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ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

ON GENDER AND AIDS



This pamphlet draws from Draft Gender Guidance for National AIDS Responses, which was presented to and noted by the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board at its 22nd meeting in April 2008. The guidance was developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of governments, civil society, the UNAIDS Secretariat, UNIFEM and the ten UNAIDS Cosponsors. The draft guidance, which also contains background information and programme priorities for different epidemic settings, will be further refined and adapted through country level pilot and assessment activities over the course of 2008 and 2009.

Table of Contents

Introduction4

Essential Actions7

Objective ONE 8

 Recomendation ONE..... 10

 Recommendation TWO12

Objective TWO14

 Recommendation THREE16

 Recommendation FOUR 18

 Recomendation FIVE.....20

Objective THREE22

 Recommendation SIX24

 Recommendation SEVEN26

Conclusion28

INTRODUCTION

More than 25 years into the AIDS epidemic, gender inequality and unequal power relations between and among women and men continue to be major drivers of HIV transmission. Approximately 60% of the people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are women and girls, as are about 50% of people living with HIV worldwide. Intimate partner violence, challenges in negotiating safer sex and other manifestations of gender inequality are closely associated with the risk of women being infected with HIV.¹ Gender inequality and harmful gender norms are not only associated with the spread of HIV but also with its consequences. Women and girls bear a disproportionate burden of responsibility for families affected by AIDS, and women who disclose their HIV-positive status have often faced greater stigma and suffered more extreme negative reactions than men. Gender norms and expectations also influence male sexuality, risk-taking and their vulnerability to HIV. To meet the goal of Universal Access to HIV prevention, treatment and care by 2010 and the Millennium Development Goal of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015, it is essential that gender inequality is addressed as a central element of our collective response to AIDS.

Essential Actions on Gender and AIDS outlines a series of steps and processes for country-level stakeholders to accelerate and expand action on gender equality in order to strengthen national responses to AIDS. It emphasizes the importance of setting gender and AIDS programme priorities and stresses that these priorities will vary according to the configuration of a country's epidemic and its local contexts. One of the lessons learned in assessing gender and AIDS efforts is that a key feature of effective programming is an understanding of how harmful gender norms and gender inequality contribute to the spread of HIV, and how HIV differentially affects women, men, girls and boys.

Understanding the gender dimensions of HIV from the perspective of planning, programming and monitoring and evaluation, helps to foster a sustainable response to AIDS. Effective action for HIV prevention requires concerted and far-reaching action to challenge and change harmful gender norms and inequality

between women and men, as well as focused action to make community environments safer, especially for young women and girls. HIV prevention also requires addressing how gender dynamics influence people in key populations and at risk groups, such as sex workers and their clients, people who inject drugs, and men who have sex with men and their female partners. Identifying and supporting the needs of discordant couples is also important, as is paying attention to the differential impact of HIV on women and men, either as people living with HIV or as care-givers or family members.

Experience shows that while attention to gender equality and the needs of women and girls is slowly increasing, such activities remain limited, under-funded and not well integrated into national AIDS responses. Gender-related projects are frequently 'added on', rather than firmly anchored within national AIDS programmes. Often there is insufficient connection made between analysis of the gender dynamics driving HIV epidemics and the planning, budgeting and monitoring of AIDS programmes. In this context, three critical challenges stand out:

- Analysing the influence of gender inequality, discrimination and harmful gender norms, both on the dynamics of how HIV is transmitted and on the impact of the AIDS epidemic itself, in order to inform national AIDS strategies, plans and budgets.
- Identifying, selecting, funding and scaling up an appropriate mix of policies, programmes and interventions for particular social and epidemiological contexts, including those that focus specifically on gender and those that integrate attention to gender within other actions, such as targeting programming specifically to girls and boys in efforts to reach at-risk youth.
- Increasing the capacity of National AIDS Coordinating Authorities and partner institutions to effectively plan and implement programmes that address gender dimensions of AIDS, and to build synergy between AIDS programmes and broader gender-equality programmes.

