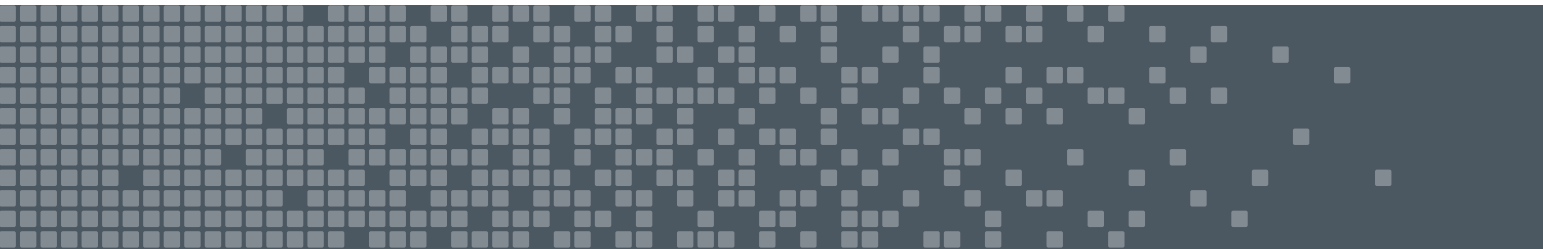


QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



JANUARY -
MARCH
2024-2025

Vol. 3

Table of Contents



Editor's Note



Inclusive Cities



Innovative Cities



Productive Cities



Sustainable & Resilient Cities



Well-Governed Cities



Policy, Research and Advocacy



Team News & Events

Editor's Note

Dear Stakeholder, Welcome to our Quarterly Newsletter



Nosipho Hlatshwayo
CEO

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Welcome to this latest edition of our newsletter, where we showcase the milestones and initiatives that continue to drive our momentum in building more innovative, inclusive, and resilient cities! The past quarter has been a whirlwind of progress, and we're thrilled to share some of the standout moments with you.

We are delighted to welcome Ms Nthabiseng Mashula to the team as our Just Energy Transition (JET) Researcher within the Sustainable and Resilient Cities Programme. Her expertise will be invaluable as we continue shaping a greener urban future.

The quarter began with SACN facilitating the Clean Air Workshop in the City of Tshwane. This collaborative event brought together stakeholders to co-create a roadmap toward cleaner air for the city, an essential step in ensuring healthier urban environments.

The Inclusive Cities Programme launched the Practice Guide on SMME Inclusion within the Construction Sector, sharing practical insights and case studies from city officials who pioneered innovative SMME integration approaches.

Our Innovative Cities Programme showcased the power of data storytelling through the ongoing rollout of SACN's Data Stories on urban issues. Presenting data in visually engaging and relatable formats has sparked important conversations and increased engagement across our social media platforms, covering topics from urban safety and economic transitions to service delivery.

In the Productive Cities space, we reflect on the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) Community of Practice event, held under the theme *Transformative Impact of the EPWP Through Entrepreneurship and Skills Development*.

Meanwhile, the Sustainable and Resilient Cities team hosted the 9th and 10th editions of our Cities' Lunchtime Chats, focusing on wetlands and rivers, co-hosted with SALGA. We also convened a Roundtable Workshop to explore the development of a JET e-learning course. We participated in the 2nd African Forum on Urban Forests (AFUF), held from 18–21 March 2025 in Johannesburg.

Finally, the Well-Governed Cities Programme spotlights the City of Johannesburg's work on Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) and the expansion of PDIA practices across SACN's Participating Cities.

We hope this edition ignites your passion for urban innovation and inspires you to take action in your sphere of influence. As always, your feedback and support are sincerely appreciated—let's continue building the cities of tomorrow, together.

Best Regards,

Nosipho Hlatshwayo



“Presenting data in visually engaging and relatable formats has sparked important conversations”



Launch of the SACN Practice Guide on SMME Inclusion in the Construction Sector

PRACTICE GUIDE

SMME Inclusion in the Construction Sector
Lessons of Good Practice from City Officials



On March 5th, SACN, through the Built Environment Integration Task Team (BEITT), launched the Practice Guide on SMME Inclusion in the Construction Sector. This Practice Guide hopes to assist city officials who implement projects in communities with good practices on how to include SMMEs in the construction process and navigate the challenges of SMME tensions and the potential threat of site disruptions. These lessons of good practice come from the real-life experiences of city officials who have found innovative ways to address the complexities of SMME inclusion.

