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From Economic Development to Local Economic Growth: Income Generating Projects in Nkayi District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

The paper explores the potentials and challenges of adopting local economic development (LED) in Nkayi district. It discusses the economic activities that have been adopted by the citizens of the Nkayi district in bid to create employment and sustainable sources of livelihoods. The paper further questions the role of development institutions in the Nkayi district in promoting business-enabling environment. The research employed purposive sampling. Data was gathered through questionnaire, key informant interviews and observation in Nkayi district. Research revealed that Nkayi citizens are engaged in various Income generating projects using locally available resources. There is a general lack of concerted effort by the development actors in Nkayi district to work towards LED related. This could be attributed to the fact that Zimbabwe as a whole has not adopted LED as a development strategy. Nkayi is endowed with many natural resources that can be intelligently exploited for the betterment of the community, however, it is faced with challenges in achieving LED as a district. The paper concludes that there is a need for the government of Zimbabwe to shift from a sectoral approach to development and adopt a region specific approach to development.

Key words: Local Economic Development, Economic Development Theories Development Institutions, Nkayi District, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

The International Labour Organization (ILO) notes that 'globalization has changed the rules that govern the world's economies, connecting national, regional and local economies more than ever before' (ILO, 2008a:2). Local economies are now 'strongly influenced by policies and processes formed at the supranational level, such as market liberalization, expanding global production systems and the changing terms of trade' (ILO, 2006:2). Notably, globalization is now a fundamental determinant of the transformations characterizing the planning of local and regional development (Pike et al., 2006; Ruecker & Trah, 2007; Christensen & Van der Ree, 2008; Rodriguez-Pose, 2008a, 2009a). Moreover, globalization 'implies changes, opportunities and threats and not all territories across the world have the same capacity and tools to make the world an even playing field' (Rodriguez-Pose & Crescenzi, 2008:372). Notably, according to Pike et al (2006:4) the 'acceleration of globalization exposes even the most remote spaces to competition and forces firms, localities and regions to react and adjust to the new economic conditions'. As a result of the changes in the approach to local and regional development, local economic development (LED) has been adopted in international development planning, particularly culminating from the rise of pervasive global trends towards decentralization. Localities are increasingly being viewed as critical places of competitiveness in a new global economy (Valler & Wood, 2010:140), thereby maximising local potentials.

As a result of these dynamic changes, Local Economic Development (LED), is fast being adopted as a strategically planned global initiative premised on providing a more flexible and effective approach to enhancing economic growth and reduce poverty. It offers a potentially more people-centred and locality specific alternative to the traditional development strategies and structural adjustment programmes that have dominated the development policy panorama (Schuurman 1993; Binns and Nel 1999). Traditional development strategies tend to adopt sector-wide approaches to development, while LED adopts a territorial approach where it focuses on the development of a region or locality rather than an industrial sector. Moreover, traditional development

strategies are generally top-down, with the central government deciding where intervention is needed with little or no input from local actors; while in contrast, the LED approach focuses on development from below and advocates the need for promoting economic development in all areas (Rodríguez-Pose and Tijmstra 2005). In essence, LED allows for equal and active participation of local stakeholders in the formulation of development strategies, making them better tailored to local needs. These strategies seek to exploit territorial potentials in stimulating the regulation of local economic systems in a dynamic economic environment. As such, (Rodríguez-Pose 2002: 1-10) posits that 'the aim of LED is to develop local strength and overcome weaknesses in order to allow the locality to successfully confront the opportunities and threats it faces from the external environment'. Critically, Zimbabwe does not have any policy consciously adopting and implementing LED. No effort has been made so far in the country to consciously move from the traditional approach to development to adopting strategically planned LED. The paper thus, seeks to explore alternatives that can be adopted by locales in Zimbabwe to create better conditions for their economic growth and employment generation, borrowing concepts from the fundamental principles of LED; using Nkayi District as a case in point.

