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The Role of Rural Female Income Diversifying Associations for Household Food Security in Gondar Zuriya Woreda of North Gondar, North West Ethiopia

Mezgebu Belay

Lecturer and Chairperson, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Gondar, Ethiopia

Abstract:

Attaining food security for rural households of Gondar Zuriya woreda is very difficult. Fulfilling basic inputs for crop production such as adequate fertilizer, improved seed, wide arable land, adequate oxen for plowing, and other cattle for harvesting and other purposes is almost a struggle. As a result, rural female income diversifying associations have become essential mechanisms performed to reduce food insecurity serving as additional source of income for households of the area's rural kebeles. The study was conducted to identify the major rural female associations formed aiming household food security as well as women empowerment and to explore the changes brought as a result of founding such associations in the area. It was carried out in three rural kebeles (Das Dinzaz, Tsion Segowatch, and Tach Teda) of Gondar Zuriya woreda. Key informant interview is conducted with the association's coordinators, secretaries, some other members and the head of the agriculture office in Maxegnit town. Besides, observation is used to fully capture the activities performed by these associations. The study reveals that rural female associations such as backyard sheep and goat breeding, apiculture, dairy farming, energy saving, poultry farming, etc. have played a great role serving as an additional means of making a living, which contribute a lot for household food security and women empowerment.

Keywords: Rural female, Income diversifying associations, Household food security, Gondar Zuriya woreda

1. Background

Historically, rural women have been participating in various income diversifying activities with the help of micro-enterprises which are important in creating job opportunity and income in rural Africa (Ajani, 2013). It is an essential strategy of making a living from different livelihood activities besides crop production. In this regard, Zelalem (2014), notes that to ensure household food security in Ethiopia, micro-level analysis on the linkage between food security and livelihood diversification should be given due emphasis. Livelihood diversification refers to “attempts by individuals and households to find new ways to raise incomes and reduce environmental risk, which differ sharply by the degree of freedom of choice (to diversify or not), and the reversibility of the outcome” (Carter, 1997). It includes both on- and off-farm activities which are undertaken to generate income in addition to the household major livelihood strategy such as wage, agriculture, etc. Samson, et al., (2010) also define income diversification as the process by which households widen their income base by adopting new economic activities such as diversification from subsistence into commercial activities; and diversification from agriculture into nonfarm activities. It is emanated from the interest to become more food secure, upgrade housing, educate children, accumulate assets or otherwise improve the household's standard of living.

“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization, 1996). However, according to Nigatu and Barbara (2011), in Ethiopia, 82.3% of the households were food insecure. Food insecurity has been given as the first priority in achieving the most fundamental human right in all developing countries (Kyaw, 2009). Though this is the case, usually, rural households are suffering from food insecurity resulted from lack of adequate inputs for grain production. According to Adugna and Wogayehu (2012), in Southern Ethiopia, for instance, shortage of oxen, lack of farm input and land shortage are the major factors contributing for household food insecurity. Rural female income diversifying associations are very crucial being as additional income sources of rural households in overcoming such problems and securing food. In line with this, Ajani (2013) argues that since farming in sub-Saharan Africa is rain-fed and seasonal, rural women should diversify their income sources. In patriarchal societies like the rural Amhara people women have been considered as weak, passive and only responsible for the domestic activities such as cooking, child care, nursing sick member of the family, fetching water, etc. But, currently, the consciousness of the people in relation to gender equality is increasing from time to time and this situation is changing. Women have started to engage in the activities where breads are coming, which have solely been left to men for generations.

...women are said to be “feeding the world”. On a global scale, women produce more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub-Sahara Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80% of basic foodstuffs. In Asia, they provide from 50 to 90% of the labour for rice cultivation. And in Southeast Asia and the Pacific as well as Latin America, women’s home gardens represent some of the most complex agricultural systems known (Prakash, 1999).

FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization, (1998) also notes that rural women are approximately 50 per cent of the world’s food producers. Besides reproductive functions, rural women in developing countries participate in crop production and livestock care, provide food, water and fuel for their families, and engage in off-farm activities to diversify their families’ livelihoods. (Women 2000 and Beyond). Women play significant roles in producing food, managing natural resources, generating income, and attaining household food and nutrition security (Quisumbing and Meinzen-Dick, 2001). Women in Africa are participating in the endangered rural non-farm occupations - basket making, mat making, ceramics and weaving, which play its role in the progress of Africa’s rural economy (Haggblade et al., 1989). Thus, according to Getaneh (2010), since women are better than men in spending their income on household purposes and have significant contributions in ensuring household food security, it is crucial to assist them by providing access to loans for income-generating activities, reducing their overall vulnerability. Empowering women is easier when they are in group than individual (Quisumbing and Meinzen-Dick, 2001). Women with limited resources who receive animals through group distribution schemes also note that the group itself provides numerous benefits, such as increased confidence and leadership skills (Quisumbing and Meinzen-Dick, 2001).

For this reason income diversifying associations are formed in the rural parts of Gondar Zuriya woreda to support women and they have engaged in various activities. This study therefore focuses on exploring the role played by rural female income diversifying associations in ensuring household food security through diversifying the households’ income sources and empowerment of women in Tach Teda, Tsion Segowatch, and Das Dinzaz rural *kebeles* (lower administrative units) of Gondar Zuriya *woreda* (district), North West Ethiopia.

2. Methods Employed

This study is carried out in purposefully selected three rural *kebeles* (Tach Teda, Tsion Segowatch, and Das Dinzaz) of Gondar Zuriya *woreda* where income diversifying female associations, which are established by the agriculture bureau of the *woreda* in collaboration with a nongovernmental organization called world vision that provide training and capital in the form of loan, are available in a relatively organized manner. A key informant interview was conducted with coordinators, secretaries, and most successful members of each association; as well as the head of the agriculture office at Maxegnit town. Areas that major questions focused include the role of rural female income diversifying associations in fulfilling household subsistence, women empowerment, and challenges encountered. In addition, personal observation is made on the various associations and some households from which women are involved in the associations for additional income generation. Furthermore, review of some scientific literature related to the study issue is carried out.

3. Study Area

Gondar Zuriya is one of the North Gondar zone *woredas* in National Regional State of Amhara, North West Ethiopia. According to Gondar zuriya *woreda* agricultural development office report, Gondar zuriya *woreda* has 35 rural *kebeles* and 2 urban *Kebeles* (Maxegnit and Teda). It covers 142.08 Km² areas and the total population residing in this area is 209,000. It is bordered on the south by South Gondar zone, on the southwest by Lake Tana, on the west by Dembiya *woreda*, on the north by Lay Armachiho *woreda*, on the northeast by Wogera *woreda*, and on the southeast by Mirab Belessa *woreda*. The study is conducted particularly in Das Dinzaz, Tsion Segowatch, and Tach Teda rural *kebeles* of this *woreda*.

