.0	11.6	33.8	36.4	3.7715	1.31341
Valid N (listwise)							

Results in Table 2 indicate that a majority of respondents (70.2%) agreed and strongly agreed that they believed women were challenging stereotypes in the community. These views align with Eagly and Heilman (2016), who asserts that women have shown a growing capacity to challenge gender norms, particularly in leadership and professional settings. In a similar vein, Ridgeway (2017) highlights that as women become more visible in leadership positions, society's views of them are progressively changing.

On the other hand, results found that 63.9% of respondents agreed that women were resilient as they faced societal challenges as they focus on attaining their goals. Kabeer (2019), who emphasizes that through self-motivation and social support networks, women actively pursue leadership and career achievements throughout various civilizations, despite cultural and economic hurdles, supports these findings. With a total response of 63.5%, a majority of respondents strongly agreed that cultural beliefs restricted women's leadership progression. The findings also align with the works of Okafor and Nwankwo (2023) that women's access to leadership positions continued to be hampered by deeply rooted gender conventions and cultural expectations.

Further, findings showed that a higher number of respondents agreed and strongly agreed (67.6%) that systemic barriers like resource access and education limit women's leadership opportunities. These findings support UNESCO (2019), which notes that structural disparities in employment and education remain significant barriers for women globally. Further, Cheryan et al. (2017) assert that the gender gap in leadership is also largely caused by unconscious prejudices and a lack of mentorship. In a similar vein, O'Neil et al. (2021) emphasize how women employ creative approaches to overcome sociocultural constraints and establish other career paths.

It is worth noting that 66.9% of respondents strongly agreed that women were managing to strike a balance between cultural expectations and their career aspirations. According to Bailly and DiPrete (2016), women use adaptive behaviors to balance competing pressures from their careers and society. Additional results show that 76.1% of respondents agreed that stronger support networks were crucial in helping women attain leadership positions. This corroborates with Patel and Rao (2019), who established that advocacy, sponsorship, and mentoring are essential for advancing women in leadership positions. The findings further reveal that 70.2% of respondents strongly agreed that women were strongly engaged in advocating for systemic change in the society.

### Thematic Analysis of Socio-cultural Challenges

When asked about the socio-cultural challenges that faced women from West Pokot sub-county as they pursued their leadership goals, a majority of interviewees agreed that cultural barriers were major issues. Respondent 1 noted that patriarchy adversely affected women's leadership progression:

**Respondent 1** *"In our culture, women who attempt to enter politics are discouraged because leadership is typically viewed as a male function".*

**Respondent 2** *"Some people think that women are too weak to make the difficult choices that*

come with leadership roles."

**Respondent 3** "Most women's time for leadership responsibilities is limited because they are expected to take care of the home."

**Respondent 4.** "Girls' education is often neglected by parents, which hinders their ability to assume leadership positions when they grow up."

These responses highlights barriers of stereotypes, male dominance and neglected as barriers to women leadership progression in west Pokot.

### Regression Model Summary for Socio-cultural Resilience and Leadership Progression

This analysis sought to assess the percentage of change of leadership progression of women in West Pokot Sub-County that was explained by socio-cultural resilience. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 3: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.403 <sup>a</sup>	.122	.082	.62232
ya. Predictors: (Constant), Social cultural resilience				

Results in the model summary as shown in Table3 indicate that the R-square value is 0.122, which means that social cultural resilience of women in West Pokot Sub-County influenced 12.2% of their change in leadership progression.

### ANOVA for Social cultural resilience and Women's Leadership Progression

The analysis of regression ANOVA was useful in assessing the goodness of fit of the model in social cultural resilience predicting leadership progression. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Regression ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.211	1	4.211	11.259	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	112.186	300	.374		
	Total	116.397	301			
a. Dependent Variable: Leadership progression						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Social cultural resilience						

Results in Table5. show that  $F = 11.259 (1, 300)$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , meaning that the adopted model was fit and there exist a linear association between socio-cultural resilience and leadership progression of women in West Pokot sub-county. This implies that with the growth of socio-cultural resilience, there is an enhancement in the advancement of the number of women in leadership roles. This is further justified by the statistical significance ( $p < 0.05$ ) that this relationship could not be due to random chances.