2. Conceptualisation of Local Economic Development

Local Economic Development is a polemic process and has undergone wide ranging and extensive debate of its conception, implementation and benefit to the recipient. There are several definitions of LED and no single one overriding others as the accepted definition. According to the World Bank (2003:7), 'Local Economic Development (LED) is the process by which public, business and non-governmental sector partners work collectively to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation with the aim of improving the quality of life for all'. On the other hand, the UNHABITAT (2003a:1) defines LED as 'a participatory process where local people from all sectors work together to stimulate local commercial activity resulting in a resilient and sustainable economy. It is a tool to help create decent jobs and improve the quality of life for everyone, including the poor and marginalized'. Moreover, Helmsing (2010: 2) posits that the LED is 'an integrative approach in which public, private and civic actors define and manage resources to create and maintain place prosperity in a well-defined area'. In essence, LED becomes a 'process in which partnerships between local governments, community based groups and the private sector are established to manage existing resources to create jobs and stimulate the economy of a well-defined territory' (Ibid). From the definitions presented, it is clear that the concept of LED emphasizes local control, using the potentialities of the available human, institutional and physical resources to promote growth and competitiveness at the local level.

According to Cunningham and Meyer-Stamer (2005), LED is a pragmatic response to a visible need, usually pursued for a common good of the locale but also to pioneer and promote individual actors' interests. They note that these interests could be that:

Local decision makers try to promote economic development to raise their legitimacy with the local electorate, and possibly to improve the income stream for local government; while in some countries, LED has become a mandatory task of local government as part of an extensive decentralisation effort; and from the perspective of foreign donor organisations, LED is an established practice with a long tradition in their home countries, and there is no doubt that LED is one of the important tasks of local government (Ibid:5)

Moreover, Cunningham and Meyer-Stamer (Ibid:4) postulates that 'promoting LED has become a growth sector in the international technical assistance industry, both in transformation economies and in developing countries where high levels of unemployment and poverty, result in a strong need to promote economic development'. Notably, entails the empowerment of a local group, improving their social fabric status, raising its standard of living through various self-help income projects (Todaro, 2000:10). As such, LED is a global initiative aimed at promoting economic development of specific territories through local initiatives and resources by local people towards the creation of employment and better living conditions in the locale.

3. Local Economic Development: Origins

According to the World Bank report by Rodríguez-Pose and Tijmstra (2005:3) citing (Nel 2001: 1004), 'LED strategies have their origins in the high-income countries of the North where they emerged as a response to the social and economic problems that resulted from the persistence of locality-specific development problems such as the disappointing results of traditional top-down development strategies in combating the resulting rise in unemployment and regional inequality'. These drove the search for alternative development strategies that would offer opportunities for growth in all areas (Roberts 1993). On the other hand, in the South, 'LED has been gradually emerging as a development strategy for similar reasons, where the persistence of slow economic growth and poverty, combined with the changes in the national and international economic environment, and the effective inability of many central states to intervene at the local level have provided a strong impulse towards more locally based initiatives' Rodríguez-Pose and Tijmstra (2005:3). Nel (2001: 1004) posits that 'in many developing countries, the situation was aggravated by factors such as the debt crisis, imposed structural adjustment and massive currency devaluation, and other natural and political shocks'. Rodríguez-Pose and Tijmstra (2005:3) notes that 'in this context, LED has been used to describe a growing number of initiatives, ranging from industrial policy and regional planning for community development, which, although part of a LED strategy, cannot entirely be considered as LED. LED only refers to those development strategies that are territorially based, locally owned and managed, and aimed primarily at increasing employment and economic growth (Rodríguez-Pose: 2002). This is further cemented by Canzanelli (2001: 9) who defines LED as 'participatory process that encourages and facilitates partnership between the local stakeholders, enabling joint design and implementation of strategies based on the competitive use of the local resources, with the aim of creating decent jobs and sustainable economic activities'.

4. Local Economic Development Theories And Concepts

There are a number of theories and conceptualizations that characterize LED. For purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the 3Cs theory, the bottom up approach and putting the last first: the Chamberian approach as discussed below.

