



Faith in development: Transcript

Season 2: Gender and protection

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Speakers

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Episode 3: The journey to healing

Sabine Nkusi 0:10

Hello, welcome back to Season 2 of the *Faith in development* podcast brought to you by Tearfund. I am Sabine Nkusi, your host for this conversation. Today, we will focus on the *Journey to healing* which is Tearfund model responding to sexual and gender-based violence. And that will be in conversation with Solange Mbonigawa, who is Tearfund's Survivor Movement Coordinator, Esperande Bigirimana, who co-leads the Phephisa Survivors Network in South Africa. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

It's good, Esperande and Solange for being with us on these exploring one of Tearfund approaches to responding to sexual and gender-based violence called the *Journey to healing*. I would like to just pass it over to my colleague salon to just really give us an overview of what this approach is about.

Solange Mbonigawa 1:13

Thank you, Sabine, I might also repeat about my role for the audience sake. I'm coordinating the global survivor movement in Tearfund. The journey started all in the beginning of 2018. When Tearfund wanted to explore around the issues of sexual and gender-based violence in South Africa, and in other countries, DRC, Burundi and the Central African Republic, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Myanmar, and many other countries, Colombia to name a few. The question we're asking ourselves, we're looking at what was surrounding us, the issues of rape and the question was 'why is this thing happening'. But we did not have an answer to that, until we did look for the right people to answer to the question. And we said that our faith leaders, they don't have an answer. But we said how can we reach to those people who are being affected by the issue, sexual gender-based violence, those come to be these women, including Esperande, and many

others, where we went to them with a simple question to understand, they are understanding about sexual gender-based violence, and many other patients that we follow, but what we picked up from them. The question was, is anyone who is here to this need to ask now, because they knew that more people came before us, many more people came before us, but no one came back to them, meaning no one is in the today. You may hear but you don't listen. Tearfund was there to listen to them. And in the process of listening to them. That is where the journey to healing approach emerged. It took us a long journey. To find I refer to Veena, Prabu and everyone those who were close. In the beginning of this program, what we picked up, it was a great opportunity for Tearfund to learn from survivors. And we sit with them. And they made us aware of what it is to be a survivor of sexual gender-based violence. We talk tends to run focus group discussion with the survivors. When I would run one, I would run another one until you were able to hear and listen to their needs and the needs were, we wish we can be acknowledged that we are here in the community as survivors of sexual gender-based violence because the program was being spoken about in government institution department, but it was a story without a person behind it. Then we were able to have survivors to come and teach us what it is that the agenda and based violence doing to them. From there, we couldn't really hold everything into our head. That is where we decided to put things on the paper. And when we developed some resources, Tearfund has now two important greater resources is reflecting the voice of survivors, the journey to healing by survivors and with the survivors, from the we even understood, where they were telling us that those are the survivors, there is nothing about us without us. And that means you cannot speak on behalf of survivors speak with them, they want a person who can be gentle with them, who can really push them, they know where they want to go. And that is what is Esperande, they will do share with you here, showing the journey, how it started, is individual how she experienced it, and how far she has gone in terms of healing. And I'm sure she won't speak on her behalf alone, she will be bringing her colleagues alongside with her.

Sabine Nkusi 6:02

Thank you very much, Solange. So you've mentioned a few people that worked with you on this. You mentioned Veena. So that's Veena O'Sullivan, who has been a pioneer of this work around section gender-based violence in Tearfund. And you've also mentioned probably the pan who has really been the architect of the Transforming Masculinity approach, and our audience will have the opportunity to hear from them in the coming episodes as well as their share, really their heart and how all these work started. So if I may, just back quickly to, to what you were talking about. So you mentioned that we have two resources that can you tell us what are the names, what are they called, and maybe very briefly say what is the purpose of each resource, and to what elements of the journey to healing process are in those resources.