Many of the issues most relevant to women, girls and gender inequality are also pertinent to men who have sex with men, transgender communities, and lesbian, gay and bisexual groups. Some countries choose to include attention to these populations within gender and AIDS analyses and strategies, while others prefer parallel processes in order to ensure adequate resources and attention to their separate needs. Addressing and understanding the specific impact of gender norms in relation to HIV and men who have sex with men is an important aspect of effective programming. Gender norms affect this population directly and also contribute to the broader epidemic because many men have sex with both men and women.

¹ Gender norms can be understood as learned and evolving beliefs and customs in a society that define what is socially acceptable in terms of roles, behaviours and status for both men and women. In the context of the HIV epidemic, these gender norms strongly influence both men's and women's risk taking behaviour, expression of sexuality, and vulnerability to HIV infection and impact, including their ability to take up and use HIV prevention information and commodities, as well as HIV treatment, care and support. UNAIDS/PCB(20)/07.11, June 2007.

ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

Essential Actions focuses on three broad objectives to expand and strengthen action on gender equality within national AIDS responses. Each objective outlines a set of corresponding recommendations and priority actions for key groups of stakeholders: (i) the **National AIDS Coordinating Authority** and implementing partners (such as Ministries of Health, Education, Women's Affairs, Labour, Planning, Finance, Social Welfare and Justice); (ii) **civil society**, including women and men living with HIV, NGOs, women's groups, and youth, community-based and faith-based organizations; (iii) the **donor community**; and (iv) the **UN system**.

The recommendations and actions are aimed at assisting country stakeholders to work more effectively together to support and expand gender equality in national AIDS responses. They are intended to address frequently identified obstacles to scaling up gender interventions, focusing on strategic planning, coordination, funding, and monitoring and evaluation of national AIDS responses. The role of stakeholders may vary according to country contexts, but the leadership of the National AIDS Authority and the engagement of relevant government ministries, local government, civil society and affected communities is essential to achieving an effective multi-sectoral AIDS response.

Objective ONE

Know your country's epidemic and current response in gender terms.

Why?

Accurate information is the foundation of strong and effective strategies and plans. This includes basic information on sex, age and route of transmission for people living with HIV, as well as an understanding of how gender inequality and harmful gender norms influence the spread and consequences of epidemics. It is equally important to understand the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies and programmes in gender terms, to identify critical gaps so that responses can be better targeted and strengthened.

Recommendation ONE

Ensure that HIV monitoring, surveillance and evaluation fully capture information about the gender dimensions of the HIV epidemic, and periodically conduct stand-alone gender assessments to gather essential supplementary data.

(This includes ensuring that the epidemiological analysis answers questions such as: Who is getting infected? In what circumstances? In which regions?)

National AIDS Coordinating Authority²

- Track HIV infection by sex, age and patterns of serodiscordance in couples.
- Collect and analyze information on why women and men are getting infected, and include attention to concurrent relationships, sex between men, transactional sex, and intergenerational sex in analysis of sexual transmission data.
- Conduct HIV-related socioeconomic assessments to examine the differential impact of HIV on females and males, with attention to the specificities of people living with HIV and marginalized populations; and analyze the findings by age and other variables such as education and economic status.
- Collaborate and share information on HIV and gender with institutions that carry out large national research processes, such as demographic and health surveys, and with civil society organizations.
- If national monitoring, surveillance and assessment systems are not yet designed to capture gender dynamics, review and strengthen such systems.
- Periodically conduct stand-alone gender assessments of the national epidemic and response; the assessments should be carried out through wide consultation, involving technical expertise on both gender and HIV, as well as representatives of key populations.

Civil Society

- Advocate more robust HIV monitoring and surveillance to effectively track HIV infection by sex, age and patterns of serodiscordance in couples.
- Advocate and participate in collection and analysis of information on why women and men are getting infected, with attention to concurrent relationships, sex between men, transactional sex, and intergenerational sex.
- Participate in, and contribute information to, the analysis of gender dynamics of HIV and its socioeconomic impacts on females, males and marginalized populations.

² Refers to National AIDS Coordinating Authority and key implementing government partners.

