

## REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY METHODOLOGIES FOR MANAGING INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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**Abstract:** The subject of this paper are project methodologies used by donor organizations when providing development assistance through their projects. Every major donor agency has developed its own methodology, whether it is organized as a cycle that consists of phases or qualitative factor necessary for the project success, accompanied by tools for planning and implementing projects. Some of the largest assistance providers' methodologies are analyzed - the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Commission (EC) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). By comparing these methodologies some similarities, as well as certain differences, can be noted. Moreover, qualities such as participatory approach, local ownership, capacity building, sustainability and fight against the corruption have arisen and noted as critical for the success of development projects. Once set up, these methodologies and tools are not immutable. On the contrary, knowledge on project management in the field of international development is constantly changing, adapting and upgrading and therefore growing.

**Key words:** project, methodology, development, cooperation, success

### 1. INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Project approach is widely accepted in almost all areas and types of organization - from smaller firms and large corporations to military and governments. Most literature on project management studies commercial projects. However, subject of this paper are international development projects that vary in a wide range of characteristics from commercial, IT, infrastructure and other projects. Consequently managing these projects differs from the usual project management. Historically, international projects had been funded first by institutions such as the World Bank and other development organizations. These projects were largely infrastructural and their implementation was done in cooperation with international engineering and construction companies. These "hard" projects, generally speaking, have not encountered major implementation difficulties, especially due to the presence of expert management. Over time, projects of social character appeared in sectors such as education or reform of pension programs that dealt with people rather than infrastructure (Youker, 2015). These "soft"

projects raised a need for different management, a different type of experts, and specific project methodologies.

International development projects are a special type of project that provides socio-economic assistance to developing countries or to some specially designated group of target beneficiaries (Khang and Moe, 2008). They take place in environments that face many challenges. Managing these projects must take into account extremely complex economic, social and political factors from the environment that have a major impact on the outcome of the project and the achievement of its objectives. These objectives, together with stakeholders and political manipulations, are the elements which differ international development projects most from other types of projects.

While the usual ultimate goal of a commercial project is profit, an international development project tends to make a certain change in society. Goals of the development projects usually include reducing poverty, improving living standards, protection of the environment, protection of human rights, help to victims of natural disasters or those caused

by human activity and building basic physical and social structures. Such humanitarian and social goals are much less tangible and the results are less visible and measurable when compared to infrastructure and industrial projects that can be found in the private sector. Even projects involving the construction of physical infrastructure have the ultimate "soft" goal of serving sustainable social and economic development. Intangibility of goals and results presents a special challenge in the management of development projects. The answer to this challenge requires new practices, which include adapting existing knowledge in project management and using new tools and concepts that would be suitable for assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of such far-reaching development goals. Neglecting this important aspect of development projects usually leads to the tendency of measuring only resource mobilization and efforts, rather than results. The consequence is inefficient use of development funds and long-term lack of accountability. As project interventions cannot continue forever, the ultimate goal of each project is to produce positive and significant changes that will be sustainable after the external assistance comes to an end (Khang and Moe, 2008). Another feature of most international projects is a complex stakeholder network. Commercial projects usually have two key stakeholders - the client, who finances the project and as a result gets the benefits from its deliverables, and the contractor or some other type of implementation unit, who gets paid to manage the project to achieve the desired results. By contrast, international projects involve at least three groups of key stakeholders, namely the funding agency that finances but does not use directly the project outputs, the implementation unit, and the target beneficiaries who actually benefit from the project outputs but most commonly do not pay for the project. The role separation has several implications. First, the financial accountability of project managers and the entire team is considered extremely important, as these projects take place in developing countries, where corruption is often present. Second, because of the common developmental, cultural and knowledge gap between donors and the target recipients, the

likely mismatch between the real needs and capacity of the target groups may result in poor project design, a precursor of failure in the implementation. Third, donor agencies and governments of the receiving countries set out complicated rules and procedures for regulation of disbursement and utilization of development funds in order to achieve financial accountability. With similar intention, but by different institutions with a different organizational cultures and traditions, these rules and procedures usually contradict to each other, causing specific and unnecessary difficulties during the project implementation (Khang and Moe, 2008). Fourth, each stakeholder tends to assess the success of the project on the basis of the criteria that arise from their own interests (Diallo and Thuillier, 2004). The lack of market pressures in appraising and implementing development projects, combined with the intangibility of their objectives, often makes these projects the target of political manipulations. Various political structures can advocate projects that bring them personal benefits, projects that are not feasible, or even donor countries use development assistance funds to form political alliances with local governments and political structures.

