

# Stimulating The Role of Civil Societies for Sustainable Development Through Social Entrepreneurship

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**ABSTRACT--***Civil Societies (CS) in Nigeria perform multifaceted functions towards societal sustainability ranging from advocacy for good governance to better welfarism for the citizenry. But despite these efforts, several CS end up in extinction with reasons mainly attributed to sustainability challenges. Hence, it is imperative to investigate the impediments to the existence of Nigerian civil societies; examine the source of Nigerian CS income with a view of assessing their coping strategies in an effort to incorporate Schumpeter's Social entrepreneurship theory to the sustenance of CS in Nigeria. The study explored descriptive research design. The study utilized primary data and secondary data. Six civil society organizations in Nigeria were purposively selected for the study. The primary data was retrieved through phone interviews and Key informant interview while the secondary data involved extensive review of relevant literature. The primary data were analysed using content analysis. Findings revealed that lack of guaranteed source of regular income, poor human resource management and lack of incentive for volunteers of CS were largely responsible for the dearth of viable and vibrant CS; several CS relied heavily on mono-donors for funding and when such donors withdraw support it seriously affect the existence and activities of the CS; and very few CS have adopted social entrepreneurship as a coping strategy. The study concluded that more CS in Nigeria will still continue to become extinct until a stable and consistent source of income is guaranteed. Social entrepreneurship, therefore, is recommended for the Nigerian CS to maintain their momentum and continually guarantee sustainable development in their respective fields.*

**Keywords--***Civil societies, financial sustainability, Nigeria, Social entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become the goal of every developing nation in Africa. Literature has increasingly emphasized that the government cannot solely shoulder the responsibility (Arowolo, 2015; Simelane and Chiroro, 2013; Kemp, Parto and Gibson, 2005). Hence, there is increasing need for diversification which ushers in stakeholders to partner the government in ensuring sustainable development. To this effect, civil societies have also

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risen recently to champion the courses of community development (African Civil Society Circle, 2016) but these efforts do not stand the test of time as most civil societies go into extinction majorly because of financial constraints. Recently, a strand of entrepreneurship known as social entrepreneurship has been adopted in several countries of the world and it has been instrumental in aiding the survival of civil societies.

In January 2016, SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) replaced the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals). This is to guide development and to improve the lives of people resident in developing and underdeveloped nations in all the member states under the United Nations' until 2030 (African Civil Society Circle, (ACSC,2016). These global goals encompass extensive scope of targets such as poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and economic growth. Studies such as ACSC (2016), WACSI Research Report (2015) and Kemp, Parto and Gibson (2005) have shown that governments cannot realize these elaborate goals on their own. It will be necessary to bring on board collaborative and individual endeavours at the local and global levels. Meanwhile, the United Nations (2014) has emphasized the need for government to broadly involve other concerned bodies, which include the general public, the private sector, as well as relevant Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

In most developing nations of the world, sustainable development have been achieved through civil societies (Kemp, Parto and Gibson, 2005). In recent times, civil society groups have grown in number and importance. Similarly, the context, dynamics and landscape for civil society are changing in notable ways (WACSI Research Report, 2015). Civil society groups do not only serve as incubators of social, political, and economic ideas in ensuring good governance but also serve as advocates for the disadvantaged communities and groups of people within the society. The government creates an enabling environment; the private sectors contribute in the areas of job creation and income; while the civil society facilitates better delivery of goods and services; as well as economic and social interaction. The civil society does these by mobilizing groups and individuals to participate in poverty reduction, political, economic and social activities.

Universally, several changes and events brought about the emergence of civil societies. The consequences of collapse of the Berlin wall which occurred in 1989; the sudden emergence of popular democracy most especially after the decline of the Soviet Union; and return to democratic governance in several developing countries most especially Africa, and other neighbouring continent such as Asia and Latin America after several years of dictatorship were motivations for the existence of civil societies (Florin, 2000). Also, the rising poverty levels, the massive drive for globalization and international trade as well as the introduction of the Human Capital Index (HDI) as a new lens for economic growth, all provided impetus for the existence of a third estate outside the government and private sector to civil society so as to pursue a new agenda for socio-economic development (Arowolo, 2015).

