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REPORT

# GENERAL EDUCATION QUALITY DIAGNOSTIC

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The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and for formulating policy recommendations. Global preparatory meetings, regional consultations and national reviews are essential to prepare the Annual Ministerial Review and Development Cooperation Forum, which ensures a comprehensive, qualitative review of progress in implementing the MDGs.

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Design  
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# GENERAL EDUCATION QUALITY DIAGNOSTIC

Analysis And Monitoring Framework

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<b>Title</b>	General Education Quality <sup>1</sup> Diagnosis/Analysis and Monitoring Framework
<b>Timeframe:</b>	Two years for the development and trial application of the framework. [Roll-out from year-3 onwards].
<b>Responsible Unit:</b>	Basic to Higher Education and Learning Division (ED/BHL) in cooperation with other Sector Divisions, Regional Offices, broader UNESCO Structures, Member States, Private Sector and other International Development Partners.
<b>General objective:</b>	Enhance national technical capacity to analyze/diagnose, improve and monitor the quality of their general education systems.
<b>Expected output:</b>	Systemic general education quality diagnosis/analysis and monitoring framework and its application.
<b>Beneficiaries:</b>	Education policy makers, planners, practitioners and learners.
<b>Main partner:</b>	Member States that will technically and financially support the development of the framework; that will volunteer for its pilot application and that are ready to use the results of the analysis to develop their education quality improvement interventions, partner agencies that will provide technical and financial support for the development of the framework and that may use it in support of their various clients.
<b>Executing Agency/Sector:</b>	UNESCO, Division of Basic to Higher Education and Learning (ED/BHL).
<b>Project leader:</b>	Ms Mmantsetsa Marope, Director, Division for Basic to Higher Education and Learning (DIR/ED/BHL)

<sup>1</sup> Under the proposed framework, the definition of general education is aligned to the operational definition of basic education, as adopted at the Experts' Consultation on the Operational Definition of Basic Education, UNESCO, 2007. (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001802/180253e.pdf>)





# BACKGROUND

While EFA targets are yet to be reached, the last two decades registered undeniable progress toward expanding access to education especially at the primary level. In 2007, some 72 million children were out of school. All the same, this constituted a 28 percent reduction since the start of the decade. From 1999, sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia increased their primary net enrolment ratios by five times and three times the rate of the 1990s, respectively, reaching 73 per cent and 86 per cent by 2007. South and West Asia reduced the number of out-of-school children by fifty percent resulting—a reduction of 21 million. Sub-Saharan Africa reduced its out-of-school population by almost a third—a reduction of 13 million. The proportion of girls among the out-of-school population declined from 58 per cent to 54 per cent. Access to secondary education registered modest improvement. Though with wide regional and country-level disparities, some 513 million—nearly 60 percent—of children at eligible age were enrolled by 2006. This constituted an increase of nearly 76 million since 1999.

For developing countries in particular, the success in expanding access has not been met by comparable progress in improving education quality and relevance. A range of sources, including EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMRs)<sup>2</sup>, the Global Competitiveness Report (GCR), international and regional assessments—PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS, SACMEQ, LLECE—national assessments, and country-specific sector analyses point to the fact that most of the developing world is in an education quality crisis, a crisis they can ill afford! Equally, a large proportion of developed countries are yet to deliver quality education to all to their learners. A range of country-level sector analyses have documented the weak quality and doubtful relevance of general education. This is manifest in its failure to prepare

learners for higher levels of education, for trainability and educability, for taking up life-long learning (LLL) opportunities on their own, for the labor market and for the world of work. The system has repeatedly been diagnosed as having weak capacity to produce graduates who can effectively meet labor market demands, function effectively in the world of work, take up current or predictable opportunities while equally meeting current challenges, demonstrate the agility to take up unpredictable opportunities and meet unpredictable challenges and contribute effectively to holistic national and global development<sup>3</sup> agendas. Due mainly to current analytical approaches and instruments, evidence on the general education systems' effectiveness in producing graduates with appropriate dispositions, attitudes, aesthetics, life views and core values—peace, multiculturalism, respect for diversity and living together—remains scant.