## 2. USAID'S PROGRAM CYCLE

USA as a pioneer in providing foreign aid and as the largest bilateral donor implements its funds through USAID. For that purpose, USAID uses Program Cycle, an operational model for planning, delivering, assessing, and adapting development programming in a given region or country to advance U.S. foreign policy. The Program Cycle comprises four phases: Country/Regional Strategic Planning, Project Design and Implementation, Activity Design and Implementation and Monitoring and Evaluation. It provides the means through which USAID operationalize development policy, which is constrained with certain budget and resources. The whole cycle is supported with processes of learning and adapting and it is focused on the results (ADS Chapter 201, 2016).

Strategic planning is the process through which USAID determines the best strategic

approach in a given country or region based on U.S. development policy priorities, individual country and/or regional priorities, and USAID's comparative advantage and available foreign assistance resources, among other factors. The final outcome of this phase is a Country Development Cooperation Strategy in which the strategic approach is described. The Strategy defines general and specific objectives for a given period of time and it is the basis for later decision making. First step in the development of the Strategy involves iterative process of dialogue between USAID Missions in given countries and Headquarters in Washington and settings of parameters based on analysis of data derived from monitoring and evaluation findings, portfolio reviews, strategies, existing goals, projects and activities etc. Next step is a creation of the Results Framework and Development Hypotheses. They are the backbone of the strategy and a visual representation of its goals and results. A customized tree of goals is used, where each level of objectives (or results) contribute to achieving the objective on the next level above. For each development goal, the development hypothesis should also be developed. It explains why and how USAID's investment contributes to the development goal and improves the National Development Cooperation Strategy. The process of Strategy preparation is finalized with its review and approval followed by putting it into use. Its content is not immutable, it can be adapted based on changed circumstances or in the light of the lessons learned in the process of design and implementation of activities, monitoring and evaluation (ADS Chapter 201, 2016).

After documenting strategic plans in the Country Development Cooperation Strategy its operationalization is defined in the Project Design and Implementation phase. This operationalization involves a large number of activities, such as contracts and agreements on cooperation with international organizations, allocation of funds to local organizations, agreements with partner governments, etc. One of the most important requirements in the planning and implementation of projects is that the purpose of the project supports

strategic goals, i.e. to be in line with the results framework of the Strategy. In practice, the purpose of a project usually coincides with one medium-term result. Although the general procedure for project design is prescribed, each mission reserves the right to adapt the process to the needs of each individual project. The task of the mission is to develop a theory of change and an implementation plan. The process of developing the theory of change should be participatory and including involvement of local stakeholders. It includes a series of dynamic and critical exercises that allow representation of different views and ultimately achieves consensus on the best approach in the given circumstances.

Besides project purpose, given context, link with the Strategy and the theory of change, process of designing includes resources, conclusions from performed analyses, plans regarding finance, management and implementation and monitoring, evaluation and learning. It is all contained in the Project Appraisal Document which is approved by the Mission director by a memorandum. This is the last step towards moving towards project implementation. Missions have the authority to organize their staff in the most efficient way to implement the project. Director of the mission is obliged to appoint a project manager or other responsible person who will provide general management at the project level (ADS Chapter 201, 2016).

Third phase is the Activity Design and Implementation. Activity design is a process by which USAID further defines how to implement activities that contribute to the project's purpose. Activity is an intervention or set of interventions typically implemented through mechanisms such as contracts, assistance programs or partnerships with another agency of the US government, the government of a partner country, a non-governmental organization or a private sector entity. It can also be an intervention taken directly by USAID staff, such as political dialogue, capacity development or co-ordination with stakeholders. An intervention usually takes the form of a contract, whose signing represents the first step of implementing the given activity Activities

should be designed to achieve clear and measurable results, as well as to focus on strengthening local systems in order to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved. Activities should be flexible in order to adapt to new situations, then to encourage common learning and filling in gaps in knowledge (ADS Chapter 201, 2016).

