

STUDY OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

This research focuses on the relationship between youth development training of the Myanmar Medical Association in Yangon and community development of the 126th ward, East Dagaon Township from an anthropological point of view. The aim is to explore how the youth collaboration from Youth Development Programme affects the community through the processes of development activities of youth engagement and contribution. The specific objectives of this research are: to describe the activities of the youth development programme, to illustrate how it benefits the development of community member and to elicit community responses to the youth development programme. The ethnographic, qualitative field research was conducted by means of Group Interview (GI), Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Direct Observation (DO). This paper found that the youth development programme improved the youths and the educational, health, and socio-cultural conditions of the people in the study area.

Keywords: youth development, youth activities, community development

Introduction

In 1995, the world youth population defined by the United Nations as the age cohort 15-24 is estimated to be 1.03 billion, or 18 percent of the total world population (<http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx>). In most of the societies, youth are meaningfully involved in significant decisions regarding the goals, design, and implementation of the community's work. In other words, youth have taken over a significant role in the development of human beings. In addition, youth engagement is also viewed as a vehicle for the development of the community. Therefore, the role of youth is an important component as well as the biggest source of development not only in the world but also in Myanmar. All the efforts and aspiration from them could be distributed effectively to the development process, if they are utilized wisely.

Youth participation refers to the involvement of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequence is extended to others - i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves (G.P. Cornwall, 2010). Community development in the wards helps local community residents to identify unmet needs (A. Gilchrist, 2004). It seeks to build capacity by improving skills and knowledge for individual and community as a whole. Central to the idea of community development and it allows community residents to come together to plan and generate solutions take action towards developing the social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects of community (H. Hackett, 2004).

Youth development and community development are important issues for Myanmar. There is a UN plan to promote the ability of youth in Myanmar. According to this plan, UNFPA started to support the Youth Development Programme in 2007. Youth who had received leadership training in some community-based activities such as peer education, basic health education, library awareness, library arrangement and library fair cooperated with community members within Yangon area. This research included two kinds of study processes: the first one is to find out the nature of YDP and the second is to explore the collaboration of youth from YDP and the

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community. Thus, the study areas are divided into two: the head office of YDP and 126th Ward, East Dagon Township. YDP is situated on Thein Phyu Road, No. (249) Myanmar Medical Association, Youth Development Programme, Mingalar Taung Nyunt Township, Yangon Region and 126th Ward is located in East Dagon Township, Yangon Region.

Literature Review

Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States (<http://undesadspd.org/Youth.aspx>). According to the Myanmar Youth Forum which passed a resolution in Naypyidaw defined youths as people between the ages of 15 and 35 following a vote by representatives from all of Myanmar's states and regions (www.mmtimes.com/news). According to Myanmar policy on young people (2017), youth include those who are between fifteen years and thirty-five years old (Myanmar policy on young people, 2017).

Dr.P.Easwara Rao and Mr.G.Jaganmohana Rao (2014), pointed that youth are one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the future leaders, they are, potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development.

Rt. Hon. Eugene Odoh and Eme, Okechukwu Innocent (2014), also mentioned that the wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productive and creative the youthful populations are. The youth in any society are the engine of growth and development because they provide the labor force for production of goods and service to take effect. Societies are not only recreated through the youthful population, but youth are often referred to as leaders of tomorrow. The youth represents both a challenge and an opportunity for development.

Dungumaro and Madulu (2011), suggest that youth participation may also be a response to the traditional sense of powerlessness felt by the general public when it comes to influencing government decisions: "people often feel that health and social services are beyond their control because the decisions are made outside their community. Involvement or participation has become one of the important conditions and is essential for the implementation of programmes and projects and also a fundamental condition to attract projects and programmes.

According to the J. Rubin, and S. Rubin (2001), community development occurs when people strengthen the bonds within their neighborhoods, build social networks, and form their own organizations to provide a long-term capacity for problem solving. The foregoing shows that every community development programme should be aimed at changing an undesirable situation.

According to O. M. Adesope (2007), who emphasizes active involvement in community affairs, greater social propensity, faster reaction, time, innovation and prowess, it becomes necessary to exploit their active features for progressive change in the community through active and meaningful participation in programmes directed towards their development. Youths therefore needs proper harnessing so that they can maintain reliable status quo in their locality. It is easier for them to speak with one voice when they are brought together; that is why youth's participation in the various community development programmes will yield progress (A.O. Angba et. al, 2007). In this research, youth involvement in the development activities is considered as a factor for community development.