Quality and effectiveness challenges are most pernicious at the basic levels of education, where the majority of learners have the highest levels of participation. Invariably, learners from rural areas, urban slums, poor households and communities, linguistic and ethnic minorities, immigrant communities and conflict zones tend to receive the poorest quality of education. Poor quality of basic education bequeaths not only poor quality to the post-basic levels but also acute exclusion of the aforementioned learners. A stark manifestation of this reality is in the gross under-representation of these learners in post-basic and higher education systems and in high income jobs and work opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> Ref to GMRs for 2005 and 2010, 2006, 2009 and 2010

<sup>3</sup> Holistic development is conceived as entailing among others: economic, political, social, demographic, human, moral, ethical, environmental and spiritual dimensions.

## DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS OF POOR EDUCATION QUALITY

Poor education quality has vast and dire consequences especially, though not exclusively, for developing countries. It leads to students' disengagement and dropping out of school. For those who persevere, it leads to high repetition rates and ultimately to failure to acquire requisite skills, competencies, affects and values. High dropout, repetition and failure rates result in un-affordable wastage of resources that could have been invested toward further expansion of access and quality improvement.

Most importantly, failure to acquire requisite skills, competencies, affects and values denies countries the productive labor force required to lead knowledge- and technology-driven productivity growth, to facilitate shared growth, global competitiveness, social coherence, national and global peace and other broader dimensions of development—political, social, human and cultural etc. Poor education quality is one of the key factors of global inequalities and practically, one of the modern boundaries between rich and poor countries.

Evidence shows that educational attainment is necessary but not sufficient to support growth and competitiveness.<sup>4</sup> As one of the proxy measures of education quality, test scores have a statistically significant association with real GDP per capita growth with one standard deviation in test scores correlating to two per cent annual average growth in GDP per capita.<sup>5</sup> Poor quality also denies individual 'graduates' employment opportunities, the resultant earnings<sup>6</sup> and improved quality of life. Because the majority of learners who receive poor quality education are often from marginalized and poorer segments of societies, sustaining the current levels

of poor quality education not only denies developing countries the opportunity for growth but also the re-distributive effects of education. Ultimately, poor education quality risks reinforcing social and income inequalities and sustaining inter-generational poverty and marginalization.

Moreover, countries with acute social inequalities have been shown to be more prone to social unrests and political instability.<sup>7</sup> Poor education quality, therefore, is detrimental to poverty reduction efforts, social equity and inclusion, social coherence and political stability. It stands in the way of attaining poverty reduction related MDGs at an individual, national, regional and global level. At the same time, it presents obstacles to attaining the six EFA goals, each of which has education quality aspects; and particularly goals 2, 5, and 6.

4 World Economic Forum, Executive Opinion Survey 2008, 2009

5 Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007

6 Hanushek and Zhang, 2006, GMR, 2005, Verspoor et. al., 2008, Marope, 2005.

7 World Development Report, 2007



## RATIONALE FOR THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Both developed and developing countries are well aware of the quality crisis and its development consequences. Most of their education reform programs have education quality improvement among key strategic objectives. The global EFA agenda has also identified quality as requiring attention. Yet, the challenge persists, and the EFA quality goals are dauntingly off track.

Hitherto what are lacking are tools for: systematic diagnosis/analysis, and monitoring the quality of general education. Such a tool should provide with a comprehensive, coordinated, articulated, and diagnostic collection of evidence on ‘systemic blockades’ to the quality of general education and for using such evidence to design and target timely interventions. The situation of general education is in stark contrast with higher education (HEd) and to some extent with technical and vocational education (TVET). Though contentious and inconsistently applied, HEd has fairly established quality assurance systems whose results can guide the design of targeted interventions.

TVET systems have qualifications frameworks that help to standardize quality and whose applications may inform timely and targeted interventions. Beyond national and international examinations which have very limited scope and comparability, the general education system does not have a similar tradition or even an evolving one. The lack of a quality diagnostics/analysis and monitoring system leaves UNESCO’s Member States (MSs), especially developing countries, with no clear and robust mechanism for systemic analysis and monitoring of the quality of their general education systems and without guidance on how to design and target quality improvement interventions.