The last phase is Monitoring and Evaluation, including the process of learning. They represent continuous and systematic processes of data collection, compilation and evaluation, in order to support the building of knowledge based on evidence and analyses. These data are used for the purpose of better decision making and knowledge gained through the whole Program Cycle enables continuous improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of development results (ADS Chapter 201, 2016).

### **3. EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S PROJECT CYCLE**

European Union is the biggest collective donor of development aid. As Member States allocate resources for development aid both individually and through the EU budget, responsibility is shared between the EU and the Member States themselves. As regards EU development funds, institution in charge of implementing these funds is the European Commission. It provides development assistance in two modalities, supporting the recipient's government budget and supporting specific programs and projects. The second modality involves programs, projects and managing them using project management. When it comes to international development projects EC uses standardized approach, with clearly defined steps and procedures widely known Project Cycle Management (PCM). This approach allows simultaneous management of multiple projects and the quality of these projects improves over time. The cycle consists of five successive phases - programming, identification, formulation, implementation and evaluation with audit (PCM, 2004).

The first phase, Programming, is multi-annual and the output is an agreed Country Strategy Paper including a multi-annual National

Indicative Program. During the Programming phase, the situation at national and sector level is analyzed in order to identify problems, constraints and opportunities which cooperation could address. This involves a review of socio-economic indicators, and of national and donor priorities. The purpose is to identify the main objectives and sector priorities for co-operation, and thus to provide a relevant and feasible programming framework within which programs and projects can be identified and prepared. A Country Strategy Paper should be drafted on the basis of discussions with the partner country. The process of its preparation should promote clear 'local' ownership of the strategy so as to facilitate successful implementation. This requires time, financial resources and appropriately skilled personnel. The indicative program specifies global objectives, financial envelopes, specific objectives and expected results, crosscutting issues (gender, environment, etc.) and programs to be implemented in pursuit of these objectives, the targeted beneficiaries and the type of assistance to be provided (PCM, 2004).

Identification as the next phase is based on the results and documents generated during the programming phase. Its purpose is to identify project ideas that are consistent with partner and EC development priorities, assess the relevance and likely feasibility of these project ideas and to prepare a financing decision for a program of projects, or determine the scope of further work required during the formulation stage for individual projects. The source of project ideas may come from a variety of sources, most importantly from prospective implementing partners, either partner governments, non-state actors or multi-lateral or regional development agencies (PCM, 2004).

If the previous phase is successfully completed the next phase, which is Formulation, will be opened. At this stage, the relevance and feasibility of the proposed project idea is confirmed, a detailed project design is prepared, including arrangements related to management and control, financial plans, cost-benefit analysis, risk management, monitoring, evaluation and the financial

proposal for individual projects and financing decisions is being prepared. As in the identification phase, implementation partners and other local stakeholders should take a leading role in the project formulation. The donor, or the EC, assumes the role of support, but also an active role in some tasks, especially when it comes to financing and managing feasibility studies, project design, provision of technical assistance and advisory inputs (PCM, 2004).

When project design is completed and financial support is provided, Implementation phase can begin. The resources planned in the previous phases are put into use in order to contribute to the project goal, and thus to the broader goals of development cooperation. This phase involves a large number of activities and includes contracts on studies, technical assistance, inventories, etc.. The project is monitored or reported on in order to allow for adjustments to changes in the environment (PCM Handbook, 2002). The implementation stage of the project cycle is in many ways the most critical, as it is during this stage that previously planned benefits are delivered. All other stages in the cycle are therefore essentially supportive of this implementation stage. Primary responsibility in this phase should be of implementing partners. The EC's main responsibility is to provide timely finance, management and technical support, to monitor project implementation and ensure an appropriate level of accountability for resources used and results achieved, and to capture and act on lessons learned during implementation. Project managers are responsible for undertaking three main tasks: monitoring, re-planning and reporting (PCM, 2004).