In South Africa, the construction industry was meant to be a vehicle to alleviate poverty through the creation of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs, and through mandatory subcontracting to local small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs). However, the construction sector has not been able to create the expected number of opportunities for SMMEs due to decreasing investment in infrastructure by municipalities and a general lack of economic growth. And in recent years, unlawful disruptions on construction sites across the country have increased, complicating the inclusion of local SMMEs.

The scarcity of opportunities has resulted in new-entrant SMMEs flooding the space, creating a high-stakes, competitive and often hostile environment where many SMMEs fight for just a handful of subcontracting opportunities, sometimes resorting to unlawful tactics to put themselves ahead. Media reports commonly attribute these disruptions to the “construction mafia”, which is variously described as organised associations (or “local business forums”) of SMMEs in the construction industry. For cities, the challenge is that there is no cohesive vision of what SMME inclusion should look like or what it should achieve. City departments and project managers are left to try and work it out independently and often use very different approaches to dealing with SMMEs. This Practice Guide aims to close the gap and provide good practices for including SMMEs in construction projects, offering solutions and suggestions in a practical, concise and accessible format.

Much of the information is drawn from *Keep the Bus Moving: SMME inclusion in the construction sector*, a research report published by the South African Cities Network (SACN) in 2023.





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SACN's Data Stories: Turning Urban Data into Engaging Conversations

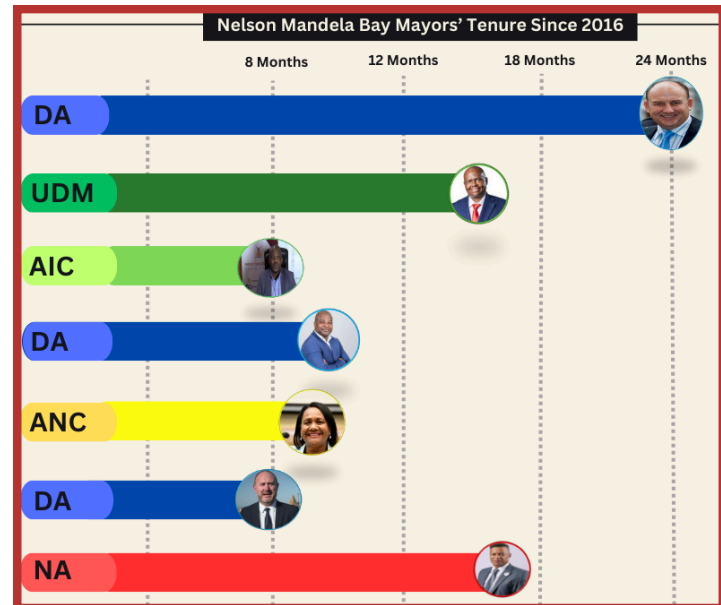
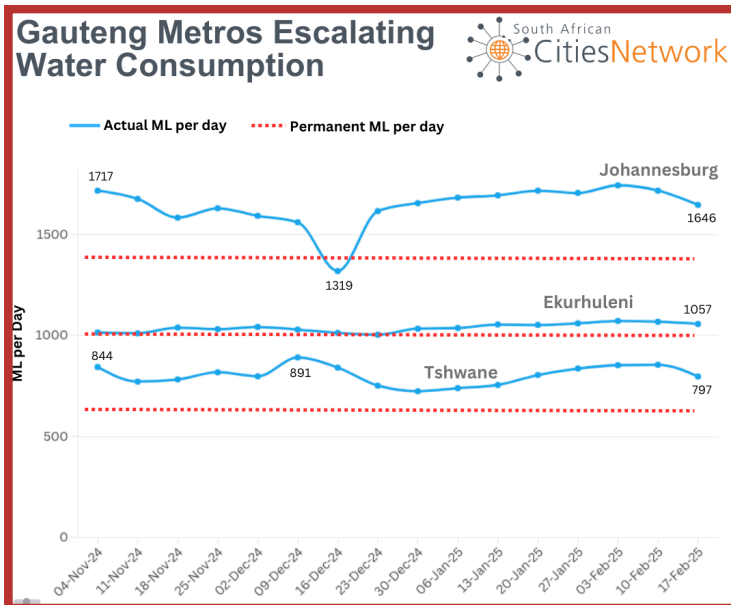
Since 2024, the South African Cities Network (SACN) has been publishing Data Stories across our social media platforms—turning data into compelling, easy-to-understand insights. These bite-sized narratives have not only made key urban trends more accessible but have also sparked increased engagement and interest across our digital channels.