Solange Mbonigawa 7:10

The best resource is *Share the journey*. It's a resource that contains the knowledge and the feelings, the emotions of those survivors who started the journey with us, they headed to inform to give us the insight from their side, on what steps that are needed for them to, to feel that something is happening in their lives and something positive happened in their lives. That is when through that process of sharing their stories

and everything, they realised that oh, it's not about sharing the story or not. It's a journey. And they had to name the resource, a shared journey, because they could see now they are no longer static, they are not standing on one point or sitting on one point, they are moving and moving together. And they named it a shared region. This will do have the content of what they have gone through to become equipped and empowered to be better advocate for themselves in their journey of healing. The second one, which is out of the shadow, they were trying to communicate what happened to them, once they were in that darkness. But this time, they are into the light, they are out of the shadow now they are being seen, it's no longer a story without a person. It's a story with the person who can testify that what I'm saying, I know what it is, I experienced that. And that second resources, which contains many activities that they will use to go through a process of their hearing of their traumas, their pain of their past. And it contains a lot of activities that helps them when they are in their support their peer support group that one can take turns to teach and educate the new ones. Whenever they are forming a new group, they are no longer struggling. They have resources that they can use in their development in their learning in their enabling because they are no longer those people who feel ashamed of themselves. And through these resources, they are no longer feeling stigmatised because they are now equipped. They have what it takes to overcome the shame and the stigma in society.

Sabine Nkusi 9:53

Thank you. Thank you very much and I think as long as you have had, you know the real privilege, I suppose have really journeying with these wonderful women over the years. And I'd like to just really welcome Esperande to this conversation. Randy, welcome. It's such a privilege to have you with us to be sharing with us where your heart is, you have been such an inspiration for many of us. And I think, for us Tearfund who have been on a journey with you, we have seen also what God can do in the lives of people. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Esperande Bigirimana 10:35

Yeah, um, um, we spill under, again, manna from Burundi, um, survivor of sexual violence in a conflict, and also in the family. So, yeah, it said that, under the team of leadership of the survivor network in South Africa, and also a member of global survivor network. So yeah, that's me. I'm very happy to be with you and to share our journey. I call it our journey, because I'm just as parent but I'm representing to network, which babysitter survival network in South Africa, and the blueprint, survivor network and the group by survival network. So, I'm not alone. Yeah. Thank you.

Sabine Nkusi 9:53

Thank you so much, Randy. And I love what you're saying about you're not alone, that it is a movement of other women. And I guess in order for you to take to get to this level of representing other women, you have to start somewhere. So how did you get involved with Tearfund? Can you just tell us about that?

Esperande Bigirimana 11:43

Yeah, I started to be involved with here found from end of 2013 and start well, 2014. I may, I met beautiful lady called Solange. It was one of staff I found in that time we meet in the church. And then she told me about her work and what she's doing. And she mentioned that she wanted to work with survivors of sexual violence. And then in my heart, I was saying, 'wow, how God can answer your prayers.' Because as my background, I was educated at university and was doing a master's degree in divergent development. I was busy publishing my story, because I had the shame and the stigma to speak and to get a platform so that I could tell what happened to me. So in that time, when I met Solange, she does tell me just from nowhere, you know what? I work with Tearfund and we are putting together a group of survivors in the break the silence and then I asked him What do you mean break silence. Because I know that it was impossible in that time. I knew that the only way to break silence it was just to write something article about your story. And then no one cares to read or even come back to you. But again, and then I say, Well, I went to drain and then she asked me why because it means to survivor. From that time. That's how during Tearfund and survivor network, from that time, I started to go through my chain of hearing sharing my own story. And I gained a lot of energy with other survivors when they were sharing their stories and, and the desire come strong, that we need to change our society, our community and nationally and internationally. And I started I started my own support group in a my own community, mobilising other survivors to train. So we had many survivors from all over the world, South Africa and North South African and have energy also to mobilise faith leaders and speak to some institution government institution in South Africa to see the change. It was just a time of breaking the silence and feel relieved that somebody is able to listen to us. Somebody is able to communicate with us and be able to tell what's happened. So I think that's how I train Tearfund and then I become champion. I'm moving to a champion of teaching those manually to new survivors in the community or in the church. I become coordinator of purpose and each champion just encouraging and supporting us The Bible was just advocacy work in the mobilising the survivors in South Africa. Yeah. No, thank you.

Sabine Nkusi 15:08

you so much. I mean, there is so much in, in what you've just shared, and a bit of the journey and how everything sort of started. But I wanted to ask you, so you've talked about, you know, the sort of Survivor, the journey to healing. It's all about being part of a peer support group, isn't it? So are you able to sort of share with us? What happens in in a peer support group? What are some of the conversations that you have? What activities do you do? And you've also talked about how you started in a support group? And then you became a Lead Champion? What does that mean? What does the Lead Champion do?