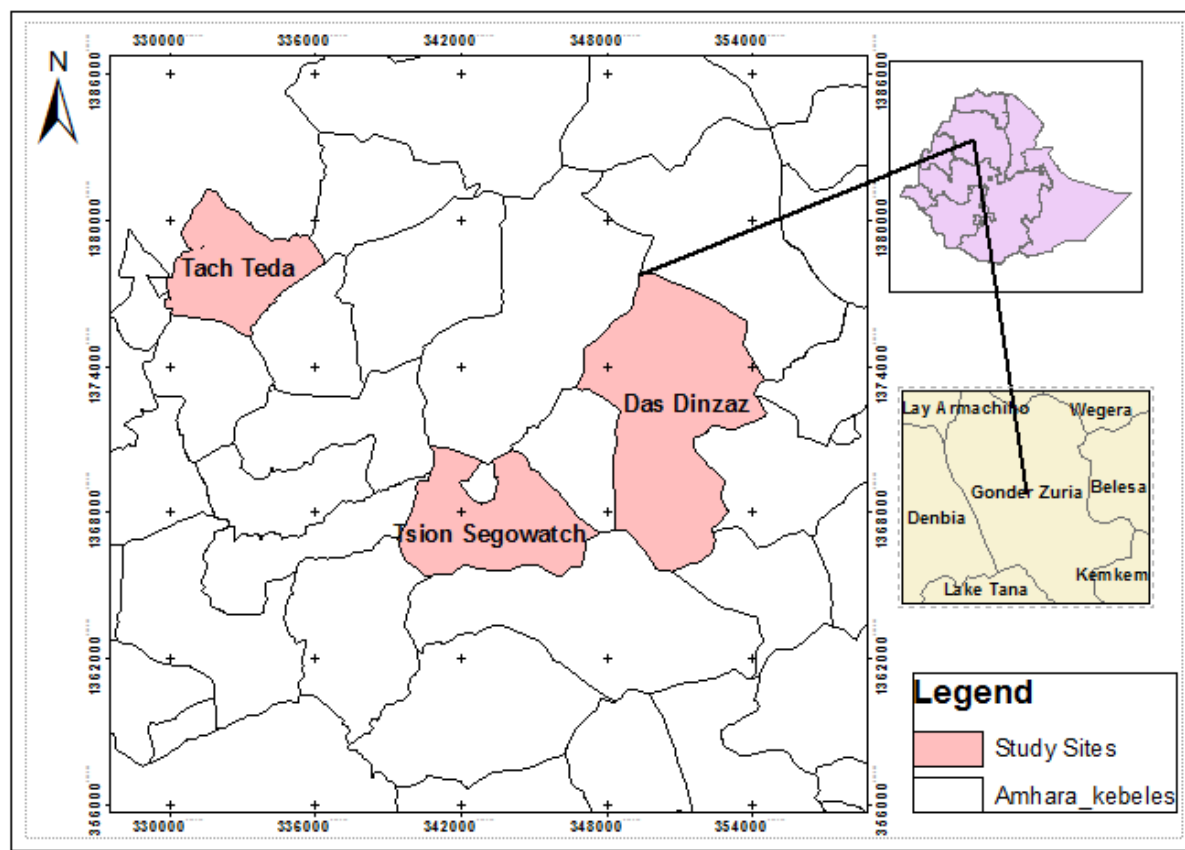


Figure 1: Map of the study area

4. Rural Female Income Diversifying Associations in Gondar Zuriya woreda

Engaging in income diversifying activities geared by the need to become more food-secure, upgrade housing, educate children, and improve the household's standard of living (Samson, et'al, 2010). In Gondar Zuriya woreda rural female income diversifying associations play a pivotal role in fulfilling the food security of rural households, reducing unemployment, and promoting women empowerment which further leads overcoming gender based violence-domestic conflict and other exploitations of women by their husbands as a result of losing all rights to have a say on their properties. Most importantly the associations have helped to diversify incomes of the households to ensure food security; build up saving; reduce migration and crime by bringing unemployed youths especially boys to be part of them.

The main criterion for selecting members for the formation of these associations is interest. Those interested women to form group and establish these associations are registered by the help of people in the agriculture office at Maxegnit town and the *kebele* administrators. Choosing the type of association (e.g. back yard sheep and goat breeding, apiculture, etc.) they want to participate in is up to the interest of the women. For the sake of comparative advantage and to get better market, not all interested women are formed in the same activities. Still those who are already involved in such income generating activities are seeking for other better activities like from energy saving activity to apiculture and sheep breeding and from sheep and goat breeding to dairy production; and those who are not involved have registered to form associations and engage in such income generating activities based on their interest. The following are the major rural female income diversifying associations in Gondar Zuriya woreda.

4.1. Back Yard Sheep and Goat Breeding

It is one of the rural female associations formed for income diversification and household food security. Though they have formed associations the sheep and goat are not communal (rather they are private properties). The purpose of forming association is to get support such as loan, and improved sheep and goat breeds from the concerned governmental and non governmental bodies such as World Vision. Women in sheep breeding association are typically engaged in activities related to the safety and wellbeing of the sheep such as cleaning the barns and maintaining hygiene of the sheep, which are performed around the homestead. When other members of the household are taking their turn to treat and look after the sheep, feeding and watering, they are also involved with home activities. I am the coordinator. We have an association comprises of 47 members, who are engaged in sheep breeding. We meet once per month and discuss on our weaknesses and strengths regarding the sheep treatments, saving, how to be programmed and change the lives of our families. Even we discuss on how we can be equal with men. We have fines for the absentees in the meeting, said Azeneg Alemu, coordinator of the association in Tsion Segowatch *kebele*.