The last phase is Evaluation which aims to make an "assessment, as systematic and objective as possible, of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Evaluation of the project can be done when the project is still in progress i.e. mid-term evaluation, in order to review progress and

propose an alteration to project design during the remaining implementation period. It can also be performed at the end of the project which documents the resources used, the results and the progress towards the goals to improve future project designs. It is possible that the evaluation is held after a number of years after completion (ex post evaluation), which focuses on the impact of the project (PCM Handbook, 2002). This phase includes audit of "external operations" and it is focused on the activities of beneficiaries, contractors or intermediaries (PCM, 2004).

#### 4. GIZ'S CAPACITY WORKS

Germany is among the top donors of foreign assistance which is implemented by its development agency, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). This provides international cooperation services for sustainable development and international education work. It cooperates with businesses, civil society actors and research institutions, fostering successful interaction between development policy and other policy fields and areas of activity. Nevertheless, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is its main commissioning party (GIZ, 2016).

GIZ considers cooperation as a cornerstone of development, whether it is taking place at the local, national and international level. GIZ recognizes two types of cooperation system: permanent, which provide public services, and temporary i.e. projects. Each cooperation system is created and developed in order to achieve the goals and results agreed upon by the involved actors. On the other hand, cooperation must be managed. Capacity WORKS represents one such model for management. It is based on five success factors, which are mutually complementary and every success factor is linked to set of tools which enable project managers to look beyond the intermediate environment of their projects and ensures that GIZ's work is both process-driven and result-oriented (Capacity WORKS success stories, 2012). These success factors are strategy, cooperation, steering structure, processes and learning and innovation (Capacity WORKS, 2015).

Success factor strategy focuses on how the actors consciously negotiate and decide on the strategic orientation of their own cooperation system. The strategy requires participants to develop ideas on which future joint action is based. A clearly defined strategy provides all actors understanding that the cooperation system "works for the right thing" and it clarifies their expectations. Furthermore, it makes resources and capacities more efficient, engages actors and motivates them to achieve goals. For developing such strategy Capacity WORKS suggests a number of tools, among which is the strategic loop with following steps: (1) current situation analysis, (2) designing options (3) deciding on options, (4) strategy elaboration (5) strategy integration into operations (Capacity WORKS, 2015).

Every cooperation system includes various actors and success factor cooperation focuses on them. The actors are stakeholders, participants in the process of social change and their actions are conditioned by their own interests, as well as the role and position within the society. They decide autonomously even when they decide to enter the system of cooperation. However, as this system is managed through negotiation, the actors must be ready to compromise in order to achieve common goals and results. Success factor cooperation analyzes stakeholders involved or ones yet to be involved in the co-operation system. It determines which actors are relevant, because they can make a significant contribution to achieving goals or on the other hand stop the whole process of change. At the same time, the results of the analysis of the actors themselves can be incorporated into the goals of the system. Furthermore, in order for cooperation to be successful, the capacities of these actors must be developed (Capacity WORKS, 2015).

Success factor steering structure represents a "social space" where these negotiations are conducted, that is, partners define their roles and rules for the cooperation system and enable continuous decision-making. It resolves conflicts and deals with other traditional management activities, such as resource management, operational planning and monitoring. There is no ideal governing structure - each cooperation system should

find the most suitable form of it, taking into account the sector characteristics, already existing structures, political and cultural system, etc. Capacity WORKS recommends two basic models, a formal and flexible steering structure. The formal model is based on the hierarchy of the management level (political-normative, strategic and operational level), while the flexible structure relies on several teams, which have one central point that manages coordination, which are accountable to the strategic and political normative unit, while also including cooperation with advisory bodies (Capacity WORKS, 2015).