Esperande Bigirimana 15:49

Thank you so much. Yeah, what happened, the support group is a beautiful thing. Because, first of all, support the group, it's kind of a free group, where you solve whole problems, they say so, because we are different. When we come in the support group, we come with different kinds of trauma, and frustration. So when you are tended to be a champion, so you get to bid and tended to be a champion faced using those

manually, syringes show it will or the shedding with you. And then when you calm the survivor, you are able to listen to each other, and try to encourage each other, or found solutions is not that support group sub whole problem, but there are resources in the community. And the people also who are in the support group, have a different kind of skills, for example. So we use our resources we have in our support group to solve problem or to reduce trauma. And also we network with churches, network with police stations, network with wetland social workers, or psychologists. When one of our members, it's not doing well, or you see it you need medical support than what at Survivor can do. You send her to those network, we create ourselves. But also in support group, it's way you feel you are at home, a person who understand you who went through the same issue, where you are not ashamed to share anything, because we speak the same language. We understand ourselves as survivors than anyone else outside, can you understand us? So it's always it's just a supportive group. It's just there to feel happy. And to give you a hope, that after trauma, that is a life that is a light outside there. Yeah.

Sabine Nkusi 18:04

I think when you know, when you said that support groups are not there to solve everything, but they're there to, to sort of equate to you, I wonder if you can maybe just tell us, you know, are there any particular things that you sort of discuss? So like any particular skills that you gain? What are some of the skills that that people gain in a support group? First of all, basic skills,

Esperande Bigirimana 18:31

When you join the support group, it's about yourself. Know how to communicate, because everyone who has trauma doesn't know how to communicate, communicate through anger, and no one listen to that. I can give you an example in our own community with a woman who is speaking with anger and no one can understand that they had issues, but as we knew exactly that they have, you know, a trauma that isn't behaving the way they behave. So when you come in our support group, the first things we asked you is to tell us what's going on. And then slowly, slowly, we will support you to know how you can communicate your program to the readers or to the police officer, things like that. And also, we then advocate issues that concern survivors. Because as you may know, you cannot go for example, to permit office and start shouting, you should or you will be terrified. So another way we can also is public speaking, you know, how we communicate. And again, it's not everyone who get those there's a different kind of skills that you can learn. Some want to do mobilisation other survivors learn those skills for mobilising those one who want to do advocacy work. We allow them to learn and have both advocacy skills.

Sabine Nkusi 20:03

Yeah, no, I think that's really amazing just giving the giving everyone the opportunity to really reach that sort of God given potential. And as you say, you know, many of the women would have had dreams before being

violated. So it's about also, I suppose, restoring some of those dreams, and really gaining hope for the future. And also love how you, you're able, I guess, you know, within the group to sort of pinpoint to the different skills that are required for different people that and I know that, you know, we are all made differently, we have different skills and talents. So the fact that you're able to identify those and really work on those, so that people can speak out. That's, that's great. Earlier, you mentioned that one of the things that you do is also networking, and going to churches, I wonder if you can maybe tell us some of your experience, what have you experienced been really engaging the church on this issue of sexual and gender based violence, because we know that, you know, the church is, you know, has been quite silent about what's happening. And it's not just in common, but it's also it's inside the church, you know, women are really suffering, there is a lot of pain. So can you tell us, what have you been doing with churches? How have you been advocating? And also, have you faced any challenges within the church as you do that?