Donor Community

- Provide financial and technical support to strengthen national monitoring and surveillance systems to track HIV infection by sex, age, patterns of serodiscordance in couples and other key variables.
- Support national operational research on HIV and gender that involves institutions that have expertise in HIV and gender. This should include supporting national partners to commission research to assess gender norms linked to HIV infection and its differentiated impacts, and to determine factors impeding uptake of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services for females and males, with attention to marginalized populations.
- Facilitate dialogue and advocate with country stakeholders to ensure that HIV monitoring, surveillance and evaluation fully and regularly capture the gender dimensions of the HIV epidemic.

The UN System

- Provide technical support to national partners on collecting, analyzing and using data on HIV infection by sex, age, economic status, geographic location, patterns of serodiscordance, modes of transmission, and uptake of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services.
- Provide technical support for conducting assessments to analyze the gender-related drivers and effects of the HIV epidemic.
- Review technical guidance on HIV-related socioeconomic impact assessments to ensure that gender dimensions are adequately incorporated and analyzed.

Recommendation TWO

Assess the current AIDS response to see if and how it is addressing the gender dimensions of the epidemic

National AIDS Coordinating Authority

- Track access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services by sex, age, risk behaviour, and geographic location (and if possible by economic, educational and marital status), determine whether there are critical gaps, and assess gender-based barriers to services.
- Assess the legal and policy frameworks affecting females and males, with attention to the specificities of people living with HIV and marginalized populations.
- Engage your national audit office to carry out an audit of the proportion of resources in the current national AIDS response that are allocated to and spent on programmes addressing gender issues.
- Engage civil society groups, gender-equality advocates, women living with HIV and human rights experts in assessment processes.

Civil Society

- Participate in and contribute to gender assessment of the current national AIDS response.
- Support mapping of access to services by females and males, including services provided by civil society organizations.

Donor Community

- Together with country partners, advocate for a gender assessment of the current AIDS response.
- Assess your AIDS policies, priorities and funding outcomes in terms of the impact on gender equality.

The UN System

- Provide technical support for a gender assessment of the current national AIDS response.
- Analyze your policies, priorities and programmes in terms of impact on gender equality in the national AIDS response.

Objective TWO

Plan, implement and evaluate specific actions to advance gender equality, and ensure that appropriate attention be given to gender across your multisectoral AIDS programmes.³

Why?

Effectively addressing the links between gender and AIDS always requires a mix of specific, focused action on gender equality as well as ensuring that other, broader action on AIDS is gender sensitive. Focused efforts can have the greatest impact on the highest priority issues and populations. At the same time, integrating gender perspectives into multisectoral action on AIDS is the best way to ensure broad reach. The exact selection and mix of policies, programmes and interventions will vary according to the social and epidemiological context.

³ These actions should be developed on the basis of Objective 1.

Recommendation THREE

Integrate gender into the national AIDS strategy, annual action plans and sector plans, with specific attention being given to budgeting and allocation of funds. (This includes agreeing on which agencies are responsible for designing, financing and implementing specific and cross-cutting actions on gender equality that advance the AIDS programme).

National AIDS Coordinating Authority

- Develop a national AIDS strategy, annual action plans and sector plans on the basis of a gender analysis of the epidemic in your country and the current response.
- Plan and cost specific activities to address gender norms driving the epidemic in your country; these should clearly recognize specific roles and responsibilities among government departments, civil society, donors and the UN system.
- Develop and cost specific activities to address differentiated social and economic impacts of AIDS on females and males, with attention to the specificities of marginalized populations.
- In addition to the development of specific gender activities, take account of gender as a cross-cutting issue in all areas of the AIDS strategy and action plans (i.e. integrate gender issues into all programmes and processes across sectors).
- Involve national gender institutions, groups with gender and human rights expertise, women living with HIV, and marginalized groups in the development of an AIDS strategy and plans, as well as in national AIDS coordinating mechanisms and processes.
- Based on gender analysis, budget and allocate an adequate share of HIV resources to gender-focused activities across sectors, and monitor and track the utilization of these funds.
- Include explicit components on advancing gender equality and addressing the needs of women and girls in all funding applications to multilateral and bilateral donors.
- Develop specific strategies for promoting the active participation of private sector actors as key funding partners.