Invariably, there exists a renaissance of the concept, practice and meaning of civil society in this period. In view of this new resurgence, civil society began to be heard of more loudly, seen more frequently, talked and written about extensively around the world (Florini, 2000; Hawken, 2007). At the same time, the frustrations of donors in relation to slow pace of change despite their investments in several countries saw their direct intervention in the work of non-profit organizations and civil societies broadly.

The concept of civil society has since inception being a contentious term. Although, there is no universally accepted definition but few definitions will be explored to further strengthen the framework of this study. CIVICUS

described the civil society as an entity which is created by individuals, organizations and institutions via collective actions, in an arena outside the family, the market and the state, in pursuance of shared interests and goals (CIVICUS, 2014). Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are all bodies that act in this arena. They include a variety of NGOs, networks, coalitions but exclude firms with profit-making motives as well as organisations seeking political power (Priaet *al*, 2012).

Civil society, within the scope of this study, is not a homogenous group. It varies in size, function, mission, vision and culture. By the virtue of their focus, civil societies may be international, national and local or community or grassroots (Adedokun, 2019). They can also be identified as grassroots movements, networks, intermediaries or federations with divergent nature. Additionally, civil societies is often involve working directly with communities which deliver services, national level advocacy, or with other intermediate function which involves aiding grassroots or local organisations with the view of helping the residents or communities. They also play multiple roles including service deliverers, advocates and facilitators. Civil society, in all its forms, includes youth networks, women's groups, faith-based organisations, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and international non-governmental organisations. Others include those working with trade unions, ethnic-based partners at the local (community) levels and professional bodies.

In spite of these nuances, civil society has generally been considered as consisting of independent institutions that are able to surpass narrow and personal interests with the aim of promoting universal values for the general good of the society (ACSC, 2016). Over the years, civil societies have emerged as key stakeholders in the developmental processes of several African countries and have been influential in sectors such as education, health, government and environment. They are also very instrumental in areas such as poverty reduction, human rights, gender empowerment, youth development, and others. However, several civil societies which play critical roles to promote sustainable development, enable self-empowerment citizens and actively involved in seeking quality delivery and accountability from the private and public sectors are increasingly going into extinction because of unavailability of capital to sustain their vision and mission. Hence, this study is an attempt to provide sustainability measures for the civil societies most especially through social entrepreneurship.

## II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Most developing countries have adopted sustainable development as the latest model to which development can be patterned (Motala, Gwenhure, Ndokweni and Chitiga-Mabugu, 2014; Osborn, Cutter and Ullah, 2015; WACSI Research Report, 2015). The acceptance of sustainable development templates is connected with the new phase of United Nations' strategy to set developmental targets for member states by 2030 tagged: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN's SDGs mission became imperative as it became effective in January 2016, with the motive of providing a novel and global social, economic and environmental goals as well as objectives expected to be achieved by United Nations member states by 2030 (ACSC, 2016).

The SDGs were hinged on the eighth goal of the MDGs with emphasis on vital components of sustainable development within developed nations and their developing counterparts. It also encompasses social justice, good governance, vulnerability and the segregation of marginalized populations and the impoverished, environmental

sustainability, human rights obligations (Simelane and Chiroro, 2013; Meyer-Ohlendorf, Gorlach and McFarland, 2013). The model of MDGs was adopted to design the SDGs, it will not be legally binding on all UN member states but will indicate a political allegiance to development (Meyer-Ohlendorf *et al.*, 2013). Eventually, with poverty reduction objectives in view, the harmony of economic growth and universal environmental goals are to be offshoot of these goals (Simelane (2013).