Esperande Bigirimana 21:37

Yeah, of course, I always compare church like a hospital. You know, where you find everything. Sick people are getting well, things like that. So, when we start Phephisa in South Africa, for example, which will be like the same, as in Burundi. They have their own challenges in accepting survivors, because they deny that there are no survivors. No, that's their first position, that we say, 'No, we cannot talk about those issues. It's not good in the church'. Those are the kinds of responses we were getting, when we start a Phephisa South Africa. If you can look in the big churches, you will see that when we start representing South Africa, survivors, we're meeting in the streets. And then when we're doing advocacy, you know, both of ads videos that actually, we had members of the churches, you know, in one way, we may not agree with what the church is doing, but we are the members. So what we did, like me, in my personal capacity in my own community, firstly, I went to the reverend of the church and they asked me, 'do they use your church we meet? Once a week or once a month?' The answer was no. Because being a survivor, it looks like we're not holy, there's something wrong with you. They don't see as being raised, as you know, they see as adultery, not a crab, in the face of race. So and then I say, 'okay, I'm a member of the church from Rome time'. But we are so many and we have so many survivors in the church. And then we ask, 'how many?' and then I started to name and they come as a group in peace, because we're trained how to speak, how to behave, and to know our problem and how we can approach the problem. And then we say, please may you allow us to use the venue just once a month. It will start there, since they were a member of the church, they allow us but they will never want to know what we are doing, or who we are, or what happened to us. We use the venue, but they don't know what's going on with our group or why we are there. Later on. We invite them in some sixteen days, most of the time, we invite them in our celebration. Tearfund used to provide refreshments and everything and their preparation. And we invite them in none of them, then we come because we give them an invitation and they will start to give a testimony and appreciating that we use the venue. And from those that kind of sharing our story what you have been doing and how I've been using their churches. They start actually to come back to us. Oh, that's good. You're doing well and listen to them from ads and open up, you know, see ads as normal people, you know, not like yeah, an audit just to see as No, my Christian like me one else. But in the beginning. There was a lot of rejections today proudly, I guess say that any time you can come in South Africa and Pietermaritzburg and just say I want to have a meeting, I just call one dear friend and say, You know what, we need to do a venue for free, then we say, yes, it's free.

Yes, we know you that you are doing well. You are doing good work.

Sabine Nkusi 25:18

Thank you so much. I mean, again, there is so much in what you've just shared, I think that the bit about survivors not being treated as holy. So you are sinners. You know, what has happened to you? Is your fault. A lot of blaming that's happening there. You know, no being given the opportunity to to meet in in the church, even though you are a member of that church, you know, having to meet under trees. I mean, that is a lot to take on. And I think it is very much what the church does, when he hasn't been really awakened to some of these issues. In this work. Of course, you do work with other women. Are you able to tell us how you support other women and other survivors of sexual and gender based violence because the I think the first time I met you and even heard of your story, I think what really came through for me is when you said I don't want this work to just be about me. I want this work to be about other women. I want to reach out to my community. Can you just tell us how you've been able to support other women and the other survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

Esperande Bigirimana 26:31

Being a survivor in the good things when you are well empowered, like the way we're empowered in a Tearfund? When we started in 2015, you get that energy and the desire to save adults. In the purposes of 5G network. Everyone will feel like it will be the end of the network of the movement. We didn't really have much skills or education to lead any organisation. But we have, you know, the seriousness to have strong network that can challenge leadership, you know, not only in the community, but in our communities, in our churches in our government structure, which today, we can proudly say that we are a team of women men of them. We are a team of seven, which you call the steering team of Phephisa. And we're able from 2017 to have ourselves our own website. Without having funds. You know, we never have any support after Tearfund. But today, we do have a website where we are aiming to publish our work, our stories to be known. And also, when we start the purpose I will never forget that will be oriented. But as we were watching in the community and also growing with discover that there is nothing you can do without been recognised under the law of the country. We work on it. And today, we are going to which is really very strong, very active work as a team, because everything is not about money for us at peace, our mission, if you can go to our website, our mission is just in a sexual awareness in the world, not in South Africa only in the world. That's our mission. So with money without money, we work as a team. And we mobilise other women give them the skills. We support any survivor under the court of law. And that push us to learn a little bit about law policies, you know, because we discover when we go to the court of law without the policies and a little bit of law, we educate ourselves there in adapt to support new survivors that the worker have been doing. And also I can say me a member of Grober survival network called semma. So I think I was introduced global survival network seminar in 2017. By Tearfund, you know, before crossing South Africa, introduced me to savor it was the first retreat to fully pay for me. And that had been grown, where we then a lot of things where we share our stories and learn from other servers but from all over the world. And under that global survival network, we're able to have a coach who helps us to build PISA you know, And also at Phephisa, we have skills, those might vary, we share them with people who are in Burundi, Congo,

who are part of the same. So we network, even ourselves. We have been supporting many women survivors all over the world. And also, I was given opportunity under Tearfund, I think 2019 To mobilise the survivor in Burundi and also equipped Cecere, that's how they can support survivors, which was really a very good opportunity to be in that kind of platform. And so we have been supporting survivors on an international level national level in the community level. Yeah.