### Regression Coefficient of Women's social cultural resilience and Leadership Progression

This analysis was useful in the quantification of the relationship between women's socio-cultural resilience and leadership progression. In other words, it is crucial in indicating how much of, on average, of leadership

progression changes with a one unit change in socio-cultural resilience. The analysis results are as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.444	.271		12.685	.000
	Social cultural resilience	.504	.173	.043	2.913	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Leadership progression						

Results in Table 6 indicate that the coefficient of socio-cultural resilience is 0.504. This means that for every unit rise in socio-cultural resilience, there is an improvement in leadership progression by 0.504 units. Further results indicate that this relationship is statistically significant as sig. value = 0.000 < 0.05. The findings indicate that socio-cultural resilience is crucial for the advancement of women in leadership roles in West Pokot sub-county. The positive coefficient indicates that initiatives aimed at boosting socio-cultural resilience may result in tangible enhancements in women's leadership outcomes in West Pokot sub county. These results are in agreement with the study of Adeyemi and Ojo (2021), who found that socio-cultural resilience significantly enhances women's ability to navigate cultural barriers and achieve leadership progression.

The results further collaborates with the study of Choudhury and Islam (2022), who explored the role of socio-cultural resilience in women's leadership progression. They found that women who demonstrated resilience in the face of cultural and societal adversity were more likely to break through traditional barriers and assume leadership positions. This suggests that socio-cultural resilience is a key factor in enabling women to overcome deeply entrenched cultural norms that often hinder their leadership progression.

Moreover, these results resonate with the study of Kiptoo and Wanjiru (2021), who investigated the impact of socio-cultural resilience on women's leadership. They found that women who exhibited resilience in navigating cultural and societal challenges were more likely to achieve leadership success, particularly in contexts where traditional gender roles are strongly enforced. The findings also agrees with align with a study by Onyango and Achieng (2020), who examined the role of socio-cultural resilience in women's leadership in East Africa. Their study revealed that women with high levels of socio-cultural resilience were better able to navigate cultural expectations and societal pressures, leading to greater leadership advancement.

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary of Findings

The study aimed at examining the influence of socio-cultural resilience on Women's leadership progression in West Pokot Sub County, Kenya. Overall, the study established that there was a strong relationship between women resilience and leadership progression. Most respondents (70.2% believe women in their society can contest stereotypes with a high mean score of 3.86. more than half of respondents (51.3%) strongly agreed with statement that despite societal challenges, women continued to pursue their goals (Mean 3.81). Additionally, a large number of respondents (52.6%) acknowledged that cultural beliefs were an impediment to women's leadership progression (Mean = 3.76). While 50.7% concurred that the absence of education and resources hinders women's advancement, there was a slightly higher level of disagreement (Mean = 3.46). A majority of respondents (71.9% agreed or strongly agreed) noted that women are overcoming challenges through innovative means (Mean = 3.76). Although most acknowledged the significance of women's leadership (Mean = 3.56), the reactions were more tempered. The response to women who break stereotypes and succeed in roles traditionally dominated by men is mixed (Mean = 3.53). The ability of women to balance societal expectations with career ambitions was recognized by respondents (Mean = 3.58).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that women in West Pokot sub-County exhibit socio-cultural resilience through their ability to challenge stereotypes, resilience in face of societal challenges, take creative solutions to socio-cultural barriers, are successful in male-dominated roles, recognise women leadership, advocate for change, and are able to balance cultural and their ambitions. Additionally, support networks enhance their leadership while cultural beliefs about women and lack of education and resources hinder their progress. Further conclusion is that the socio-cultural resilience has statistically significant effect on women's leadership progression.

## Recommendations

From the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

It is recommended that government and organizations need to offer scholarships, vocational training, and financial assistance to women. Equally, there is need to involve men as partners in achieving gender equality, since cultural transformation necessitates joint endeavours. In addition, the county of west Pokot can enhance support networks for women, as they are essential for women to attain leadership roles.

## Recommendation for Future Studies

The following future studies are recommended:

Comparative studies should be conducted analysing women's leadership resilience across different sub-counties in West Pokot Country and across counties in Kenya.

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