As laudable as these SDGs have appeared, there are series of ongoing debates surrounding the means of achieving the goals. Arowolo, (2015) stated that SDGs are majorly concerned with goals setting and construction of indicators while paying little attention to the roles required of stakeholders to make these set goals achievable. There was much argument on the best means to achieve this universal framework starting from the rural areas which the United Nations hope to capture. It is obvious that government alone cannot achieve the SDGs agenda with consideration for the ambition and scope of the SDGs (Research Center for Leadership in Action, 2012). This brought about the need for notable the stakeholders to facilitate the how all sectors of the society, including CSOs(Civil Society Organisations), private sectors and the entire members of the public would participate. In spite of the efforts of several CSOs, findings have revealed that sustainability has been the challenges of most CSOs as several of them hastily go into extinction mainly because of financial challenges (WACSI Research Report, 2015). Through social entrepreneurship, this study attempts to provide a new dimension to sustainability of civil societies to enhance the process of attaining sustainable development in Africa.

### **III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The primary objective of the paper is to explore the coping strategies of the selected civil societies in guaranteeing sustainable development in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study centers on examining the sources of Nigerian CS income; investigate the impediments to the existence of Nigerian civil societies and assess the coping strategies of CS in Nigeria.

### **IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Even though literature have pointed out that studies have been conducted on civil societies' activities of in Africa, this study will broaden our understanding on the contribution of civil societies to community development with emphasis on social entrepreneurship in Nigeria. It will contribute to literature in the area of Sustainable Development Goals attainment and give insight into how civil societies contribute to development in the Nigeria. This study will also provide data and intellectual references for future research on civil societies. It will as well enrich existing knowledge on social entrepreneurship among civil societies in Nigeria.

## V. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Civil Society*

The concept “Civil Society” means non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and not-for-profit groups which have impacts on the wellbeing of people, public life, and communicating the ideals of society. This is done with consideration for the ethical, political, religious, cultural, scientific or philanthropic. CSOs are simply a conglomeration of organisations which further encompass any of the following: NGOs (non-governmental organisations), professional associations, charitable organisations, CBOs (Community Based Organisations), indigenous groups, labour unions, FBOs (Faith Based Organisations) and foundations (WACSI Research Report, 2015). It aims at improving education, health and several issues affecting humanity (Oleksandrivna & Viacheslavivna, 2019). It is often referred to as belonging to the basic three major sectors of society, after the government and business enterprises.

### *Civil Society Typifications*

Two elements can be extracted from Civil society. These are: CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) and CSIs (Civil Society Institutions). CSOs are groups through which citizens belong in order to further their goals, interests and aspirations. Examples of CSOs are FBOs, CBOs, indigenous groups, labour unions, NGOs, and charitable organisations among others. The CSOs are institutions of the society whose interest is to foster the rule of law, democracy, accountability and transparency. Media advocacy organisations and professional associations are also inclusive of the examples of CSOs (WASCI Research Report, 2015). Their task is often wielded around citizens generally. However, the scope of this study covers both civil society constituents.

## VI. ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is a voluntary organisation with several obligations and functions they perform in the society. These include: serving as major alternative voice to the government, empowering the people, advocating for the promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance, provision of community services and social welfare, creation of awareness, serving as interphase among the government, international communities and the people, advocacy for good working condition, provision of alternatives through community service and assisting government in researches and policy formulation. According to the report of UNDG (2013) and UNDP (2014), civil societies need to concentrate these goals in four strategic areas: act as a service delivery provider, serve as agents of accountability, serve as the mouth piece of the poorest and most marginalized citizens and as well monitor progress through data collection and reporting.

## VII. CHALLENGES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The challenges of civil societies in Africa are numerous. ACSC (2016) and WASCI Research Report (2015) revealed that these include systemic, societal, human and logistic challenges. The challenges cover arrays of areas such as maintenance of human resource competence, perceived corruption (Lack of transparency and accountability), politicization and partisan labeling in projects execution, low investment in transparent and

accountable systems, limited communication about impacts and results of projects as well as financial constraint which is largely a product of over-reliance on donors particularly single sources of funds. As a result of these sustainability challenges largely hinged on finances, several vibrant civil societies with prospects have either gone into extinction or are underperforming in most African communities.