Civil Society

- Advocate the full integration of gender into the national AIDS strategy, action plans and sector plans, including in activities to be implemented by civil society organizations.
- Organize and advocate the active engagement of women living with HIV and of those involved in gender-related activities (including women's groups, human rights and law groups, sexual minority groups) in AIDS planning and funding processes.
- Work with government and bilateral and multilateral donors to ensure that civil society activities on gender are included and fully funded in national AIDS policies and programmes.
- Develop strategies and capacity to monitor funding allocations and expenditure on gender-equality activities.
- Support the identification of funding needs for promoting gender-related activities.

Donor Community

- Review HIV funding and proposal guidelines to ensure that they promote the development of proposals that advance gender equality and address the needs of women and girls.
- Coordinate actions to ensure that programmes that advance gender equality in national plans are fully costed.
- Fully implement provisions of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness as they relate to support for gender equality in the context of national AIDS responses.
- Include responding to the gender dimensions of AIDS as an explicit policy and programmatic objective in funding strategies, and as a review criterion in proposal evaluation.
- As part of the national AIDS strategy, provide funding for gender- and AIDS-related activities in key sectors (can include Ministries of Health, Women's Affairs, Education, Justice, Interior, Social Welfare, Communications, Defence, Public Transport, Labour, etc).
- Collate and share information on planned and actual gender-related commitments and disbursements, including details of funding recipients and intended use of allocations.
- Provide sufficient funding for expansion of specific interventions to advance gender equality and address the needs of women and girls within the national AIDS response and integrate gender into other HIV-related activities; this includes adequate funding for technical support.

The UN System

- Provide technical support for the integration of gender into the national AIDS strategy, as well as into its sectoral and decentralized plans and strategies.
- Provide support to groups with gender expertise, to organizations of women living with HIV, and to marginalized groups to strengthen their participation in the development of national AIDS strategies, action plans and sector plans.
- Develop gender-focused activities and integrate gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in Joint UN Programmes of Support to the national AIDS response.
- Integrate gender into all global, regional and country-level guidance and programming tools developed to support the national AIDS response.
- Review reporting and accountability frameworks to integrate gender- and HIV-related obligations.
- Expand technical support for national funding applications to multilateral and bilateral donors so as to ensure inclusion of and support to components that advance gender equality within the national AIDS response.
- Provide technical assistance on gender and AIDS to members of the Country Coordinating Mechanisms of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.
- Earmark an adequate share of agency AIDS resources to fund the implementation of programmes to address gender and AIDS, and track the spending of these funds.
- A UN Theme Group on HIV/Joint UN Team on AIDS should access available funds to stimulate action and expand programming on gender and AIDS.

Recommendation FOUR

Implement and scale up specific interventions to address the gender dynamics of your epidemic in terms of HIV prevention, treatment, care and impact mitigation. (It is important to note that what you plan and implement will vary according to the gender dimensions of the epidemic in your country)

National AIDS Coordinating Authority

- Support the implementation of a broad range of programmes and services to advance gender equality in HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.
- Coordinate and partner with sector ministries and other key stakeholders to implement interventions addressing gender-related vulnerability to HIV and the varying impacts of AIDS across sectors.
- Ensure alignment between your AIDS programme and the gender profile of the epidemic in your country, with particular attention being given to emerging patterns of infection, including the respective needs of women, men, boys and girls (including females and males living with HIV and marginalized groups).
- Support research on the successes and challenges in the implementation of programmes to address gender and AIDS; this should include support for dissemination of the findings of such research.

Civil Society

- Ensure that AIDS-related activities implemented by civil society take into consideration the gender profile of the epidemic in your country, with particular attention being given to emerging patterns of infection in females, males and marginalized groups.
- Expand implementation of successful gender-specific AIDS-related activities.
- Together with government, multilateral and bilateral donors, advocate the integration of gender as a cross-cutting concern in all AIDS-related activities.