By presenting visually appealing and relatable data, our Data Stories have encouraged more conversations, shares, and interactions among our social media audience. Whether highlighting urban safety, economic shifts, or service delivery challenges, these stories ensure that important insights reach a wider audience and drive meaningful discussions.

This growing engagement reaffirms the importance of data-driven storytelling in shaping informed urban dialogue. SACN remains committed to making complex urban issues more accessible, relevant, and actionable.

Please follow all our social media channels and like, engage with, and share our data stories!

Examples of our Data Stories:

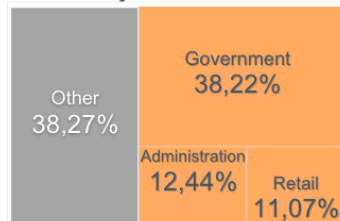


Job Concentration in our Cities

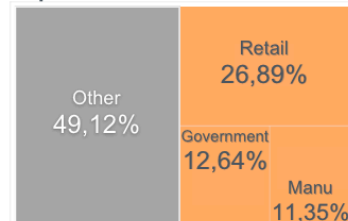
Percentage breakdown of the 3 dominant sectors providing formal employment in South African Metropolitan Cities



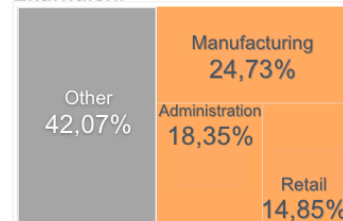
Buffalo City



Cape Town



Ekurhuleni



eThekweni





Productive Cities through Strategic Partnerships

According to the latest Quarterly Employment Statistics release, total employment decreased by 91,000 (0,8%) year-on-year between December 2023 and December 2024. Amid this backdrop, the South African Cities Network remains committed to supporting local economic development through initiatives like public employment programmes and advocating for policies that enhance entrepreneurship and skills development. As South Africa navigates this unfavourable economic landscape, the SACN continues to play a pivotal role in fostering productive cities through strategic partnerships and innovative initiatives. This quarter, we highlight key events and developments that underscore our commitment to enhancing local economic development and empowering cities to maximise job growth.

Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) Community of Practice

The path to economic recovery requires collaboration and innovation. SACN remains dedicated to this mission, ensuring cities are well-positioned to foster job creation, skills development, and entrepreneurship. On 18 March 2025, SACN participated in the EPWP Community of Practice, themed *"Transformative Impact of the EPWP Through Entrepreneurship and Skills Development."* This Ministerial event brought together diverse stakeholders, including members of the SACN EPWP Reference Group, to discuss the evolving priorities of the EPWP, particularly in Phase V. Discussions emphasised entrepreneurship and skills development as critical exit pathways for participants. The session facilitated meaningful dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, aligning them around the programme's priorities and inspiring actionable strategies to address socio-economic challenges faced by EPWP participants.



The EPWP Community of Practice was preceded by SACN's hosting of the EPWP Reference Group meeting in February 2025, which featured the presentation of the EPWP Training Framework for Phase V. Amongst other objectives, the framework aims to provide operational training guidelines to EPWP sectors and implementers on exit approaches in the context of the EPWP. This framework is now available online and outlines sector-specific training interventions to enhance productivity and employability beyond EPWP projects.

