

Poverty and the Challenges of Child Labour in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, 2000-2016

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ABSTRACT

Child labour is a societal menace that has seriously impeded the general development of a child. Child labour remains a major source of concern in Nigeria. In spite of legislative measures, it has continued to rear up its ugly head. This study attempted to assess how poverty triggered child labour in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. The central objective of the study is to assess the influences of poverty on child labour in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. The timeframe of this study is 2000 to 2016. The data of the study were generated from qualitative instrument drawn from array of published and unpublished materials such as textbooks, journals, newspaper, magazine, conference and seminar paper and internet materials. In interpreting our data, the relationship between poverty and child labour was established at both theoretical and empirical levels. Empirically, we used qualitative and historical method that was critical and analytical in providing descriptive and historical details. This was complemented by descriptive quantitative analysis of ILO, UN, UNICEF and a lot of others. It was found out that child labour is a serious societal menace that hampers societal progress. We therefore, concluded that poverty exacerbated child labour in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. Recommendations such as mass literacy and awareness creation, appeals to religious and traditional institutions and a lot of others were proffered.

Keywords: *Child labour, Poverty and Underdevelopment*

1. INTRODUCTION

Child labour otherwise known as employment of children (minors) who are legally too young to work is common and rampant in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. This practice does not only interfere with children's education but endangers their health being. This has being in existence throughout the ages and in all cultures, in market places and in a lot of other places. These do not mean that the minors should not learn to work but it should not be at their deterrent.

These practices became common in the locality as a result of the increasing growth of poverty and this is exacerbated by act such as seasonal and irrigational farming, sumptuous nature of commercial activities, endemics polygamous setting and

the prevalence of divorce. Most of the minors are victims of societal menace which were hatched by the cancerous evil called poverty. Children in the area, both in the day and night times are seen roaming around in the street hawking, doing one menial job or looking for petty jobs of their size in order to earn a living

There is no particular law on the vice; rather most people utilized them as a way of getting cheap and simple labour which is less costly and advantageous to them. High rate of children drop out in schools is common in the society and this is mostly as a result of minors' quest for quick money to earn a living. What seem disturbing is that government, religious institutions and traditional institutions have folded their hands as the menace is widening in scope and horizon. This has now further paved ways for act such as child exploitation and societal vices such as miscreant, gangsters, banditry, rape, cultic groups and other acts that kill joy development in the society.

2. STAMENT OF PROBLEM

One of the basic problems which triggered for this study is the high rate of children labour/employment which often manifest in the form of exploitation and its adverse effects on children school life and health being.

There is also the high growth of vices such as early marriage, rape, drugs abuses, children gangsters, banditry, which all surfaced as an outcome of poverty in the society.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

This study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

- In what ways do poverty contributes to the rising challenges of child labour in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State?
- To what extend do child labour affects the well being of children in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State?

4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to assess the relationship between poverty and child labour in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State.

The specific objectives of the study include:

- To identify the cause of poverty and its resultant effects on child labor in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State.
- To examine the effects of child labour on children's well-being in Mangu local government area of Plateau State.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study used combination of methods. First, ex-post facto research design was employed to extract records from National Population Commission (NPC), National Development Plans (NDP), Central Bank of Nigeria, UESCO and a lot of others. The study also used qualitative tools such as textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazine, conference and Seminar papers and internet materials.

We used a qualitative and historical method that was critical and analytical in providing descriptive and historical details. The qualitative and historical method provides us with clear perspective into our research problem by giving us the opportunity

to understand the historical details and accurate account of the past and use it to discuss the present.