## VIII. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainability is basically about the protection of amenities (physical, environmental, as well as cultural diversity). Sustainable development has been perceived differently by scholars of different clime Omonijo, Uwajeh and Anyaegbunam (2019), but in spite of that, it could be observed that its focus is hinged on enabling people globally to enjoy a better quality of life and satisfy their basic needs without any consequential disadvantage for the quality of life of successive generations which is often pursued through innovative, productive and sustainable economy and investments (HM Government, 2005). Tello and Yoon (2008) posited that there are six possible drivers of sustainable development. These include: customer demand, government regulation, social activism, supply chain partnerships, technology advancement and social responsibility initiatives.

### *Social Entrepreneurship*

The concept of entrepreneurship as an organized knowledge came into being about hundred years ago (Yahaya and Nuhu, 2011; Olowu, Ijeoma&Vanroose, 2019; Aribaba, Ahmodu, Adedokun, Yusuff&Omada, 2019) and its definition has been debated among scholars, researchers, and even policy makers since its conception. This is often arguably misconstrued by many as establishing a personal business venture. Entrepreneurship is more than something one does at a point in time. It is a process. Odia and Odia (2013) opined that it involves taking decisions and making concrete plans to venture into an enterprise.

Social entrepreneurship is basically aimed towards reacting to market inadequacies with innovative and financially sustainable inventions with the intention of proffering solutions to social problems which often time emerge as the link of the private and public sectors (Dees and Beth, 2007; Uma & Bhuvaneshwari, 2019; Sobiya&Thangavel, 2019; Viswapriya, &Mayilvaganan. 2019). It further means a contemporary aspect of entrepreneurship which explores the features of businesses, nonprofit making organizations and public enterprises, with the aim of applying social problem-solving and private-sector enterprises' focus on large-scale transformation, risk-taking and innovation. Social entrepreneurship primarily aims at creating social values beyond the conventional definite externalities of normal day-to-day profit-oriented business (Peredo and McLean, 2006). It encompasses prompt responsiveness to the daily want of mankind for social good and provision of the process of creating it, as well as creativity, ability to bear risk, as well as inventiveness in the course of scarce resources.

Although social entrepreneurship is not absolutely new in the lexicon of Economists and Business Administrators, yet it has enjoyed increased recognition, attention and adoption from researchers, policymakers, journalists, philanthropists and civil societies. This is because it has become an essential and distinct tool for a nation's environmental, social, political and economic development (Anderson and Dees, 2006). The difference

between entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship has been hinged on the impacts the latter has on the society rather than the former which is solely towards profit making.

Per time, the hallmark of an entrepreneur is creating new values, increasing interest in recognising and exploiting opportunities to sustain the values created; demonstrating high level innovation in the course of producing the values created through the recruitment of needed human resources and purchase of material resources; willingness to shoulder risk during the period of creating the value, as well as recognition of resources not recognized by others. However, the aim of social entrepreneurs is to establish and develop the social value ahead of positive externalities which include income, employment and impact factor on the society.

Also, social entrepreneurs aims to positively impart the society in areas of social service provision and reduction of social problems in the society either from the proceeds of their profit or as the service they render in the society. Dees, *et al* (2002) stated that concept of social entrepreneurship is not totally for profit making in their undertakings. They, however, revealed that some of the services rendered will attract income in the course of their operation. Dees, *et al* (2002) revealed that for the non-profit organisations, money realized during the social entrepreneurship should be exclusively preserved to achieve the social intention proposed as well as provide for the sustenance of the employees and the social entrepreneur that were instrumental to the pursuance and success of the social enterprise endeavours. As such, social entrepreneurship becomes a legitimate means to an end.

## **IX. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### ***Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurship***

Dwelling on Omonijo, Adetola, Lawal, Odukoya, Olowookere, Okunlola and Rotimi, (2019), the concept of entrepreneurship has attracted several theories but out of such theories, the social entrepreneurship theory of Schumpeter (1975) is considered essential in this study. The theoretical impetus for social entrepreneurship was built following the Schumpeterian assumptions. According to Schumpeter (1975), the real innovators in the society are the entrepreneurs. And as much as the society is desirous of change, it becomes imperative for the entrepreneur to provide innovation which offers the society a unique approach of confronting and resolving problems. Schumpeter posited that social problems naturally require innovation essentially because they are largely precipitated by the adoption of antiquated methods, approaches and models.