Sabine Nkusi 30:50

Thank you. I just love how you, you said that you had to learn new things. And, and I think as sometimes as, as women, you know, we have to adapt to what's happening around us. If there is a call to action to do something, we have to really make sure that we know what we're talking about. So when you said that you had to learn about the law, because you were advocating for sort of with lawmakers and especially for survivors with the law, I thought that was just really amazing. So, I want to ask you about the movements that you have been talking about. You talked about some of the work that you have done in Burundi, you've talked about Phephisa, as well, and SIGMA. For our audience, actually, today, you know, the Phephisa networking in South Africa actually won the UK charity award in 2018. For an approach that is not very expensive, but actually just providing space for people to meet. So it all starts with providing a space for people to meet, connect, learn from each other, share their experiences, and dream together, as Brandon has been talking about dreaming together and really hoping for a better future. And you've also talked about the global movement that you're a part of now. And I know that you've been going to various places prior to Covid-19. And also, during this time, attending meetings with some of the that global network. Can you tell us a bit about that as well? I think you came from, you know, sort of doing the work at a local level with the younger survivors in South Africa. And now you are advocating at a global level with survivors from all over the world. Can you tell us how that is? And maybe, you know, the summer network, what is that you do there and how you are involved?

Esperande Bigirimana 33:09

Yeah. Oh, yes. Since 2017, from the beginning, I become a member of Sigma Global Survivor Network, which is now has almost 25 countries, you know, who are part of SIGMA. So, typically, the work I'm doing there, it's more on advocacy, on reparation. What we call it reparation, because most of the countries who are part of SIGMA are from war countries or conflict countries. So our democracy is around reparation. Just make sure that our countries understand that when a woman is used, like a weapon of war, actually his government or his country, supposed to do kind of reparation because it's something you do willingly, because we were served as a from a long time and when if you can walk in and appease Vedic around those countries in a conflict, the survivors are not to be found, you know, we are just part of statistic. So group by survivor network normally focus on preparation, and also a survivor want to be involved in their own peacebuilding of their own country, and also to push agenda of international organization to come in and support the survivors. CPR for example, to see those a crime as a crime not treated it like it was a woman that woman was used as a weapon of war. Those are the kinds of work we do advocacy on international organization, the UN and also is not advocating on ready for change, we educate them, like we have been doing un woman, military, educating them white men, the holistic approach, holistic approach hearing, what does it mean for Survivor because they operate in under the country of war where the survivor, when it's wrapped, they're taken into hospital and they give a testimony. And then they give another testimony to another

person to another person, how it's harmful to those survivors. So we're advocating that we need a holistic approach, one center, where a survivor can go and have medical support, psychological support, emotional support, and also livelihood support, just to be one center, that's definitely to have been advocating on international level, and under UN also reparation, telling those candidates to join in a petition of survivors. Because we believe that if we are able to get the petition, and the petition doesn't mean that if even you give me a composition of, let's say, \$10,000, it doesn't mean that I'll be fine. But it's mean that you recognise that it was a cram happened to me, it's just repetition, just to put something together a little bit, recognise that there is something wrong happened to me, you did something wrong to me. And then oh, even apologise. Yeah, that's the kind of work you have been doing, and grow by survivor network. And also, just to have each other the survivors in the shell, our story, and, and just, and just have each other, support each other, love each other. And just give hope to each other.

Sabine Nkusi 36:49

Wow, really, really important work. So as you were talking about reparation, I'm just remembering earlier, you've talked about how there was some, I guess, resistance within, you know, challenges, even within the church, as you were survivors trying to meet and the way you were being perceived. I presume that as you do this advocacy, people are also resisted, but they're not necessarily too keen to be hearing what you're saying. But are there any success that you have seen in the global sort of the advocacy work that you have been doing, how the conversations progressing? And moving forward any success? Any glimpse of hope, in what you have done? And what you have seen?