SA Startup Act workshop

To support and drive awareness for the development of policy that encourages the growth and development of innovative and high-growth enterprises in South Africa, the SACN's Productive Cities Programme also participated in the **SA Startup Act Workshop** alongside the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and other key stakeholders. The Startup Act aims to make it easier for startups to establish, grow and scale. The workshop explored micro-policy interventions aimed at supporting South Africa's startup ecosystem. These interventions align with SACN's broader agenda of enabling cities to create an environment conducive to economic growth, particularly for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME).

Our participation in key events underscores our dedication to fostering productive cities that drive sustainable livelihoods and inclusive growth. For more updates on our initiatives and if you would like to collaborate with us, please do not hesitate to visit our website or follow us on social media.

Sustainable and Resilient Cities



Elijah Ramulifho
Programme Manager:
Sustainable and
Resilient Cities

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Cities' Lunchtime Chats: The Urban Nexus Continues

Chat No.9 took place on 24 February and focused on wetlands' vital role in sustaining biodiversity, combating climate change, and supporting livelihoods worldwide. In her presentation, Desiree Sehlapelo from NBI illuminated the significant role of religious morals in shaping societal concepts of goodness and governance. She argued that the qualities of a good ruler and the essence of goodness are often rooted in religious beliefs. Her presentation was on community participation in wetland rehabilitation, a case of Lake Fundudzi. Ms Sehlapelo emphasised that governance should be seen as a process that involves incorporating ethical practices into ecosystem management to ensure effective and morally sound processes.

Nancy Job from SANBI presented the importance of wetlands and their rehabilitation at a local level. She highlighted how wetlands, driven by the presence of water and sometimes invisible just below the surface, support diverse ecosystems. Wetlands play a crucial role in environmental regulation by providing flood protection, water purification, and biodiversity. Ms Job also discussed the legislative requirements for wetland alterations and reiterated that any activity in these areas often requires authorisation, reflecting their importance in environmental conservation. She stressed the need to protect wetlands because of their vital functions, including supporting agriculture and providing essential water resources in semiarid regions.

Both speakers underscored the importance of integrating ethical standards into governance and environmental management. Their insights invite reflection on how religious morals and legislative frameworks can shape better governance practices and ensure the preservation of essential natural resources, such as wetlands.

CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS: THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION



PROTECTING WETLANDS FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE
This Cities' Lunchtime Chat seeks to highlight the vital role wetlands play in sustaining biodiversity, combating climate change, and supporting livelihoods worldwide. From marshes and mangroves to swamps and bogs, wetlands are nature's lifelines—filtering water, reducing floods, and providing habitat to countless species. Let's protect these precious ecosystems for future generations!

Speakers



Nancy Job
Lead: Freshwater Biodiversity Programme,
South African National Biodiversity
Institute (SANBI)



Desiree Sehlapelo
Project Manager,
National Business Initiative (NBI)

24 FEB
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 9





WATCH NOW

Sustainable and Resilient Cities



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Programme Manager:
Sustainable and
Resilient Cities

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Chat No. 10 took place on 14 March and commemorated the important role that rivers play in supporting livelihoods, ecosystem services, biodiversity, and socio-economic activities. Mr. Daniel Masemola from the City of Johannesburg discussed various water management initiatives to improve river health and control invasive plants.

Some of these include:

- Implementation of river clean-up and invasive plant control.
- Creation of 162 job opportunities through the Presidential Employment Program.
- Focused efforts on various catchment areas.
- Partnerships with the World Resource Institute and the International Institute of Sustainable Development.
- Monthly meetings of the water quality task team involving multiple stakeholders.
- Future solutions include rehabilitating watercourses, floating wetlands, and bioengineering techniques.

Mr. Fritz Bekker's presentation focused on efforts to monitor and improve the water quality in the lower Orange River. Efforts have been made to increase awareness and accountability among municipalities and businesses that release pollutants into rivers. Dr Ferrial Adam's presentation emphasised the importance of community engagement and collective action in addressing water pollution and raising awareness. She emphasised the importance of creating awareness and amplifying voices to hold stakeholders accountable. She also proposed a collective approach involving NGOs, community leaders, academic institutes, and the government for effective water quality management and pollution control.