A reflection that the existing panacea to the varying socio-economic, technological, environmental challenges are not adequate for sustainability, entrepreneurial quest to package novel ideas becomes imperative, with consideration to whether it is product/service distribution system, technological development, production method or new organizational form (Lennox and York, 2011). Hence, the need for the adoption of social entrepreneurship became imperative as an alternative to existing entrepreneurship which is only profit oriented and with little contributions to community development except on few occasions when corporate social responsibilities are performed and often times, the effects of the CSRs are not evenly felt.

Schumpeter contributed immensely in the areas of entrepreneurship and his contributions also imparted social entrepreneurship. The Schumpeter innovation theory can be understood as the process of promoting and deploying

entrepreneurship activity to lessen the volume of unemployment in the society. Although the explanation above cited unemployment as a key social problem Schumpeter sighted but he also proposed the possibility of mélange of social problems any society may be experiencing. His aim was to adopt entrepreneurship as a problem-solving rather than just a concept in his innovation theory towards entrepreneurship and since this study is aimed towards looking beyond the everyday enterprises, then it is important to state that social entrepreneurship is also a brain child of Schumpeter who believed that entrepreneurship activities should be promoted and deployed in every segment of the society. Meanwhile, since the aim of civil societies is for advocacy and rendering services to the society in areas of health, education, environmental sustainability, human rights, gender equity and sustainable development among others, there is need for financial sustainability of their organization and such sustainability can be guaranteed in the provision of certain needs of the society.

## X. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research designs exploring the case study of six purposively selected civil societies in Nigeria. ISERH (Initiative for sound Education and Reproductive Health) Osogbo, Osun State; ACCR (African Centre for Corporate responsibility), Garki, Abuja; CRUDAN (Christian Rural and Urban Development Association of Nigeria), Buruku, Plateau State; JDPC (Justice, Development and Peace Commission), Ijebu-Ode; NYNETHA (Nigeria Youth Network on HIV/AIDS), Awka, Anambra State and WOPEIND (Women for Peace and Empowerment Initiative of the Niger Delta), Ekeki-Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Their selection was based on special approaches adopted for sustainability which surpass other existing civil societies. Phone interviews were conducted for the key informants in the six organizations.

## XI. FINDINGS

Information on **Table i** revealed the characteristics of the selected civil societies. Most of the selected civil societies depend solely on grants (local and international), donations and voluntary services. The FBOs (CRUDAN and JDPC) survive on donations, fund raising and voluntary service while CBOs (ISERH and WOPEIND) thrive on local donors, grants and international funding. Others (ACCR and NYNETHA) were sustained through International grants and research grants from reputable organizations (locally and foreign). On the number of services rendered by these organizations, findings revealed that majority of the organizations render health, education and development related services apart from JDPC that embarks on legal and human rights issues. The table also revealed that the least of the organizations has existed for ten (10) years. On sustainability measures towards financing the organizations, four of the organizations have social enterprises from which funds are generated to sustain the services of their administrative staff and volunteers who sometimes need financial motivation and the remaining two organizations consistently get grants from donors to prosecute their community services.

**Table 1:** Characteristics of Some Selected Civil Societies in Nigeria

<b>S</b>	<b>Civil societies</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>No of services rendered</b>	<b>Sustainability measures</b>	<b>No of volunteers</b>	<b>Year of establishment</b>
1	Initiative for sound Education and Reproductive Health (ISERH)	Osogbo, Osun State	Local donors, Grants and Voluntary services	4	Private primary school	11	2006
2	African Corporate Responsibility (ACCR)	Garki, Abuja	Research Grants, community services and International Grants	Multiple	Nil	9	1998
3	Christian Rural and Urban Development Association of Nigeria (CRUDAN)	Buruku, Plateau State	Donations and fund raising	Multiple	Interventionist projects	23	2001
4	Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC)	Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State	Donations and voluntary service	Multiple	Donations and voluntary service	Over 200	1988
5	Nigeria Youth Network on HIV/AIDS (NYNETHA)	Akwa, Anambra State	International funding (USAID)	3	Nil	17	2001