Prior and current general education quality analyses and improvement efforts have tended to focus on specific aspects of education inputs, mostly in isolation from one another. The most analyzed inputs are finance, teachers, curricula, school infrastructure and furniture, books and instructional materials. However, it is very rare that even these select aspects receive a comprehensive, articulated and interactive/iterative analysis. Likewise, processes that often receive isolated attention are assessment, management and governance. For the best part, only cognitive outcomes receive attention. Even then, cognitive outcomes have mostly been narrowly defined as test scores.

Most quality analyses have been limited in scope and fragmented. Fragmentation has often led to inherently inconsistent and sometimes contradictory remedial interventions. It has also, often, led to uneven and imbalanced improvements of aspects of the quality. For instance curricula reforms have not always taken into account the books and instructional materials, teachers, teaching processes and assessment methods required to give them effect. Changes in student curricula have not always taken into account the teaching and learning environments where such curricula are to be implemented, or teachers who are supposed to implement such curricula. Conversely, changes to the physical teaching and learning environments have not always taken the demands of diverse curricula into account or even taken into account teachers’ and learners’ needs that have to be met within such environments.

This proposed initiative seeks to develop a general education quality diagnosis/analysis and monitoring framework that UNESCO’s MSs can use to diagnose critical ‘quality pulse points’ of their systems and to use the prognosis to design targeted interventions.

## Key characteristics of the framework are that it is:

- Systemic and comprehensive while allowing for specific targeting of the sub-systems. It recognizes the connectedness and complementarity of elements of system quality as well as their potential contradictions. It adopts an integrated, iterative, coordinated and comprehensive view of elements of education system quality. At the same time it allows for purposeful targeting of elements of education quality where comprehensive diagnostics identified them as the ‘missing link(s)’ in the quality chain.
- Diagnostic tool (in a set of toolkits) meant to facilitate MSs to raise critical questions about binding constraints to realizing the desired quality of their systems rather than to offer MSs with solutions to the quality challenges of their systems.
- Takes the demand side (outputs and outcomes) of education systems as a starting point to the diagnostics of education quality and addresses only the inputs and processes as requirements to deliver intended outputs and outcomes. This is a significant point of departure from the common practice where increasing inputs has often been assumed as a starting point for improving education quality.
- A flexible and contextually responsive approach rather than a ‘one-size-fits-all’. It allows MSs multiple-entry points to address their quality challenges based on their respective contexts.
- Re-asserts MSs’ technical and political leadership for determining the binding constraints to

the quality of their systems: prioritize those constraints, and determine the nature and sequencing of interventions required to redress them. This is another significant point of departure from common practice where international development agencies, due to their technical capacities often take a technical leadership role in diagnosing quality constraints and identifying responsive interventions.

- Emphasizes the strengthening of MSs’ technical capacities to realize their leadership role.

## UNESCO'S RATIONALE

UNESCO, as the lead agency for the Education for All Goals movement recognizes the immense potential for the improvement of quality general education among Member States. While acknowledging that progress has been made in reaching universal primary education, the expansion of equitable access to education without the necessary provisions for ensuring quality only conveys virtual results that have minimal impact on the lives of learners and decreased opportunities for social participation.

Therefore UNESCO does not disassociate quality from substantive access or from any of the other dimensions that are set out in the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and in the Delors report on the Four Pillars of Learning (1997). In this respect, the organisation fully endorses the development of a comprehensive framework, which will accelerate quality education in an equitable manner and under operational terms.

UNESCO as an honest broker is uniquely positioned in providing targeted assistance to its MSs by presenting to countries a comprehensive list of all enabling factors of quality education, with no predisposition to the significance of one factor over another. This will allow MSs to pose the right questions when reviewing policies on quality education and in the prioritization of areas of action that mostly affect quality in the given country context. In this regard, the Framework takes a significant point of departure; it is common practice for education quality improvement efforts to be supply driven, considering primarily inputs and processes as the most important parameters in quality attainment.