Donor Community

- Support expansion of specific interventions and related advocacy to advance gender equality within the national AIDS response.
- Promote the participation of civil society groups, gender-equality advocates, and women living with HIV in the national AIDS response and support their involvement in dialogue with key policy-makers.

The UN System

- Provide technical assistance to government and civil society partners, and advocate the implementation of gender- and AIDS-related activities across multisectoral national AIDS programme.

Recommendation FIVE

Develop and track targets and indicators to measure the gender-related outcomes and impacts of AIDS programmes.

National AIDS Coordinating Authority

- Disaggregate existing indicators to measure progress in fulfilling the commitments made in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, by sex and age.
- Develop quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess the impact of gender-specific interventions and gender mainstreaming in your national AIDS strategy and action plans, and integrate these into your national monitoring and evaluation system.
- Fully integrate gender into your national AIDS programme reviews to examine to what degree programmes are meeting the gender-differentiated needs of women and men, including men who have sex with men and their female partners.
- Monitor programmes to track who is accessing services by sex and age, and analyze barriers to access.
- Carry out evaluation studies to gather evidence of what works in reducing gender-based vulnerability to HIV.

Civil Society

- Develop the capacity to monitor and evaluate progress towards universal access, in terms of gender equality.
- Participate in reporting on progress towards fulfilling the commitments outlined in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS, and human rights treaties bodies, in terms of gender equality.
- Increase the role of civil society and academic institutions in monitoring and evaluation, including collection of information from marginalized communities, participation in joint National AIDS Reviews, and critical analysis of national data.
- Increase the use of monitoring and evaluation data in gender- and HIV-related activities, and evaluate programmes in terms of the impact and outcomes for women, men and marginalized populations.

Donor Community

- Support the engagement of civil society in the monitoring and evaluation of gender equality in the HIV response.
- Support the inclusion of indicators to effectively track gender-related outcomes and impacts in the national monitoring and evaluation system.
- Support technical assistance to the national AIDS coordinating authority and its partners in developing and tracking targets and indicators to measure the gender-related outcomes and impacts of the AIDS response for females and males.
- Integrate gender-equality targets and indicators into your performance monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

The UN System

- Support the development of gender-specific indicators by which to measure progress in fulfilling the commitments made in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.
- Support the integration of gender into existing monitoring and evaluation tools, frameworks and processes, and, where necessary, support the development of monitoring and evaluation tools in the contexts of gender and AIDS.
- Support the engagement of civil society in the monitoring and evaluation of gender equality in the AIDS response.
- Integrate gender into your programme review and performance monitoring tools and frameworks at global, regional and national levels.

Objective THREE

Build capacity and mutually reinforce links between action on AIDS and broader action to achieve gender-equality goals.

Why?

It is necessary to enhance the gender capacity of National AIDS Coordinating Authorities and their implementing partners to ensure that they gain a practical understanding of how to strengthen action on gender in AIDS policies and programmes. Similarly, building the AIDS competence of gender institutions enables effective integration of HIV into national gender programmes. Fostering linkages between AIDS programmes and gender programmes builds synergy and leverages resources for more effective outcomes.

Recommendation SIX

Promote reciprocal capacity-building to increase the gender competence of those involved in AIDS-related initiatives and the HIV competence of those involved in gender-related initiatives.

National AIDS Coordinating Authority

- Provide training in gender-related issues and human rights to national AIDS coordinating authority staff and implementing partners.
- Provide training in HIV-related issues to staff in key institutions and ministries dealing with gender-related issues.
- Develop and maintain a database of national and regional gender and AIDS experts, relevant gender focal points in government, and national organizations working on law, human rights and gender.
- Conduct gender and HIV capacity assessments of key institutions and establish clear benchmarks for capacity-building outcomes.

Civil Society

- Support reciprocal capacity-building by facilitating partnerships between civil society groups with HIV expertise, including women living with HIV, and groups with expertise in gender policies, programmes and advocacy.

Donor Community

- Provide support to the national AIDS coordinating authority for training in gender-related issues, recruitment of gender experts and technical support on gender.
- Provide support for HIV-related training of staff in key institutions dealing with gender-related issues.
- Provide funding for capacity-building of networks of women living with HIV and of marginalized groups, to contribute to and implement AIDS responses.
- Provide training on gender and HIV to increase the relevant competence of your staff.