Success factor processes puts its focus on social changes. Processes are "packages of work" necessary for achieving certain results. They represent the path to the desired social change. Since numerous processes exist in a cooperation system it is necessary to differentiate the processes among each other, determine whose responsibility they are and allocate them certain resources. They need to be harmonized and regulated by certain rules. Useful tool for analyzing processes is a process map. The starting point in the process map creation is goal that it wants to achieve. Then, three groups of processes are defined: the core, control and support processes. In the core processes we distinguish three types. The first processes are related to results, which are directly related to the goal that it wants to achieve. Second ones are cooperative processes, which support the previous type by facilitating the coordination of actors. The third are learning processes and they are needed to assess the quality of the activities and make the necessary changes. Management processes set the legal, political and strategic framework that is essential for the main processes to take place. They supply the system with decisions. Support processes do not have a specific role in achieving results, but support other types of processes. Hierarchy of processes established in this way is useful in visualizing existing processes. In order for it to be created and subsequently fulfill the purpose, it is necessary that the actors express their views on the existing system of cooperation and to negotiate a common vision about the system they want to

establish. The last success factor concerns learning (Capacity WORKS, 2015).

When we think about learning we usually relate it to individuals. However, cooperation systems, such as organizations, part of the society or society as a whole, are also continually learning. Cooperation systems learn when they are adapted to external or internal conditions. This allows them to struggle with future challenges. Success factor learning and innovation focuses on how cooperation systems adapt to these challenges. Projects as temporary cooperation systems have the ability to develop a model of change at all levels. They are learning arenas in which many potential innovations can be tried before they are introduced into the field of social interest. It is necessary to create a coherent learning architecture, which supports and increases learning at different levels. It is not enough for individuals to expand their knowledge base and change their attitudes and behaviors. They will be able to effectively use them only when the structures, processes and rules of organizations and systems of cooperation as a whole are subject to change (Capacity WORKS, 2015).

## 5. METHODOLOGIES OVERVIEW

By comparing methodologies of three donor organizations some similarities, as well as certain differences, have been. The first set of characteristics refers to the project life cycle. Methodologies of USAID and the European Commission are based on such a cycle. Although there is a minor terminological difference between the names of the USAID methodology and the methodology used by the European Commission (program cycle/project cycle), there is a great similarity between their basic models. Namely, their cycles consist of certain stages. The first phase of both methodologies is linked to a strategy that determines the general direction of development assistance. USAID creates a dichotomy between project design and project implementation as one phase, and then activities as sub-actions of projects as the next phase, while the EC integrates projects and activities, but separates the processes of their identification, formulation and

implementation into separate phases. The project cycle ends in evaluation with both methodologies, which, on the one hand, is based on monitoring, and on the other hand, is the basis for learning. However, understanding of the phases of these two methodologies differs by one very important feature, i.e. succession. EC perceives the phases of its project cycle as progressive, where the completion of one phase is a signal for starting the next phase, while USAID does not see them as successive but complementary which opens up the possibility of engaging in various components of the cycle simultaneously. The third methodology, the GIZ's Capacity Works, is not presented in the form of a cycle, but as a set of qualitative factors, which are present through all the life stages of the project. Nevertheless, GIZ's methodology implies strategy and learning as an indispensable factor in the success of the project, since these are the titles of the first and last success factors.

Next characteristic of development projects is their orientation towards achieving results. Organizations in the public sector are traditionally focused on rules and procedures and focus on them while providing public services. Consequently, less attention is paid to customer needs and customization of services according to specific circumstances. When it comes to development organizations, greater importance was also paid to planning and implementation of projects by certain procedures (An Introduction to Results Management, 2006). Nevertheless as early as the 1960s, a trend of shifting focus from the input, output and process level to the level of results and outcomes was introduced in order to focus attention on the effectiveness of the projects. Three methodologies analyzed in this paper put the focus on results, which is already noticed by the graphic presentation of the USAID project cycle and GIZ success factors, where the results are at the center. The guiding principles of EU development policy include, in addition to fostering national/local ownership and increased social dimensions of growth and development, an increased focus on results. The European Commission uses a logical matrix as a standard tool, as part of the project cycle management system. Although