CITIES' LUNCHTIME CHATS: THE URBAN NEXUS EDITION



OUR RIVERS, OUR FUTURE

This Cities Lunchtime Chat commemorates International Day of Action for Rivers by showcasing the important role rivers play in supporting livelihoods. Our Rivers, our Future, from providing fresh water and supporting biodiversity to regulating climate and sustaining biodiversity, cultural traditions and socio-economic activities, healthy, free-flowing rivers are critical for people and the planet - let's play our role to protect them!!

**14
MAR**
12:30 - 14:00

Chat No. 10

Speakers



Dr Ferrial Adam
Executive Manager,
WaterCAN



Fritz Bekker
Founding Member,
Gariep Watch



Daniel Masemola
Director: Water Management and Biodiversity,
City of Johannesburg



WATCH NOW

6

Sustainable and Resilient Cities



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Programme Manager:
Sustainable and
Resilient Cities

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Roundtable Workshop for JET e-Learning Course Development

On March 18, 2025, SACN, in partnership with GIZ-SAGEN, gathered key municipal stakeholders to evaluate the proposed e-learning course on Just Energy Transition (JET). The primary objective was to ensure that the course met the practical needs of the municipal officials. A significant takeaway was the call for practical and targeted content with stakeholders, emphasising the necessity for the course to align with the daily responsibilities of municipal officials rather than high-level theory. Municipal officials in attendance further suggested incorporating real-world case studies, practical tools, and implementation frameworks. Additionally, there was a strong recommendation for the course to provide specific guidance on policy alignment, financing options, and infrastructure planning to benefit municipalities of various sizes and capacities.

The roundtable discussion provided invaluable insights into how the Just Energy Transition (JET) e-learning course can be improved to better meet the needs of South African municipal officials and workers.

African Forum on Urban Forests (AFUF) Conference

From March 18-21, 2025, the 2nd African Forum on Urban Forests convened under the theme **Green Horizons: Shaping the Future Resilience of African Cities through Urban Forests**. The event brought together thought leaders, policymakers, and innovators to explore how urban greening can address climate challenges, enhance resilience, and unlock economic opportunities in African cities. Mr. Elijah Ramulifho from SACN presented a keynote intervention under Charting a Way Forward for Urban Green and Climate Finance. In his intervention, he posited that urban forests offer a triple-win opportunity: environmentally, economically, and socially.

Some key challenges discussed include the persistence of financial disinvestment in urban greening projects, lack of a conducive policy environment for private investment, high funding barriers and unfavourable credit profiles, driving up financing costs, and the need for innovative financial models and capacity building in project preparation. On the other hand, opportunities exist in that African cities stand at a pivotal moment to leverage urban greening, align projects with private sector priorities for long-term impact, and advance urban green finance strategies tailored to local needs.

A call to action was primed by the fact that humanity's current trajectory, marked by a market-led approach, fails to address climate risk and demands a shift. Adopting concepts such as Planetary Solvency and the Resilience Principles can point toward a low-carbon, nature-positive future, but collective action is essential.





Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) in the City of Joburg and introducing PDIA to SACN Participating Cities.

This quarter, the main focus in the Well-Governed Cities programme has been on deepening the roots of Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) in the City of Johannesburg and introducing PDIA to SACN participating cities.

In January and February the Programme Manager met with Liziwe Ntshinga-Makoro Group Head: CRUM, City of Joburg to plan how to secure support from senior management in the city for the implementation of solutions to illegal dumping and illegal recycling developed by the PDIA teams.

Having heard of PDIA, the City of Joburg Department of Human Settlements invited the Programme Manager to attend a stakeholder workshop on illegal land occupation convened by the department. The department is considering using PDIA to bring the diverse group of stakeholders, from city entities to civil society groups, to a common understanding of the problem.