“Women’s livestock projects in developing countries are increasing. When rural women have access to cash or microcredit, they usually choose to invest in livestock, which further provide food, cash, draft power, and fertilizer, and gain value through reproduction” (Quisumbing and Meinzen-Dick, 2001). According to the head of Maxegnit agriculture office, women from different *kebeles* of Gondar Zuriya *woreda* took loan in terms of sheep and in terms of cash to buy sheep and goat for breeding. The reason why women were preferred to take the loan is that men are usually suspected to spend it on drinking (alcohol). Now they all returned the money to the borrower, Zelaki limat-a micro finance project supported by World Vision. Side by side to this sheep and goat breeding activity they are engaged in basket weaving and spinning however, usually they do this for their home use rather than for sale.

They benefit from the sale of young sheep for lambs and household purposes. The high sale per year is 5500 birr; and the lower sale is 3400 birr. Improving their household living standard by building up saving the money from the sale of sheep and goat and buying oxen, cows, improved seeds and fertilizer for crop production; constructing new house, etc. are some of the benefits they have gained from this activity. According to informants, it brought just a transformation in their livelihood.

In this patriarchal society women were highly victim and have been ignored from the social, political and economic activities in the community for a long time. Fortunately, in addition to income generation and food security, the association helped them for empowerment. “Previously we were not allowed to sale small animals such as sheep and goats, if any, our husbands immediately take the money. But these days, we discuss on how we should spend the money. If our husbands refuse this and try to exploit us, we immediately ask for separation and keep our equal rights”, said Yezabnesh, secretary of this association in Tsion Segowatch *kebele*.

Azeneg, coordinator of the association in Tsion Segowatch *kebele*, says, I am responsible for different necessities and need of the household, previously, my household was impoverished but now thanks to the sheep and goats we have recovered. our difficulties were mainly results of the death my first daughter because of which I was in a deep sorrow for a while, in a situation of not being able to think about my family’s economic status. Later on, when my family becomes starved I and my husband started to create new income generating mechanisms. At this time we have got a god like opportunity, in 2001 E.C we received money from the project known as Zelaki Limat, established by World Vision, and bought sheep for breeding. Then I started to take care of them by providing their food, washing by soap, cleaning their barn and etc. Gradually they become many and I started to sale the small ones usually during holidays (Easter, *Enkuatash*-Ethiopian New Year, Christmas, and etc.), the time when sheep are slaughtered in enormous amount. From the sale of sheep I bought oxen for farming. Then I added one dairy cow. As a result, I was able to send my children to school to continue their education (two sons’ grade 10; two daughters’ grade 8 and 9). Now, my family lives in a better socio-economic condition. Moreover, I have become an exemplary woman in the community so that others who are members of this association and those who are not show great interest to follow my path, because I am programmed and follow strict rules of my own when it comes to working and feeding my family.

She continued her narration and says my major livelihood is agriculture, which is mainly based on the sale of the sheep. The seed, the fertilizer, oxen and other inputs for production are bought by selling the sheep. Even by doing so we get some amount of yields, just enough for subsistence. Therefore, sheep mean everything for us; they are guarantees for our survival for we can sell them and buy something (crops). They are also our health insurances. As a result I am thinking to totally engage in livestock production rather than grain production. I am also thinking to add dairy farming, which will further improve our life as we can sell the milk, butter, etc. for urban people, Maxegnit and Gondar.

Additionally, she says, I also, to some extent, participate in bee keeping/farming. But I still need dairy farming, thus we urge the government to help us (to totally free us from hunger and poverty) by providing cows for dairy production. If the sheep are treated in a good way- by providing a fodder by the time and bees are made to live in the forest where they can found different flowers, both can be equally used to economically empower women. Before these additional livelihoods our major way of life depended on grain production, which yields only four winter subsistence. Because the production is affected by drought and/or unexpected rain, less quality of seeds, shortage of fertilizer, etc. But now by selling the sheep we are able to buy better seeds, fertilizer, and other inputs- so that it will have enough not only for the winter subsistence but also the summer. My children support me by looking after and feeding the sheep before and after school. With regard to this activity my husband and the community motivate and support me and also have good attitude towards me. These days, things are changed –people are now aware and eager to improve their life so that nobody is devaluing and degrading women and their effort to improve their life; rather, everyone encourages hardworking women. Previously we, females, were undermined and victims in all aspects of our life, but now we have come to learn our rights and duties in different public meetings and the media. We have learned that we are equal with men thus; we are equally involved in the income generating economic activities such as back yard sheep breeding and others.