6. The Concept of Poverty and the Nigerian Experience

The Oxford Advance Learner Dictionary of Current English stressed that the word poverty was a coinage of a French word ‘poverté’ which denotes the state of being poor, the state of lacking in quality or amount. The term suffers from a lot of misconception, Poverty as a concept is multi-dimensional. It connotes inadequacy such as lack of money under social usage. It shows the inequality of persons in a given society, the relationship between those who “have” and they have not. It is a state of lack in which a person is unable to meet the basic minimum requirement for food, health, shelter, education and clothing. According to Akanke (2003), it is a material and non – material deprivation, which is mainly characterized by food insecurity, lack of access to health services, poor and adequate education, lack of basic needs, physical, psychological experience of violence and insecurity. In the work of Taylor (1990), poverty means different things at different places. However, in a general term, he sees poverty as a state when a person is unable, for whatever reasons, unable to provide the basic essentials of life – food, clothing and shelter. Taylor goes ahead to emphasize that poverty can be brought about by any of one or combination of the following factors : *old age, sickness, infirmity* and total depression leading to *unemployment, Laziness, low wages or high prices* ,family circumstance such as choice/ separation.

Oyemomi (2004) advocates that poverty is a state where an individual is unable to provide adequately for his/ her needs of food, clothing and shelter i.e. the inability to meet social and economic obligations, lack of gainful employment, skills, assets, self – esteem and limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water, sanitation and consequently, has limited chance of advancing in the welfare to the limit of his/ her capabilities. Poverty can either be in absolute or relative terms. Absolute poverty is a condition where a person or group of persons are unable to satisfy their human survival needs in terms of food, clothing, shelter, health, transport, education and recreation. Relative poverty is a complete state of lack and deprivation among individuals or groups. This tends to tandem with the view of Babashola (1997) a resident representative of UNDP – who defines poverty as a condition of life characterized by malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, low life expectancy and high infant mortality beneath any national explanation of human decency.

7. WHO ARE THE POOR?

The word “poor” is derived from the Latin word ‘pour’ which simply denotes having very little, low standard or quality, lacking, deserving pity or sympathy. The Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2004 acknowledged that the poor people tend to live in dirty localities which exert pressure on the physical environment, contributing to environmental degradation. The poor especially farmers perceive their economic circumstance *to be straight with uncertainty* affected by events over which they have no control such as *falls in* primary commodity price, the volume of rainfall, pest attacks, outbreaks, change in soil condition and social convict. A proper and clearer definition is the one captured by Cinjel (2004) in his work – It will rain today. He enthused:

Who are the poor? The poor are those that lack food to eat, they are not those that do not have clothing's or shelter. They are those who have but do not want to help the needy. They are those who live in abundance and care less about those who could not afford two meals a day. They are those who refused to throw smiles on the faces of those who do not have (have not). They are those who disobeyed their parents and our constituted authority. They are the office thieves who siphon public fund for their selfish interest. They are the stingy and frugal people. They are those who collected bribe and also give bribe. They are the heartless robbers who robbed the innocent of their belongings. They are the corruptible personalities who are depriving us of the joy of enjoying the fruits of our mother land. They are the prostituting men and women who are spreading diseases in the society. They are the flirtatious people and people of impure morality. They are the idle men and women who do not want to contribute their quotas in nation building.

This definition equated the state of being poor as a condition of abnormality or amorality in which things fail to work normal for the benefit of the society, i.e. a deviation from a normal way of life. Nigeria is being referred to as a "failed state" by some critics on national issues. This implied the failure of the State to provide necessary facilities for people, including good governance, food, housing, good education, health system, good roads, security, and so on.

Unemployment is still high and many youths cannot be engaged in meaningful jobs. As a result of all these, social inequality has become more pronounced, leading to great discontent and frustration. These are attributes of a country in a pool of poverty. Poverty level in Nigeria has continued to increase despite series of policies and programmes by government to tackle the issue. Danladi (2009:2) provides the Nigerian scenario thus:

The UNDP Human Development Report on Nigeria has consistently described Nigeria as a rich country with a poor population. The World Bank asserts this by estimating that 80% of the oil revenues from 1965-2004 have assured to only 1% of the population. This implies that the richness of our country is being cornered by a few people who have found themselves in corridors of power at the federal, state and local government levels. In 2008 UNDP estimated that 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty line. That is, they earn less than US \$1 (N145) a day.