The proposed framework makes a paradigm shift by placing at the centre the intended outcomes and outputs of quality education. Thus, takes the learner/graduate and the types of skills and knowledge that she/he requires as a starting point so as to later determine the inputs and processes needed for deriving to the intended outcomes. In this sense, the framework adopts a human development<sup>8</sup> approach, where the human actor is positioned in the centre and the enablers of quality are the support system that will help build human capability, enlarge people's choices and develop their full potential, through quality education.

8 Human development is the process of enlarging people's choices. Their three essential choices are to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living. The concept goes far beyond economic growth. It is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests. <http://unterm.un.org/dgaacs/unterm.nsf/WebView/1CB533BF701EC9ED852577AE006497BE?OpenDocument>

## OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of this initiative is to strengthen MSs' capacity to diagnose/analyze, monitor, build and sustain the quality of their general education systems. The ultimate impact will be faster progress toward attaining inclusive quality of general education, and the general education systems' effective contribution to building the human capital base required to support national and global development agendas.

cooperation through sharing countries' promising practices.

### Specific objectives are to:

1. Develop a generic but comprehensive and systemic general education quality diagnostic/analysis and monitoring instrument that MSs can adapt and apply in their respective contexts;
2. Provide MSs' technical support for effective application of the framework;
3. Strengthen MSs' capacity to diagnose/analyze and to monitor the quality of their general education systems and to apply feedback gained toward the design of timely and well targeted quality-enhancement interventions;
4. Provide MSs high quality technical support for their general education quality improvement efforts;
5. Through collective efforts of MSs more proactively approximate the attainment of EFA quality goals and MSs goals to build the human capital base required to support their overall national development reform agendas and global competitiveness;
6. Strengthen partnerships for redressing the current general education quality crisis and promote North-South, South-South and triangular

# THE PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

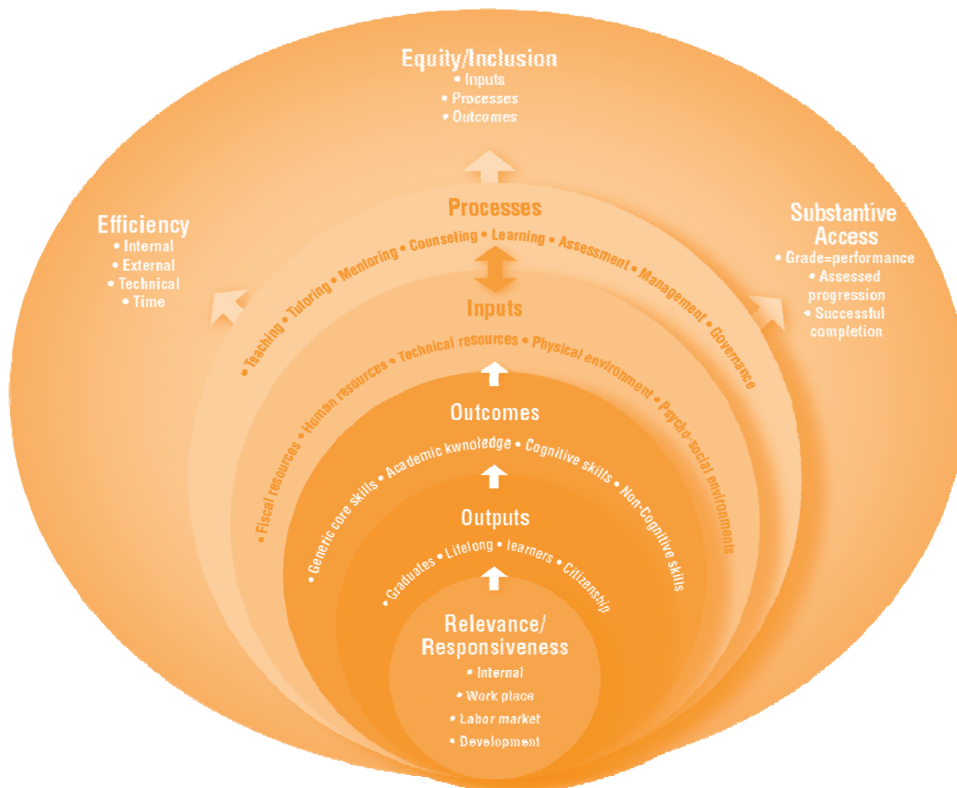
Within this framework, ‘quality education’ is broadly conceptualized as the one which is: *effective for purpose, development<sup>9</sup> relevant or responsive, equitable, resource-efficient and as denoting substantive access<sup>10</sup>*. Key pillars of the framework and key building blocks of each pillar are exemplified in Figure 1 below.