4.1. *The 3Cs Theory*

Cornwall, Musyoki and Pratt (2001: 6) argue that 'the participatory approach is always "collective in nature" and the process requires groups of people to engage collectively in a particular social problem'. The most important step in this context is 'the collective identification of the problem; collective analysis of the problem and finally collective action or solution to the problem'. Community participation in this context is viewed as a collective enterprise which emphasizes on changing the roles of the community from the passive recipient of information to generators of ideas and catalyst of the process (Tandon, 2005). This is a significant distinction from an individual effort to a community centered approach. Proponents of this approach argue that income generating projects for communities should be premised on such principles if they are to succeed. Through a process of mutual learning and analysis, community members are brought into research and brainstorming as they collectively identify, analyze and come up with solutions for their problems, resultantly becoming owners of their own generated knowledge and activities. This enables all stakeholders to actively get involved in the solution of problems that affect them (Tandon, 2005). Income generating projects can only succeed if their formulation follows a people centered approach as a knowledge and project production and identification system.

4.2. *The Bottom-Up Approach*

The bottom-up approach 'is a local concentration approach of a collective process whereby a local community can take charge of the future of its own area (Green, et al. 2003). In a bottom-up approach, the individual base elements of the system are first specified in great detail. These elements are then linked together to form larger subsystems, which then in turn are linked, sometimes in many levels, until a complete top-level system is formed. This strategy often resembles a "seed" model, whereby the beginning is small but eventually grows in complexity and completeness. Rural communities are generally dispersed, isolated, rarely asked their views and perceived as noncontributory to issues affecting them (Musyoki and Pratt, 2001). Normally, intervention strategies to their problems are developed in isolation and subject to local optimization as opposed to meeting a global purpose. A bottom-up approach means that the decision-maker takes the felt needs and wishes of the community as the starting point and unit of analysis (Swanepoel, 2003). It is from such a backdrop that income generating projects for local communities should follow such ideas and views may be interrogated and solutions sought.

5. Local Economic Development in Zimbabwe

Local and community development initiatives in Zimbabwe are still premised on the traditional framework of development that emphasizes handouts, relief and other forms of external aid for spearheading development agendas and enhancing livelihoods. Locales still engage in small income generating projects aimed at improving livelihoods for a few households, instead of engaging in community wide interventions that are aimed at fostering economic growth and competitiveness of the whole locality. This is because Zimbabwe has not made efforts on recommendations from researches being done globally that advocate the adoption of LED as a remedy to poverty and economic challenges facing localities. Helmsing (2010: 2) defines LED as 'an integrative approach in which public, private and civic actors define and manage resources to create and maintain place prosperity in a well-defined area'. Against this backdrop, it is clear that indigenous knowledge and endogenous resources in Zimbabwe are not being collectively exploited to address the general economic ills in the localities but rather fragmented individual efforts for self-betterment is pursued.

It is however worth noting that although Zimbabwe does not have a specific targeted LED policy; it has a number of other developmental policies that inherently promote some of the priorities of LED. Such policies as the Indigenisation Act, Community Share Ownership Trusts Scheme, Land Reform Policy, among others, promote certain aspects of LED, which, when strategically employed and properly implemented may foster meaningful economic development in localities.

6. Methods and Materials

This paper is based on the data collected in the Nkayi district in Matabeleland North province of Zimbabwe in May 2013. The approach was both quantitative and qualitative. Literature review shaped the questions in the data collection instruments. Data collection was through in-depth interviews, structured focus group questionnaires and field observation. The Income generating projects were scattered and widely dispersed throughout the rural heartland of Nkayi with the average catchment area radius of around 150 kilometres from Nkayi business centre. Also, accessibility of some of the Income generation projects was a problem due to the bad state of the roads. This created logistic problems in the mobilisation of the respondents thereby warranting the use of convenience and purposive sampling for the researcher administered questionnaires. In light of the preceding, chief Nkalakatha, Tohwe, Komayanga, Sivomo, Fanison, Dakamela and Skoop areas were selected for the questionnaires and focus groups. The research targeted about 30 groups of entrepreneurs who are engaged in various forms of income generating activities ranging from gardening to paraffin making. Individual and group discussions were held with entrepreneurs. Researchers observed and documented important activities.