Poverty has always been blamed for contributing to the increase in the cases of ethno-religious crises and other socio-political unrest in Nigeria. The presupposition is that the elite buy off the masses easily for pittance and recruit them into conflicts, while they and their families either shy away or run from trouble spots to safe havens (Gwamna & Dayil, 2011). Religion is emotive and can easily be used to mobilize support, with all the assurances of the good things in the hereafter, the poverty-stricken populace easily put their lives on the line in order to engage in unrestrained violence and mayhem. When

people are impoverished amidst plenty, they easily become frustrated and find vent in religious fundamentalism (Gwamna & Dayil, 2011). At this point, it becomes very difficult to control their zeal and commitment. These have been the cases with the *kalakato* crisis and the *Boko Haram* movement that we have experienced in Nigeria.

8. CHILD LABOUR IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Child labour is a widespread problem in developing countries. When children under age 15 work, their labour time disrupts their schooling and in a majority of cases prevent them from attending school altogether. Compounding this, the health of children workers is significantly worse, even accounting for their poverty status, than that of children who do not work; physical stunting among child labourers is common.

The international labour office (ILO), a UN body that has played a leading role on the child labour issue, estimated that some 120million children in developing countries between the ages of 5 and 14 are working full time, with another 130 million working halftime. Some 61% of these 250 million working children, or nearly 153 million, live in Asia, while 32%, or 80 million, live in Africa, and 7%, or over 17 million, live in Latin America. Although Asia has the largest number of child labourers, in relative terms, Africa has the highest child labour rate, estimated at about 41% of all children between 5 and 14 years old. The rates for Asia and Latin America are 21% and 17%, respectively. These numbers do not even include the many children who work full time at home for their parents or guardians. Working conditions are often horrendous; the ILO reports that some of its surveys show that more than half of working children toil for nine or more hours per day. Moreover, at least 180 million child labourers are either 14 years of age or under or work in conditions that endanger their health or well-being, involving hazards, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and debt bondage.

This includes 110 million children under the age of 15 doing hazardous work. Some 73 million working children are under 10 years of age. Every year, over 20,000 children die as a result of work-related accidents. Clearly, child labour is not an isolated problem but a pervasive one, especially in Africa and South Asia.

Nevertheless, it is not obvious that an immediate ban on all forms of child labour is always in the best interests of the child. Without work, a child may become severely malnourished; with work, school fees as well as basic nutrition and health care may be available. But there is one set of circumstances under which both the child laborer and the family as a whole may be unambiguously better off with a ban on child labour. Kaushik Basu (2013) has provided such an analysis, and we shall first consider his simple model, which shows how this problem may arise.

To model child labour, we make two important assumptions: First, a household with a sufficiently high income would not send its children to work. As one might hope, there is strong evidence that this is true, at least most of the time. Second, child and adult labour are substitutes. In fact, children are not as productive as adults, and adults can do any work that children can do. This assertion is not an assumption; it is a finding of many studies of the productivity of child labourers in many countries.

It is important to emphasize this, because one rationalization for child labor often heard is that children have special productive abilities, such as small fingers, that make them important for the production of rugs and other products. However, there is no support for this view. In essentially every task that has been studied, including carpet

weaving, adult laborers are significantly more productive. As a result, we can consider the supply of adult and child labour together in an economic analysis of the problem.

9. UNITED NATIONS AND CHILD LABOUR

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, highlighted many restrictions on child labour, Although the convention is formally binding on all countries that ratified it, it has no enforcement mechanisms attached to police it (Defense for Children International, 1989). To date, in many member' countries, particularly Africa, there are no legal provisions to prevent child labour even within the family.

In Nigeria, particularly in Plateau State, cultural and religious factors influence the growth of this act. Children are seen as part of the economic worth because their services are needed on the farm, in business enterprises, as well as in household chores. In Plateau State metropolis and Mangu Local Government Precisely, the various forms of vocational options in which many of youth labourers are engaged among others, include: shop attendance, bus conducting, welding, mechanic, hair-dressing, baby-sitting, house attendance, tailoring, hawking, begging, painting, load carrying, etc. Very often, youths engaged in such labours are extremely overworked, underpaid, and used as sex objects. Such youths are not only given poor medical attention with inadequate feeding; they also live in crude and unhealthy environments, with minimal or no education and with little or no time to play. They do not enjoy a quality of life commensurable to their age. Moreover the meager income some of these child labourers bring in, though necessary for the survival of their families, is no doubt at the expense of their education, welfare and rights.