The UN System

- Expand technical assistance to the national AIDS coordinating authority and its implementing partners to build capacity in the contexts of gender and AIDS.
- Provide technical support to build the leadership and organizational capacity of organizations of women living with HIV and of marginalized groups.
- Support those involved in gender-related initiatives (including women's groups, human rights and law groups, and marginalized) in building capacity to engage in HIV-related planning and funding processes.
- Support those involved in HIV-related initiatives in building capacity to engage in gender-related planning and funding processes.
- Assess the gender capacity, and provide training to strengthen the gender competence, of Joint UN Teams on AIDS.
- Integrate gender and AIDS into relevant training programmes for UN staff.

Recommendation SEVEN

Ensure the implementation of essential gender-related actions that promote the achievement of both AIDS-related goals and broader gender-equality goals.

National AIDS Coordinating Authority

- Convene joint planning and review meetings between the national AIDS coordinating authority, its implementing partners and key institutions involved in gender-related initiatives.
- Strengthen synergy and leverage between HIV policies and programmes, and policies and programmes that promote gender equality more broadly.
- Undertake joint strategic planning between the national AIDS coordinating authority and key gender institutions to link the implementation of gender-related activities in the HIV strategy with implementation of broader gender plans and policies.
- Simultaneously integrate HIV and gender into broader development processes and programmes, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks and National Development Plans and their implementation and review processes.

Civil Society

- Organize and advocate the active engagement of those involved in HIV-related activities in gender planning and funding processes.
- Engage with partners working across the spectrum of gender- and AIDS-related issues to build synergies and joint strategies and to increase collaboration in implementing programmes.

Donor Community

- Review support to national development and gender-equality goals to better align these with national AIDS policies and programmes.
- Incorporate gender and AIDS initiatives into the aid effectiveness agenda and promote links to broader development processes, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks and National Development Plans.
- Periodically conduct joint reviews of country support strategies for both HIV and gender equality to ensure mutual synergy and leverage and to identify critical interventions that are not being funded.

The UN System

- Provide and harmonize technical support to ensure that HIV-related gender issues are included in the development and implementation of national development plans and gender plans.
- Integrate gender and AIDS into Common Country Assessments and UN Development Assistance Frameworks, and support the UN Resident Coordinator to ensure relevant system-wide oversight and coordination.
- Create formal linkages between the UN Gender Theme Group and the UN Theme Group on AIDS and/or Joint UN Team on AIDS (where deemed advisable by the Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team).
- Create an HIV and Gender Working Group composed of UN gender focal points and UN HIV focal points at country-level (where deemed advisable by the Resident Coordinator and the UN Country Team).

CONCLUSION

The recommendations and actions outlined in this document highlight interventions that take account of how patterns of HIV infection vary by gender, between and among females and males of different age groups, and how the consequences of AIDS differentially impact women and men. They reflect the importance of understanding the role of gender inequality in driving epidemics, as well as the interaction between gender inequality and other social and structural factors that influence disease dynamics.

In the last few years there have been dramatic changes in the global AIDS response with significantly expanded commitments and resources for the scale up of national action. However, these efforts have not readily translated into resources and programming for addressing gender inequality and the particular needs of women and girls. The actions that are outlined offer crucial steps to address the gender dimensions of HIV, vulnerability of women and girls, and specific needs of diverse women and men, girls and boys, in order to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

Scaling up action to address gender-related issues in national AIDS responses requires an in-depth and nuanced knowledge and understanding of gender and AIDS, and expanded implementation and monitoring of evidence-based interventions. It also necessitates capacity-building on gender and AIDS, and the strengthening of synergies and partnerships between stakeholders involved in HIV-related activities and those involved in gender-related activities. The systematic integration of gender into national AIDS responses calls for shared ownership and accelerated action from a range of stakeholders: government; civil society, including groups working on gender, human rights and HIV issues, and affected communities; donors; and the UN system.



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