Setech Mengistie is a 43 years old woman and coordinator of this association in Das Dinaz *kebele* (Dinzaz sub *kebele*). She controls whether the members are looking after their sheep at their garden by providing the necessary fodder and water and keeping them clean. Her major economic activity is agriculture. Before she entered this association her household owned only two oxen. While explaining how she entered this association and the benefits she is getting from it, Setech says, when I hear about this association my husband and I discussed together and agreed to have additional income generating activity by involving in this association and started to breed sheep in our, back yard. Now we are able to educate our children, we have also replaced our old ox with a younger one, and are able to buy better seeds, fertilizer and other farm inputs. Currently, the general number of sheep owned by all members of the association is about 15-23.

Therefore, women are benefited from the sale of sheep and goat which enabled them to buy inputs for crop production and cover other expenses in their households. The association also helped them to assure as they have equal contribution for household food security

as their husbands. Having seen the tremendous changes brought by women on their household food security, men have started to give them appropriate respect and encouragement.

4.2. Dairy Production

When possible, women prefer to own larger animals such as dairy cattle, because they are more profitable and bring greater personal status (Quisumbing and Meinzen-Dick, 2001). Fifteen women farmers from Tsion Segowatch *kebele* have participated in improved/cross breed dairy cows which can give 6 – 8 litter per day. From the sale of milk income (maximum 24-32 birr/day and minimum 8-18 birr/day) they are able to buy new cloths, solve domestic problem related with money, send their children to school, reduced over use of fuel wood by replacing it with cow dung, reduce deforestation, even put the dried dung for sale as a source of fuel. In general, from this activity they secured their food, upgrade housing, educate children, and accumulate assets.

4.3. Apiculture

“Micro-livestock (guinea pigs, silkworms, snails, honeybees, and rabbits) are especially important. It is easier to operate a productive enterprise with smaller animals, since the initial costs are lower. Profits may be low, but so are the risks, and men are less likely to interfere” (Quisumbing and Meinzen-Dick, 2001). There are 10 women farmers from Das Dinzaz *kebele* who participate in this income diversifying activity. When they formed this association, each of them was given 3 modern bee hives, totally 30, by world vision. Previously, women hardly participated in the production of honey in rural areas due to the difficulties to hang the beehives on the top of trees. Thus, it was exclusively left to men who are physically fit to climb tree and put the beehives at the right height and place. However, thanks to technology and training, women have started to keep bees using modern beehives, which are relatively easy for women to manage. For this reason, currently, those both interested women and men who live in the hilly areas of Das Dinzaz and TachTeda *kebeles* are given modern bee hives and have formed apiculture associations. Hilly areas are preferred for this activity for the reason that it serves dual purposes (a) forest is suitable for bee because they can easily access flowers (b) it is a good strategy to prevent deforestation and encourage reforestation. In these associations women are supported by men because men are needed to guard the bee in the night time. Now they are producing pure honey, as one part of their agricultural activities and, source of income. From the sale each member of the association gets a maximum of 3700 birr, and a minimum of 2800 birr per year.

4.4. Poultry Farming

Poultry in rural Gondar Zuriya woreda are reared for market on a small scale using traditional methods. There was no poultry association and neither improved breeds nor technologies have been introduced until the formation of the association. However, after the association was established each member (33 poor female farmers, in Tsion Segowatch *kebele*), were given 80 improved chickens after signing contractual agreement and negotiate with world vision. Each member reared a maximum of 60-76 and a minimum of 50-60 chickens. Hence, they are able to scaling up improved chicken, increase egg production, and solve their financial problem from the sale.

4.5. Energy Saving

Training is given for 20 women about fuel wood saver oven prepare and distributed to both urban and rural people by World Vision. This activity resulted in dual benefits; one for income generation by selling the oven and second by reducing deforestation which mainly occurs through destruction of trees for the sake of fire wood. For this reason, rural female associations on this income diversifying activity are formed.