Child labor as defined in this paper, involves the employment of minors in vocations that interfere with their general quality of life. In Nigeria at present, legislation against child labour linked to compulsory school attendance for all children, while government owned organization and businesses are prohibited from employing underage staff on a full-time basis (Andivg 1997). Contrary to this, however, many children do not attend school and are made to work in Private enterprises and homes as hawkers, house-helpers, shop attendants, farm workers, baby-sitters, beggars, load carriers, bus conductors, apprentices, auto mechanics, painters, welders, hairdressers, barbers as well as other forms of unskilled labourers.

10. Child Labour Activities in Plateau State

It was observed that in Plateau State and Mangu Local Government precisely, between 1980 and 1990 more child labourers did not reside with their parents (an average of 49.6%) compared to 44.4% between the years 1995 to 2015. It was also observed that more females than males resided with their parents during the last 50 year indicating that female child laborers are increasingly more protected than their male counterparts. In general, the data indicated that a high percentage of youths in Plateau and with more emphasis on Mangu Local Government today reside with their parents contrary to what was obtained in the early part of the last fifty years.

Education is one of the keys to social development as well as an indicator to virtually every aspect of the quality of life (UNESCO, 1994). All children are expected to enroll in primary or secondary schools as recommended by the CRC. However, over the past 50 years, in Plateau State and Mangu Local Government precisely, and as in other parts of Nigeria, figures of youths in schools fell short of this reality. Both cultural norms

and economic need take a priority in the minds of the parents, relatives and foster parents, who are expected to take care of the education of these youths.

In both the UN and A.U charter, apart from the right to education and adequate medical attention, each child is granted protection from economic exploitation, the right to rest and enjoy leisure time so as to enhance all aspect of his life i.e. spiritual, mental, social and physical development (UN Charter, Article 31). As a result, any child between the age of 7 — 16 is required to work for not more than 8 hours a day, get medical attention, get work to his ability, time off the rest, as well as get adequate food and compensation.

The results of the present study that examined the extent of the implementation of the above parameter in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, that a very high percentage of child labour i.e. 66.6% worked for 8 hours or more per day, while 74.2% of child labourers did not have time for leisure or rest for up to 6 hours a day, over the last 50 years. These youths were denied the right to rest and enjoy leisure between 1960 to 2006; an increased number of males were engaged in excessive hours of work and less hours of leisure or play compared to their female counterparts. This difference could be connected to strict adherence to traditional and religious norms among the inhabitants that a male child is potential breadwinner for the entire family. Furthermore, there was a decline in the average number of female youth labourers in the area of study who were engaged in excessive hours of work and increase in leisure time in subsequent years i.e. 1967 to 2015. This could probably be attributed to increase in enlightenment as well as less emphasis on cultural beliefs compared to the early period of the past fifty years.

Freedom from economic exploitation represents one of the cardinal points of legislation on child labour reforms over the years (ILO Article 32). The trends observed over the years indicated that child labourers were better compensated between 1976 — 1996 in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State compared to those in subsequent years, although during the year's 1976 to 1994 as well as 1995 to 2015, the rate of compensation decreased. This is because, in the early years, youth parents felt relieved of the responsibilities of caring for their children or wards. These parents passed on such responsibilities to their relations or children's masters, who took care of them in lieu of the services such children rendered to them.

The observed decrease in compensation and remuneration during the past 30 years, compared to the early years, is probably as a result of increased enlightening and awareness of individual rights. Contrary to what obtained in the period 1970 — 1990s, today, parents prefer to retain their children at home to educate them since the introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) program is now gaining recognition.

Moreover, between 1999 — 2006, the opportunity to gain employment by under-aged and underprivileged was seen as a favour by youths and their parents. Consequently, the thought that a child's right was being abused as a child labourer was nonexistent. Presently, however, child labourers no longer regard their employment as a favour, but as a vocation which by right must receive adequate compensation. Child labourers now know their rights and strive to assert them.