6	Women for Peace and Empowerment Initiative of the Niger Delta (WOPEIND)	Ekeki-Yenagoa, Bayelsa State	International funding and intervention Grants	Multiple	Diversification to public-private partnership	14	1999
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*Source: Researchers compilation (2020)*

### ***Sustainability Measures***

The study revealed that almost all of the civil societies' sustainability measures were threatened by finances at the initial stage but doggedness and change in strategies from sourcing income from one source as well as diversification of organisation's mission aided the survival of the organisations. This was revealed in the phone interview granted to some of the key informants:

*We faced several challenges in delivering quality services to our clients at some point. We could not meet up with targets to financially sustain our employees at the initial stage. It was almost like we would faze out but we had to cut down costs and focus on the major impactful projects to be able to sustain the organization. It took us two years to master the trend.*

#### ***KII with CSO Representative D***

Similarly, another informant stated:

*Financially, we thought that support would keep flowing until we experienced serious dryness. Grants stopped coming and people kept demanding the replica of our programmes in their communities. At first, we felt we were up to the task but it dawned on us that we will become history if we don't have other alternative of generating funds. That gave birth to the existence of several supporting organisations that generate revenue for our sustenance.*

#### ***KII with CSO Representative A***

Implicit from the foregoing is that the sustenance of any civil society is hinged on ability to have an alternative income generating organization which will aid the organization. The six selected organisations kept thriving when many civil societies who started with them foundered because they have alternative organizations that generate steady income. These alternative organizations help the payment of their bills and sustain their daily domestic needs in their organization and family.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

On September 25, 2015, the sustainable development agenda came into limelight when countries of the world agreed to maintain the planet, adopt the ambitions of ending poverty and ensure prosperity for all. The unanimously agreed SDGs are seventeen (17) and each of the goals has particular aims to be accomplished fifteen (15) years after the SDGs were approved (United Nations, 2016). These SDGs are: to end poverty; give zero tolerance to

hunger; provision of good health and well-being; provision of quality education; an environment of equality in gender; provision of clean water and appropriate environmental sanitation; availability of affordable and clean energy; provision of decent work that will guarantee economic growth; availability of industry, encouragement of innovation and infrastructure; reduction of inequalities; availability of sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on water; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnership for the achievement of the goals. In order to achieve these goals, the United Nations advocated the need for every stakeholder in the society (governments, the private sector, civil society) to play an active role (United Nations, 2016).

From previous literature, it is evident that the government cannot solely bear the responsibilities while the private sectors are mainly interested in maximizing their profit per time, leaving the civil societies with the choice to actively embark on these goals because they are both interested in grassroots development and non-partisan and non-profit making organizations (UNCDF, 2010; Save the Children, 2012). Studies have also revealed that civil societies have always shouldered the task of the erstwhile millennium development goals (MDGs) and if necessary funding and human resources are available, they have the capacity to efficiently implement the aforementioned 17 SDGs of the United Nations (Arowolo, 2015, ACSC meeting, 2015).

Civil societies in Nigeria have over time being understudied most importantly in the area of impact evaluation, financial stability, and sincerity of purpose to their mission statements. This is partly attributed to lack of documentation and monitoring of their activities by the government and concerned bodies which has often demobilized several active civil society organizations eventually leading to their extinction. In spite of this, civil societies have proven to be instrumental in the developmental strategy and policy making of many communities in the way they aid the activities of the government. As a result in the absence of foreign aids or grants, more empirical studies are needed to increase campaigns on social entrepreneurship because several civil societies have gone into extinction because of sustainability challenges. If civil societies have as priority the development of the society, there is need to aid their survival and encourage their entrepreneurial prowess through which they can encourage volunteers, sustain their organizations and carry out meaningful projects which will positively impact the society.

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