During the actual development of the framework, comprising blocks of each pillar will be further elaborated to cover all critical details. For example, the treatment of an input such as teachers will include elements like: their choice of the profession, admission criteria, pre and in-service training,

recruitment, working conditions, management and utilization, salaries and incentives, retention and retirement<sup>11</sup>. A treatment of learners will include their status at entry—socio-economic background, learning readiness, health conditions, nutrition — access to health services, access to legal and social protection services, admission criteria, in-school academic and pastoral services and other support services.

Fiscal resources will be treated in terms of sources, adequacy, allocation, equity, management, utilization, efficiency and sustainability.

Figure 1: Examples of Elements of the Framework



9 Development here is broadly conceptualized as already outlined above.  
 10 Substantive access refers to effective and successful participation in education rather than token participation which does not lead to real learning outcomes. It is a construct that distinguishes access to schooling which most children have and access to education which most children don't have.  
 11 This work is already started under the TISSA initiative.

## ENVISAGED NATURE AND APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

The framework will be articulated in a modular form and as a set of toolkits that are easy to contextualize and apply. It will be presented to MSs as a generic tool that can be adapted to their contexts. It will be accompanied by a compendium of promising practices that MSs may use as a reference materials, and as input in designing contextually responsive and targeted quality improvement interventions. In line with UNESCO's standard setting function, the framework is meant to help MSs define national general education quality standards within their contexts and to equitably apply those standards toward a higher and equitable/inclusive quality general education.

In line with UNESCO's capacity builder function, the framework will be used to strengthen MSs' capacity to diagnose/analyze binding constraints to attain equitable quality general education for all, to prioritize those constraints, and to develop and implement adequately responsive interventions. In line with UNESCO's laboratory of ideas function, the framework will be presented as a 'living instrument' that UNESCO and MSs will continuously update to reflect current thinking and emerging promising practices in the improvement of the quality of general education.

With its improved methodological approach, the UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) and the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs in the relevant fields will continue to test and document emerging promising practices and to update the compendium of promising practices. MSs that wish to apply the framework will receive substantial technical support from UNESCO and its partners.



## BENEFICIARIES AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience of this framework is principally policy makers who wish to improve the quality of their general education system. Other audiences include education planners and practitioners who will use the toolkits. Key beneficiaries would be countries whose capacities for identifying quality constraints of their systems and to effectively redress those constraints would be enhanced. Learners, their families and their communities are also key beneficiaries: Especially learners from poor households and other disadvantaged groups whose chances of receiving quality education and its consequent benefits will be greatly enhanced.

# ACTIVITIES

Envisaged activities are presented below in sequence:

## 1. Securing partnership for the initiative:

Discussions are being held with Permanent Delegations of diverse MSs to seek technical and financial partnerships for this initiative. Focused attention will be given to MSs that have prioritized equitable improvement of education quality within their broad sector reform programs and that are seeking to deepen and widen the quality of their general education systems.<sup>12</sup> Financial and technical support will also be sought from countries that have managed to develop general education systems of high and equitable quality,<sup>13</sup> MSs' centers of excellence that are already working on education quality improvement,<sup>14</sup> international development partners that support education quality improvement<sup>15</sup> and the private sector that supports the improvement of education quality<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. Review of existing and ongoing general education quality diagnostic/analytic and monitoring initiatives:

In order to optimize value addition, the development of this framework will start with a thorough review of existing and ongoing general education improvement initiatives by select MSs, UNESCO structures and other development partners.<sup>17</sup> Within UNESCO, examples of relevant ongoing initiatives are 'Enhancing Learning' which focuses on one of the processes of the framework (learning), 'Learning Counts' which focuses on another process (assessment), and TISSA which focuses on one input (teachers). Applicable

elements of these initiatives will be taken into account.