Table 2: Child Labor Work Hazards and Their Consequence

Occupation	Task	Hazard	Consequences
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1	Hawking and street trading	Hawking goods, food items and prostitution	Exposure to drugs, violence, criminal acts, danger to health and morals	Victim of drug addiction, branded as social outcast (convicted criminals) social diseases
2	House Help, Domestic servant, or Babysitting	All types of domestic work	At the mercy of the employer; long hours of work, lack of minimum facilities to sleep or rest; sexual abuse; demeaning work	Malnutrition ; health effects, irregular meals, insufficient rest; psychological stress corporal punishment
3	Farm work	Working with machinery and agrochemicals	Radiant heat, thermal stress, arduous tasks and exposures to chemical poisoning	Accidents; chemical poisoning: chronic cases often undiagnosed and attributed to no occupational cases
4	Load carrier, construction work	carrying heavy loads	Arduous task; struck by heavy exposure to heat, noise and sun	Accident; muscular skeletal diseases. Victims of work-related diseases prematurely
5	Welding, vulcanizing, panel beating	Heating pieces of metal	Radiant heat; thermal stress: stepping on or handling hot object exposure to hazardous chemicals	Eye cataract: heat stress: respiratory diseases: burns and cut: infection
6	Hair dressing	Mixing (streaming) chemicals; washing infected hair	Exposure to hazardous chemicals	Synergistic effect of chemical intoxication: burns
7	Bus conductors and other unskilled labor	carrying heavy loads: catching vehicle on motion	Exposure to hazardous weather, heat, noise, sun and all sorts of human being and characters; long hours of work; abuse of health	Loss of voice; sustaining injuries; learning bad habits; psychological stress and early death

Source: Olagbemi, 2003

Table 3: Educational Achievements of Youth Labourers in Plateau State, 1970-2014

		1970-1989			1990-2014		
		Mangu	Mangu		Mangu	Mangu	Mangu
		M	F	M&F	M	F	M&F
A	Non	19.2	254	44.6	2.4	27.5	51.5
B	Primary	10.9	5.7	16.6	8.5	3.4	11.9
C	Secondary	5.2	2.4	7.6	3.1	2.7	5.8
D	Grade ii	2.9	2.1	5	4.8	5.5	10.3
E	N.C.E	2.6	2.1	4.7	4.8	4.5	9.3
F	O.N.D	4.1	2.1	6.2	3.5	1.25	4.75
G	H.N.D	2.3	2.4	4.7	1.1	1.0	2.1
H	University	5.1	3.3	8.4	2.1	1.2	3.3

Source: Olagbemi, 2003

In table 3, it was observed that 51'.5% of youths who underwent child labour between 1950 and 1966 received no formal education. They remained illiterates and could neither read nor write. However, a decrease in the level of illiteracy for the period between 1970 - 1994 was observed in the city (44.6%). A similar trend was also observed for primary, secondary, Grade II, NCE, RND and OND as well as University attendance for these categories of youths in their later academic pursuits. It is observed that the average highest level of educational attainment for child labour in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State between 1970 - 1994 and subsequently were 16.6%; 7.6%; 5%; 4.7%; 6.2%; 4.7% and 8.4% in primary, secondary, Grade 11, NCE, OND, HND and University respectively. For child labour between 1970 and 1994, the figure 11.9%; 5.8%; 10.3%; 9.3%; 4.7%; 2.1% and 3.3% were recorded for the years 1967 - 84 for the respective categories. In , the average level of education later attained by youths who served as labourers during the period 1990 to 2014 were: 13.2%; 8.5%; 12%; 2.9%; 6%; 3.7% and 6.6% for primary, period 1990 to 2014 .

10. Results and Findings

The analysis of child labour in Plateau State and Mangu Local Government Area specifically from 1970 to 2014 shows a marked improvement in both content and figures.

The early part of the last fifty years witnessed a harsher form of child labor in the State despite the UN and OAU charter on the right of the child.