the logical matrix originated in the US as a project tool, where a group of consultants developed it for USAID in the early 1970s, it does not make it a compulsory tool for this organization's projects today. However, the focus on results is noticed in using two main tools for planning, implementation and monitoring of project activities - the results framework and management performance plan. Results-based management is the foundation of all GIZ projects. The results are viewed as intended or unintended changes in the situation or behavior as a direct or indirect consequence of the intervention. The tool used for this is a model of results, which graphically represents how individual results and activities contribute to the achieved general goal. It helps actors understand the cause-effect relationships that affect the planned change. The outcome is viewed as a result that can be achieved, based on the obligation, within the time and financial means for the proposed intervention. It represents the planned, defined effect that the intervention will have on the target group, public good, structure or policy. The model serves to help negotiate realistic and feasible goals and helps the system of cooperation to arrive at fundamental management decisions made precisely for the purpose of their fulfillment (Capacity WORKS, 2016). All three methodologies rely on management based on goals, that is, the management strategy by which all actors contribute directly or indirectly to achieving a range of results, ensuring that their operation contributes achieving the desired results. Actors in turn use information and evidence of actual results in order to influence the decision-making process on resource allocation, implementation of activities, as well as accountability and reporting. (Results-Based Management Handbook, 2011).

The success of the project is difficult to measure, due to the intangibility of the results and the subjective perception of their performance. It can be defined at two levels: the project management success and the project success. The success of project management focuses on processes, so it is measured based on activities, inputs and outputs. In this case it is estimated progressively for each phase of the project,

that is, the quality of products and achievements that arise at the end of each phase are assessed. Thus the project can be considered successful if the target beneficiaries have been identified and their relevant needs have been assessed, which coincide with the development priorities of the donors; then, the appropriate implementation organization has been identified and assessed to be ready and capable to carry out the project in question; and the last, awareness and support of all key actors is adequately ensured in order for the project proposal to go to the next planning stage. Once the project is completed the success of the project is measured on the basis of the last phase, which represents the culmination of success all previous stages. On the other hand, the success of the project reflects the effective use of the final products of the project and achievement of long-term goals. It should be evaluated at the end of a project by criteria based essentially on development impact, sustainability and acceptance of project achievements by all stakeholders and the development community in general (Khang and Moe, 2008).

Characteristics that appear to be encouraged in all three methodologies and that crucially affect the project success are participatory approach, capacity building, sustainability, local ownership and fight against corruption. Participatory approach includes active involvement of all key stakeholders in each phase of the project, from planning, through implementation to monitoring and evaluation. The precondition for their inclusion is the successful identification of all stakeholders in the area of importance for the project so that all interests are present. This approach encourages systematical sharing of stakeholders' knowledge and experience based on their abilities, perspectives and lessons learned. Therefore local actors are strengthened, their capacities are built and they are encouraged to make a real influence on development decisions. Capacity building implies increasing the ability of the recipients of development projects to continue their future development without external support. Learning and building capacities of certain actors, i.e. organizations in partner countries are of great importance for the sustainability

of the results and finding long-term solutions to the problems of developing countries. Sustainability refers to whether the benefits of the project continue after the donor withdraws (Ika, Diallo, Thuillier, 2012). Without it the project's results have a short duration, and the introduced changes cannot be institutionalized and become part of the cultural context of a developing society. Development projects should encourage "local ownership". In this case "local ownership" does not have conventional meaning, i.e. does not apply to the exclusive right of ownership, but describes relationships between stakeholders, the ways which they relate to a particular project and to what extent they identify with it, assuming responsibility for its success. It ensures that local authorities, civil society and the wider community are not only recipients and implementers of development programs, but the drivers of change themselves.

## 6. CONCLUSION

International development projects have become numerous at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and through practical work of donor organizations knowledge regarding managing these projects is constantly growing. Project methodologies and tools are being upgraded and further developed. Their use requires continuous reflection, as well as adaptation to the given circumstances. Each project represents a system for itself, which communicates with the specific environment and time in which it takes place. Different political, economic and cultural differences in societies in which development aid projects are identified, planned and implemented require that each project is viewed as a unique endeavor, adapted to local requirements. Successful use of a particular methodology or tool on a single project does not guarantee benefit when used on another project. The process of learning how to make the development project successful should be done continuously and constantly, in order to build new knowledge on lessons learned.

Projects of international development have the objective to introduce changes in society, whether this is a change in the aim of reducing poverty, strengthening economic

capacity, encouraging political participation and transparency, introducing gender equality or combating the effects of climate change. In this way it becomes a model, a kind of pilot version of the changed state, which aims to transfer it to a permanent system of cooperation and institutionalize there.

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