7. Results

The research covered various areas of Nkayi district, including Sivomo, Chief Nkalakatha Magole, Sibuyu and Komayanga. Various IGPs were interviewed in the above mentioned areas. The groups included; Simasonke, Siyaphanda uniform making, eSibuya, Vusananimanina kusile, Thuthuka sizame, Nhlanhla kazulu and Manyano. These groups are mainly dominated by women members between the ages of 31 and 50 and on average the groups have 8 members. All groups consisted of literate members who had varied levels of education ranging from Grade seven to Ordinary level. The majority of IGPs were formed in 2005 and the groups had not received much institutional support, be it from the NGOs, government or private sector. Criterion for membership in all the groups was based on willingness and need to join as well as availability of space for those into gardening; ability to work hard to ensure the success of the IGP was a must. The IGPs range from vegetable production, poultry (indigenous chicken), sewing, basketry, paraffin making, brick making and crop production. Research noted that the IGPs are operating at a small scale hence they are not in a position to create employment for other community members who were not involved in the establishment of the projects.

The majority of groups pointed out that the raw materials for their activities are locally available natural resources such as ilala (palm fan), kalaga (coloured soils) and imnyiyi (colouring tree) for coloring baskets. The groups cited that there was less support from the government departments or private sector. The Ministry of Education was the only outstanding government arm that had been instrumental in the setting up and development of income generating projects under the pretext of their Adult Literacy Education Programme. For all the groups, no market research was done to establish the existence of the market but they relied on the number of people who would come to inquire about the availability of their products. This therefore means that their market is constituted of the surrounding areas who suffer from the same economic problems as them. One particular group complained that their consumers purchase their product at low prices. However once in a while buyers from Harare come into the area to buy, yet sometimes the group could send a representative to go and sell their produce in Harare, Kadoma and Bulawayo. Most of the IGPs indicated that they could get twenty five United States dollars (\$25) a month if they had good sells and this would be divided and shared among the members. This money is the one that they re-invest and also use to sustain their livelihoods, such as paying school fees for their children buy livestock like goats.

All the members expressed lack of satisfaction with the current operational status of their IGPs and indicated that they had not received any training on how to run IGPs and wished they could get that. The main challenges expressed were: unavailability of money to buy raw materials that are not readily available in the locality, no access to markets, lack of fares to travel to cities to sell products, time to travel to sell the products, borehole maintenance expenses, no money to buy fence for the garden and to buy seedlings, among others. They expressed a need in terms of getting support and assistance to alleviate some of the challenges indicated above. The members interviewed also indicated that there were further opportunities that could be explored in the district that could promote economic empowerment for locals, namely, tailoring, pottery using kalaga soils, poultry, rearing goats, among others.

The district is endowed with natural resources such fan palm (ilala), timber, white soils (kalaga). The local authority is responsible for protecting these local resources to ensure that they benefit the locals. The DA noted that efforts are made to ensure that these resources do benefit the locals and significant success has been realized in that regard. Notably, Matabeleland is an area suitable for livestock production. However, due to harsh economic conditions prevailing in the country, especially in rural areas, locals are forced to sell their livestock for sustenance. The local authority has enlisted the services of an auctioneer to protect the locals from being cheated by buyers who would want to buy at very low prices.

One of the major challenges faced by the district is the lack of financial resources and there are no donors to assist in this regard. According to the district administrator's office, the only form of funding available is the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and Local Government funding. There is also some form of institutional support marked by the notable presence of various government ministry departments in Nkayi rural district. Complimentarily, there are various other nongovernmental organisations operating in Nkayi such as International Labour organization, Orap, AGRITEX, CARE GERMAN AGRO ACTION, etc. who offer training programmes to community members premised on the auspices of capacity building. The stakeholders noted that community members are benefiting immensely from IGPs as most of them involved in these are able to pay school fees and buy food for their families. However the research findings revealed these IGPs faced challenges in relation to transportation of their finished products to the market, which has led to the finished products not being sold. It was also noted that there is a lack of market links with established markets such as Bulawayo which has seen the Nkayi community failing to access vibrant markets for their products.