In the early period of the last fifty years, poverty and ignorance coupled with cultural norms and material wants, dwarfed the reasoning abilities of the perpetrators of child labour practices, when a family is poor and in need of labour and physical cash, children are shop attendants, hawkers, house boys, girls, apprentices, conductors, load carriers or the like to make ends meet for the family. In some cases, children are removed from school as a result of the inability of parents to afford school fees or with the pretext that they are dull and cannot comprehend, only to be sent away to live with relations who exploit their services in return for poor compensation.

Often some parents avoid their responsibilities and because of economic crunch or abject poverty, give up their children for labour to relations or masters in bigger cities for economic gains. On his own part, the child labourer sees his vocations and his new life with his master or mentors as a favor, no doubt, between 1990 and 2000; the concept of child labour, protection, and children's right in many parts of Nigeria was totally new. Indeed, the OAU charter on children right was unheard of by perpetrators. Traditional beliefs and cultural lineage which stressed that one is a brother's keeper is devoid of exploitation by class, superiors, older family members, mentors and masters. As a result, children complaint and rights were not contended within the traditional African society.

That preference is given to the female child labourer while the male is overworked and abused has been shown in this paper. The African traditional belief that the male child is potential bread -winner in later years and that he must be the one to labour. This is common with youth in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State. That the woman's place is at home, a part of a religious belief, in this part of Nigeria, has been demonstrated in Mangu Local Government, a traditional society. Encouragingly, however, is the observed decrease in child labour practices in the area over the last 10 years. The economic boom of the years 2003 - 2007 saw a declining trend in child labor practices and participation. A declining number in figures today shows a marked increase in children opting to remain as apprentices with the intention of learning some skills rather than remaining in the usual exploitative and traditional wheel of hawking and domestic service.

Today, those who went through child labour detested the practice and do not want their children or wards to go through a similar experience. The resultant effect has been the decrease in number of children seeking labour when they are under aged. Furthermore, a large number of parents now send their children to school and there is an increase in awareness of exploitative measure, the right of the individual as well as that of the child.

Although the incidence of child labour in Mangu Local Government Area has decreased over the past five years, its presence in whatever form and number underlines the need for enhanced collaboration of policies and initiatives between various agencies and organizations. For the rights and protection of the child labourer to be enforced in the area in particular, and Nigeria in general, a multilateral approach to the child labor problem, which will include local government and state legislators, to stir up actions, is paramount. Indeed, in an effort to check child - labour abuses throughout the world, the ILO founded in 1999 and now a special agency of the United Nations, enforced new child labour legislation, enforced its members.

This legislation includes a minimum age of 16 years for admission to all work (whether within the family or not), a higher minimum age for specific types of employment, compulsory medical examinations as well as the regulation of night work for child laborers. The UN CRC was a result of these efforts, and a subsequent Declaration of the Rights of the child. Presently, in Plateau State in general, and Mangu in particular, there are no local government, city or state monitoring bodies or mechanisms to effectively champion the rights of the child. It is hereby suggested that the enforcement and implementation of the aforementioned legislation, protecting the rights of child in cities, states and in the entire country will proffer substantial solutions to the problem of child labour.

Furthermore, since child labour has been observed to be the result of a rational economic decision caused by poverty and ignorance, it is hereby suggested that emphasis be placed on both the supply-side and the demand-side via Federal and State Governments well articulated policies on sustainable education and poverty alleviation. Poor families must have access to borrow money from community banks with no collateral in time of need. With high demand for skilled and unskilled labour, family living in poverty could cut the supply aspect with a few more cash in their pockets.

Finally, the establishment of more neighbouring schools at affordable or at no charge could cut the supply root for child labour, as children would be exposed to education even at an age, and within their communities. Parents would no longer complain of inability to afford the cost of transportation, as schools would be within walking distance.

11. Conclusion

Child labour, if allowed to continue unabated could lead to exploitative child trafficking, a new form of slavery and child abuse. Child trafficking, with its attendant ills such as prostitution, pornography, child soldiering, child armed robbers and other forms of child abuse, is a phenomenon, which continues to pose serious threats to Nigeria and entire west Africa sub -region (UNICEF 1996). Child abuse, in all its ramifications, must not be allowed to continue to flourish in Plateau State and Nigeria in the 21st century.

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