Esperande Bigirimana 37:39

I'm actually a member of Global Funds Preparation, as a member of the board. So, yeah, there is a lot of progress. Many countries did give money, and reparation funds has been tested in Congo. And also, I don't remember the countries, but the other three countries, I don't remember without reading. Also, in Burundi, the research is done. So the group I found is testing in the countries. And for example, in the Congo, they were able to give like, I think \$1,000 to any survivor who was raped under the war. So they're testing if, global survivor, is something where reparations can happen. And yes, it can happen. And there's a lot of progress. There is survivor group and network supporting many networks, especially like in the Congo, Mali, there are so many people have been really supported. But it's not only supporting them financially, it is supporting survivor nationally to approach their own government, to acknowledge that there is a crack. I took a press in that country, it's about more than just telling the government, our government, you know what reparations, is it possible? Let's show you that it's possible. Because reparations are not about money only. It's about also acknowledging something, say 'sorry'. So yeah, there are a lot of positive things that have happened. And like last month, I think last month I was in Uganda, where credit region, growth region countries means Burundi, Congo, Uganda, Central Africa. Yeah, we come together to talk about what's happening in those countries, because we are neighbouring countries and Rwanda. And also they invite African Union to come to tell us what they are doing for survivors, which was very interesting because they didn't have much to offer or to add. This is a very strong theory that they challenged them, you know, which

was very good to us. And also we were able to, to have like a talk, which was emotional, with kids who are born out of rape, which is a crisis we are having all over the world.

Sabine Nkusi 40:15

To have you talking about the global, you know, being part of the being a board member of the global funds for reparation, I think it's, it's just an amazing, amazing thing. It's really important as well. I think me hearing this and Solange and all of us at Tearfund hearing your story and the things that you have been able to, to accomplish, really, you know, it does humble us and we feel so privileged to have been part of your story to have been part of your healing as well and to also demonstrate that it is actually possible when that space is given to women to come together to share their experiences. And I think that, you know, there's opportunity for many more 'Esperandes' to rise up and really speak out and, and really denounce some of these violence against women that is happening around the world. So just maybe before I close with you, maybe if I may bring in Solange. If I maybe ask the last question on my side. So, you have of course been you know, leading this work and you have been accompanying us for the last few years. When you hear some of these stories, even as someone who has been part of this, you know what, what does it mean to you?

Solange Mbonigawa 41:41

It's so amazing. I did not know that it will go that far. I did not know that you will have the today Esperande did not know I did not have anything that would prove that we will have that today, Esperande, and many others. But, because we have God, who is pushing every work in every corner, leaving nothing behind. That is why we are able to hear these wonderful testimonies of the work. It's not about me. I am there also to learn, there is still resistance in the community out there. I was in Zimbabwe, recently, the same scenario when I met with them in their community, Pietermaritzburg, his shed outside under the tree. It happened to me again, last month of October, in Zimbabwe, we were sitting outside, cars are passing, people are passing, those are the human beings. I have met other two groups, one woman in the church, we sit in the church, community leaders in the other actors, we met in one of the compounds with the fresh air. But when I went to meet survivors, I met them outside, we sat, in the dust, and it's last month, October, you know, it's still a huge challenge. But there is hope, we did not know that you can raise today, Esperande. Thank you, Esperande. I don't know if I can answer to that. Because I'm too emotional. Thank you.

Sabine Nkusi 43:36

We have been, I think, very much challenged by the stories that we're hearing and the journey that we are part of with the different women around the world. In Mali, in Chad, in Sierra Leone, in Zimbabwe, in Burundi, there are movements, then women who are really rising up and speaking up and and and us here at Tearfund, we are also changed by those stories and just really seeing what the potential of the church what the people of God can do to make a difference in the lives of people. So, as parent, thank you so much for being with us and really speaking to us and sharing of your story. You're a very good friend of ours, and we really wish you well and all the best bless you.

Thank you for listening, and I hope you have been inspired and challenged by what you heard. Our next episode will focus on *Transforming Masculinities* which is Tearfund model for preventing sexual and gender based violence. I will be in conversation with Prabu Deepan, who developed this approach and will be speaking to us from his home in Sri Lanka. We hope to you'll join us again. In the meantime, if you want to find out more about our work or catch up on previous episodes of the faith in development podcast, please visit learn.tearfund.org. See you next time.

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