8. Discussion

8.1. Natural Resources and Economic activities in Nkayi

The research findings show that Nkayi as a district is endowed with a number of natural resources that include, forests, fan palm, arable land colored soils and human capital. For a community that is faced with high levels of poverty, low monthly incomes and high rates of unemployment, exploitation of natural resources presents an easy and quicker livelihoods option. Natural resources can be intelligently utilized as a source of well-being and sustainable economic activities. According to OECD (2008), access to natural resources is governed by the power dynamics that contribute to the marginalization of the poor. The rural poor have often been afforded limited access due to the existing policies and institutions. However, in Nkayi district, the populace has better privileges in relation to access of resources. The district is characterized by good lands suitable for vegetable production and this explains the sprouting of vegetable gardens close to water sources. Sivomo garden is located close to the dam where members

draw water for watering from; other gardens are situated near boreholes. Vegetable production has proved to be the key economic activity which has sustained the most of the families who are members of the IGP. Basketry and hat making are among prospering IGP activities in the district because of the abundance of palm fan. Palm fan is concentrated in Dakamela, Skoop and Komayanga areas. Nkayi has very good soils for brick molding in the Sibuyu area, which has seen many young man embark on brick molding projects as a livelihood diversification option. Generally, the Sibuyu soils do not crack after being molded into bricks and baked. The idea behind the brick molding was to supply Nkayi business center with bricks, for its urban development project. However, this IGP is faced with water scarcity and also very few people are willing to pay what their labour is worth.

8.2. Development Institutions and LED in Nkayi

Local economic development is achieved when the public, private and civil society sectors work together to enhance the competitiveness and economic productivity of an area, ensuring that the citizens have equitable access to employment and other economic opportunities. According to the Global forum on Local development (undated), Government ministries, Non-Governmental Organisations and Private businesses are the actors that are involved in LED regulatory, strategic guidance and facilitation functions towards economic development of the community. These entities at times provide support and play an important role in creating a business-enabling environment. Nkayi district is run by local government represented by the District Administrator (DA)'s office and has a number of NGOs operating within the district. However, there is evident lack of vibrant private sector in the district. While the above mentioned sectors exist and are supposed to be the pillars and drivers of LED, there is no collective effort to promote LED. Each sector concentrate on its own mandate and there is generally lack of a guiding framework towards LED activities, neither is there any effort to create business-enabling environment. It is generally argued that local governments are pivotal in promoting LED within their localities, but in Nkayi there are no LED biased pursuits and interventions, because Zimbabwe in general does not have a deliberate LED policy that mandates the local government to spearhead local development under the broad LED principles. As such, for LED to be implemented in Nkayi and other rural districts in Zimbabwe there is a need for a decentralised approach to development opposed to the centralised and sectoral approach currently driving economic development in Zimbabwe. There is a need for adoption of local economic development principles at policy level so that there are proper guiding principles and frameworks for local development. That will also guide the development actors in Nkayi to work together towards the economic development of Nkayi as a district.

8.3. Potentials and Challenges of LED in Nkayi

The World Bank (2003) defines LED as a process in which the government, private sector and the civil society partner and collectively focus on creating better conditions for economic growth and employment generation, with a broader aim of improving the quality of life for all. Rangarajan et al (2012), posits that economic development activities in both rural and urban settings are essential if a nation is to realize growth and prosperity. Notably, most rural communities experience economic distress (Murray, Alpaugh, Burgher, & Flachsbart, 2010), and there is a need to promote sustainability of economic development activities. As an attempt to address these challenges, LED is fast being adopted as a strategically planned global initiative premised on providing a more flexible and effective approach to enhancing this economic growth and reduce poverty. This is informed by Rodríguez-Pose (2002)'s assertion that the aim of LED is to develop local strength and overcome weaknesses in order to allow the locality to successfully confront the opportunities and threats it faces from the external environment.

Notably, not all countries have adopted LED as a policy issue to drive their development initiatives at the local level. However the absence of such policy frameworks has not stopped economic pursuits in communities, especially in rural areas. In Zimbabwe, although there is no deliberate LED policy, community members in Nkayi district have established some economic activities that borrow from LED. However, these activities often fail due to lack of strategic management and guidance. In the case of Nkayi, community members select and implement Income Generating Projects (IGPs) with limited expertise, training and institutional support. This lack of support and appropriate training compromises the potential of their initiatives to foster meaningful economic and community development (Rangarajan et al 2012). These pursuits in the district show that although there is no LED policy in Zimbabwe, there are potential opportunities for and challenges to its success.