We are also encouraging the uptake of PDIA by SACN participating cities. The Innovation Unit in the City of Tshwane, policy research and planning practitioners from the Nelson Mandela Bay office of the Chief Operating Officer, and staff in the strategic planning unit of eThekweni were presented with presentations of the PDIA method and the City of Joburg Pilot. It was encouraging to see the considerable interest in these three cities in PDIA and how it might be applied in their particular contexts. The Programme Manager is on the steering committees of two exciting initiatives: the first, planning a Citizen's Assembly in South Africa, and the second, a project on the governance of the just urban transition.

In January, the Programme Manager participated in the first progress meeting of the Stellenbosch University Centre for Research on Democracy Citizen's Assembly planning group. This was the second gathering of the group after the inception meeting, which took place at the end of November 2024. The proposed Citizen's Assembly in 2026 will focus on the climate crisis and finding local solutions to the challenge of climate change.

In February, the PM took part in the first meeting of the Advisory Group of the Governance for the Just Urban Transition research project at the University of the Western Cape. This project will focus on enterprises' access to water and energy, rather than households, which have been more extensively researched. The project will foster conversations between the stakeholders working on the just energy transition, hoping to inform government policy.





Municipal International Relations Workshop 24-25 March 2025

The Municipal International Relations (MIR) workshop, hosted by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) on March 24-25, 2025, aimed to help local government leaders understand the importance of international relations in municipal governance. As global dynamics shift, municipalities play a crucial role in shaping these relationships and promoting sustainable development.

South Africa assumes the G20 presidency from December 2024 to November 2025, marking a historic moment as it becomes the first African country to lead this influential group. This presidency offers a chance to showcase the challenges and aspirations of the African continent. A key element of this role is the U20 (Urban 20), a city diplomacy initiative that gathers major cities from G20 countries to address urban issues. The U20 complements the G20 process and aims to elevate urban centres' voices in global discussions, promoting inclusive urban development and sustainability.

The MIR Workshop aimed to serve as a platform for local government officials, city networks, and international partners to devise strategies for enhancing the role of South African municipalities in global governance and focused on the upcoming G20 and U20 summits in Johannesburg and Tshwane in June and September 2025.



The purpose of the workshop was to:

- 1 To enhance the international relations capacity of South African municipalities by mapping existing international partnerships.**
- 2 To activate the rollout of various U20 planned initiatives for the duration of South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025.**
- 3 To discuss the role of local governments in contributing to the SDGs, New Urban Agenda, climate action, and sustainable urban development through international partnerships.**
- 4 To establish a collaboration framework between South African municipalities, the U20 cities, and international partners like city networks, development agencies, and the UN.**
- 5 To prepare municipalities for active participation in global forums like the G20 and U20.**

Team News & Events

Clean Air Fund, City of Tshwane Workshop, 4 February 2025

The City of Tshwane, in partnership with the Clean Air Fund, Breathe Cities, and C40 Cities, hosted a workshop on Clean Air in the City of Tshwane. The workshop brought together government and civil society stakeholders to collaboratively address air quality issues in the City of Tshwane. The workshop sought to co-create a roadmap for achieving clean air in the City of Tshwane and formulate a clean air forum, a multi-stakeholder participatory forum to guide and monitor all efforts for cleaner air in the city. The South African Cities Network (SACN) facilitated the workshop that engaged attendees in practical sessions, encouraging active participation and input from everyone.

The purpose of the workshop was to:

- ✓ Develop a roadmap for achieving clean air in the City of Tshwane
- ✓ Use the workshop to confirm what is feasible within the desired and legislated Air Quality standards
- ✓ Create a platform for all stakeholders to engage in Tshwane air quality management issues
- ✓ This will serve as an opportunity to validate the emerging list of priorities to be supported by the Clean Air Fund and C40



SACN Appoints Just Energy Transition (JET) Researcher



The SACN is excited to announce that Ms Nthabiseng Mashula has been appointed as the Just Energy Transition (JET) Researcher. She has extensive research experience in climate change and sustainability transitions. She has expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, policy analysis, and stakeholder engagement and is committed to advancing knowledge on equitable and sustainable energy transitions.



As our loyal readers of our
Quarterly Newsletter, we would
love your feedback!
Please [click here](#).



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