Zerfe Teshale is a 48 year old woman in Tsion Segowatch *kebele* (Tsion sub *kebele*). She is the coordinator of the fire wood saver oven association. Her major economic activities are agriculture, poultry production and bee keeping. She said that in order to supplement these activities she has involved in this activity. Furthermore, she says, in 2004 E.C. World Vision gave us a four day long training and instruments necessary for our work. Then after, we bought sand and cement and started to build fire wood saver oven. We sale these ovens at 50 birr price for our members, 100 birr for rural people, 120 birr for urban people and 130 birr to World Vision so as to distribute it to urban people. However, since the cost of sand and cement is high it is not that much profitable.

As Zewude, one of the members of this association, said, they have tried to replace the sand by soil but it made their work difficult and the produced ovens of poor quality. For this reason, they need support regarding provision of sand and cement in fair price so that they can get fair profit. Otherwise, they will be obliged to form or join other association like bee keeping, dairy production, fattening and sheep breeding. Therefore providing appropriate inputs for the production of traditional fuel wood saver ovens is recommended. Establishing another income diversifying association which mainly engages in providing raw materials (such as cement and sand) to the fuel wood saver associations may sustainably solve this problem and made the people to be the beneficiary of this modern fire wood saver oven, which also contribute a lot in avoiding deforestation.

In addition to the abovementioned income diversifying associations in which women are merely involved, there are some other associations such as maize production and fattening, which also include men.

In Tach Teda *kebele* those unemployed female and male youths formed associations and the community gave them some part of its communal grazing land for maize production and irrigation. In winter using irrigation they produce vegetables such as onion, potato, chili, cabbage, etc. and rain fed maize production in the summer season is also another income generating activity carried out by both men and women

Fattening oxen, practiced by both men and women in a fenced communal pasture land is also another additional income source at Tach Teda *kebele*. Similar to the maize producing associations both unemployed men and women of this specific *kebele* are allowed by the community to form groups and fatten oxen, for sale.

These income generating associations (fattening and maize producing) prevented many girls from illegal migration to Sudan and Arabian countries. Similarly most boys were thieves and unemployed, however, after forming the association they become employed and hard working.

The places where these fattening and maize productions are being carried out were communal grazing lands. However, due to shortage of arable land and the increment of unemployment the community has given it to members of the association, so that they can use it to fatten cattle and produce maize. Because these associations are formed and embraced jobless men and women; crime, migration and unemployment have been reduced. Furthermore, it enabled youths to construct houses and secure their subsistence.

Nonetheless, there are still some challenges encountered by members of the association such as inconvenient working environment (unfulfilled facilities), shortage of additional land for pasture, and training on money saving and how to produce maize and fatten cattle in a more productive way.

5. Conclusion

As urban women too, it is definite that rural women are equal contributors to the household food security. Beyond spending their whole time in cooking and caring children, gathering fuel wood and other home activities, they are responsible to the “public” spheres such as income generating activities and decision making for the household affairs. The rural female income diversifying associations are incredible in this regard. This is due to the fact that rural women benefit from these associations not only in generating income but also in developing awareness about their equality in different issues with their husband from the various trainings and meetings given side by side to the objectives of the associations. Similarly, as a result of several trainings given at churches by the policemen and health extension workers, men are also brought attitudinal change in relation to the equality of women with men. Hence they are very happy with their wives who are engaged in income generating activities and contributing a lot in covering costs related to fertilizer, oxen, improved seeds, and different expenses of their children attending their high school in urban areas and university educations that was impossible solely by the income generated from crop production. Therefore, the study shows that, though they are facing problems such as lack of adequate trainings, capital, wide working space, and market networks, those women participating in income diversifying associations in Das Dinzaz, Tach Teda and Tsion Segowatch rural *kebeles* of Gondar Zuriya *woreda* have brought positive changes in household food security and gender equality. Involving women farmers, both female-headed households and married women in rural female’s income diversifying associational activities are very crucial to set aside rural household food insecurity and to empower women. Informants explained that rural female income diversifying associations will be strengthened more and sustainably contribute for the attainment of household food security if appropriate credit, trainings, and other related relevant supports are provided by the concerned bodies, both governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

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