Nkayi district is endowed with natural resources that can be manipulated to form the mainstream capital to support the implementation of meaningful LED projects. The availability of such resources as ilala, ikalaga and timber poses as a great potential for the success of LED in Nkayi. This is because Helmsing (2012) notes that LED is a process in which partnerships between and among actors in development is established to manage existing resources to create jobs and stimulate the economy. As such, the availability of these natural as well as human capital resources that can be manipulated and harnessed to fuel economic activities that will result in lucrative economic development in the district poses as a significant potential for LED in Nkayi.

Furthermore, there is a remarkable presence of all the key actors in development who can partner to push the frontiers of LED and ensure its success. The availability of a functional Local Government, active NGOs and private sector is a potential for LED to thrive and succeed as its success hinges on the tripartite configuration and partnership of these actors. This is in line with Helmsing (2010)'s assertion that LED is an integrative approach which thrives on partnerships between and among the public, private and civic actors who define and manage resources to create and maintain place prosperity in a well-defined area. In the case of Nkayi, therefore, the presence of these actors on the ground poses as a potential for the pursuit and success of LED.

Moreover, there is a high degree of willingness to participate in development projects by locals. This is evidenced by the high incidence of individually pioneered IGPs in the district which poses as a potential for LED because LED is a process that values endogenous potential and makes optimal use of already existing local capacities (EGAT/UP and The Urban Institute: nd). The fact that the communities are forthcoming and willing to embrace development projects becomes an existing local capacity which

increases the likelihood of the success of LED. This is because the ventures that will be implemented as a result of LED will be easily taken up and owned by the beneficiaries.

However, amidst of all these potentials, there are challenges that may be detrimental to the success of LED in the district. The fact that there is no LED policy in Zimbabwe is a major stumbling block to the success of LED. Actors in development are not compelled by any macro level institution to engage in meaningful partnerships to promote local development and growth as well as ensure that they all work towards pioneering the economic development of the locality. For LED to thrive, there should be a participatory process that encourages partnership of various stakeholders (public, private, community, civic and business leaders) within a regional economy designed to create a strategic vision and feasible action plans that - when implemented - results in job creation/retention (Ibid). However, in the case of Nkayi, each actor focuses on its own interests and the individual mandate and has no obligation to partner with other actors to map the potentialities of the locality and devise best strategies to manipulate them towards local economic development. A specific policy on LED would set, support and drive the vision and strategy for economic growth; ensuring that the physical and built environment is conducive to facilitate and promote economic growth through the creation of a quality regulatory environment that makes it easier for businesses to grow, invest and create jobs (EGAT/UP and The Urban Institute: nd). As such the lack of institutional support in terms of absence of a specific LED policy is a challenge to the success of LED in Nkayi as it results in lack of consented effort among actors to push development from a centralised viewpoint with a common goal of boosting the economic performance and state of the locale they operate from.

Moreover, some of the natural resources in Nkayi district are subject to elite capture. This was mainly the case of timber in the Gwamba Forest in Nkayi district where a private company was reported to be harvesting timber in the district with very little to nothing accruing to the locals. A few who are in positions of power individually benefit from the timber that is mainly harvested by a private company that is foreign to Nkayi. Even some of the strategies and initiatives like the Community Share Ownership Trusts commissioned by the government are failing to ensure that at least some of the timber benefits the local communities and promote development of the local economy.

Another notable challenge of LED in the district was that there were no market linkages for the groups who were pursuing IGPs. One of the main achievements of LED is to ensure that local producers are linked to markets where they can sell their produce. However, in Nkayi district, there was no market for the goods locally produced. The local market is almost dysfunctional as locals do not have much income that could enable them to buy the products produced by the IGPs. Notably, this unavailability of ready markets for products is a challenge to LED in the district.

9. Conclusion

It is evident from the discussion above that Nkayi as a district has a potential of growing economically only if LED principles and guidelines are adopted to inform all development initiatives in the district. The main strengths for the district are that it is endowed with natural resources which are a key feature to the success of LED. Moreover, the district has a significant presence of government line ministries and NGOs who are key actors in LED, providing an opportunity for possibility of collaborative efforts to pioneer the development of the district under study. As such, this paper recommends that the government of Zimbabwe shifts from a sectorial based approach to development and adopt a region specific approach in the form of LED. Notably, this can only be achieved if LED is adopted and implemented as a policy issue which will result in the development of national LED strategy which will better guide development efforts in the context and strengths of the localities targeted

10. References

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