## 3. Constitution of technical teams to develop the framework:

Multi-country and multi-agency technical teams will be constituted and mapped to the building blocks of the framework. Their main task will be to develop each building block of the framework into a usable toolkit. Though each team will take primary responsibility for one toolkit, the teams will work in close collaboration to ensure fidelity to the systemic and in particular to systematic approach of the framework. Team members will be drawn from centers of excellence of MSs who are partners in this initiative, participating development partners, and relevant UNESCO structures. Where possible, technical teams will be constituted in a manner that facilitates South-South and North-South collaboration.

## 4. Constitution and operation of a multi-country and multi-agency reference committee:

A high-level committee of eminent educators will be constituted to provide overall quality assurance for the outputs of the technical teams and to support ED/BHL with its oversight of the work. The skill mix of the committee will be carefully considered to reflect the expertise base required to translate each building block of the framework into a usable toolkit. The committee will meet on a quarterly basis during the first year of the development of the framework. During the second year, they will meet on a half yearly basis. Committee meetings will be preceded by a virtual

<sup>12</sup> China, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Hungary, Finland, Norway, Chile, Hungary.

<sup>13</sup> Examples are Norway, Finland, South Korea, Singapore and Sweden.

<sup>14</sup> Examples include the Korean Education Development Institute, the Melbourne University-based Assessment & Teaching of 21st Century Skills.

<sup>15</sup> Examples are the RTI, USAID, OECD, DfID, GTZ, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Examples include CISCO and Intel.

<sup>17</sup> Examples are the OECD, RTI, USAID, OECD, GTZ, etc.

review of the outputs of the technical teams. Each meeting will have a specific output. Beyond the review of outputs and quality assurance meetings, committee members will serve as resource persons for diverse technical teams. Whenever possible, they will also participate in the field-based trial testing and the revision of toolkits that relate to their areas of expertise.

#### **5. Development of the framework:**

Each building block of the framework [e.g. fiscal inputs, teachers, learners, assessment, learning, management, governance, etc.] will be articulated into a detailed toolkit. The development of each toolkit will be allocated to a technical team described above. A total of 15 toolkits are envisaged. ED/BHL will coordinate the development of the toolkits including the articulation of ToRs that will guide the production of respective toolkits, monitoring progress, arranging quality reviews, and ensuring timely revisions and overall production. The reference committee will provide support as described above.

#### **6. Trial testing the framework in volunteer countries:**

MSs will be requested to volunteer for trial testing the application of the framework. The trial test will be followed by refinement and finalization of the framework.

#### **7. Production and dissemination of the framework:**

Each toolkit will be produced in a publishable format. Toolkits will be disseminated to the first cohort of participating countries, and thereafter, to subsequent cohorts of user countries on demand.

#### **8. Application of the framework:**

The framework will be applied across UNESCO MSs that wish to use it. It is especially applicable in countries with high access but poor quality,

in countries that have both low quality and low access and in countries that may have high quality co-existing with stubborn pockets of poor quality. However, countries or even sub-country structures such as provinces or states may apply the framework to improve elements of their education system. Participating countries will be provided technical support to understand the framework, adapt it to their specific contexts, apply it to diagnose/analyze binding constraints to attaining the quality of their general education system, prioritize constraints and develop responsive interventions. On demand, countries will also be provided technical support during the implementation of their interventions.

## EXPECTED OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

1. Funds secured to develop the framework;
2. A network of institutions of excellence and experts established to contribute to the development of the framework;
3. South-South/North-South collaboration facilitated;
4. The framework completed and in use;
5. Improved technical capacity of participating MSs to analyze, improve and monitor the quality of their general education.







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