Methodology

This research consists of secondary contextual material and qualitative methods. The secondary sources are based on books and articles. And qualitative methods were used as a primary research tool in this study. Qualitative research methods aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior. This study attempts to point out some factors influencing the participation between youth and community members by using qualitative methods such as Group Interview (GI), Key Informants Interview (KII) and Direct Observation (DO) were used. In this research, two groups of GI based on two main places: in the Head Office of UNFPA and 126th Ward, East Dagon Township. Altogether 28 persons in the first group focused on getting the data of nature and learning process in YDP, the interactions among youth and the effectiveness of these trainings upon youth. Altogether 28 persons from community site of the second group focuses on the data about the collaboration of youth from YDP and community and the response of this community in the development process included in second group.

To collect the concrete data, key informants were really needed. Altogether 10 key informants were chosen: two project officers: one from UNFPA and the other from Myanmar Medical Association, two trainers, two youth coordinators, administrator of head ward, abbot of the monastery, two trainees from this study area were recruited. Direct Observation (DO) is the main tool for the whole research to study the activities of youth development trainings, their effectiveness, the activities of youth on development affairs and the collaboration of youth and the responses of the community.

Finding

Background of Youth Development Programme

The youth development programme (YDP) of the Myanmar Medical Association was established and the first training was opened for the youth development programme in 2003 and it was a self-help program without getting any assistance from other associations. Trainees have to pay fees. As most of the young people had less information about the trainings, there were at first few trainees. This programme was not popular at that time. A male, project officer, of 48 years old said:

"I am one of the founders of this program. Although we faced with financial difficulties in the initial stage of opening this training, we tried to overcome and to create appropriate lessons relevant to our Myanmar life style and culture back ground"

Four year later, the training was funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). It is the largest internationally funded source of population assistance to developing countries. The work of the UNFPA involves promotion of the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA's support for population activities in Myanmar began in 1973 with its assistance to the first population census. The fund's population activities grew in the 1990s with the support given for the collection of population data specific to reproductive health and fertility. The programme of assistance (2007-2011) aimed at assisting Myanmar to realize its objective of reaching the Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs), especially. Millennium Developments Goals on reducing maternal mortality and preventing HIV/AIDS respectively. The

intended outcome of the programme is the improved reproductive health status of the women and men of Myanmar, including adolescents and young people (<http://myanmar.unfpa.org>).

With the support of UNFPA the training of YDP could be opened free of charge. Thus, the numbers of trainees gradually grew and the training sessions have been held several times. The trainings have been given through categorization. The youth development programme (YDP) is to enhance the knowledge about reproductive health and the measures to be taken to prevent HIV/AIDS and convey health message to the youths. The objectives for the youth of the trainings given by youth development programme (YDP) are as follows;

- To disseminate basic health knowledge among youth and motivate them adopting healthy behavior.
- To equip youth with leadership skills to enhance youth participation in youth programme and other youth development activities.
- To create youth-friendly environment where they can build their capacity for future development.

The youth development programme (YDP) of the Myanmar Medical Association is to develop goal of the Myanmar youth physically, mentally and intellectually from 2015 and onwards in order to contribute to future national development. There are four kinds of training, included in the youth development programme, as mentioned below;

1. Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life (HHAL)
2. Skill Development Trainings (SDT)
3. Youth Leadership Development Training (YLDT)
4. Capacity Development Trainings (CDT)

The aim is to increase the awareness of the youth the need for capacity building. The expected outcomes for youth include identity development, group membership and responsibility, initiative, peer and adult relationships, and skill development. On completing their courses, they have to share the knowledge that they have earned to local people in their environment. A man, who is a project officer, of 52 years old from UNFPA said:

“UNFPA supported financial aid and trainers for training aids for Youth during the training period. Besides we created many ways to nurture the team spirit. For example, the trainees have to wear uniforms in their class room for enhancing their friendliness and unity with each other. Although they came from different places, they had same goal, they belong to the same color and felt they were like brothers and sisters”.

The above saying mentioned that the training is a factor to improve the friendship among the youth.

The Description of the Trainings

Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life (HHAL) is a basic training principle in the Youth Development Programme. Trainees must be between 15 and 24 years of age regardless of gender and religion and with no limitation of educational qualifications and forty trainees are allowed to attend (See figure-1). Most of the trainees live in the townships in Yangon region and belong to minority groups. The motto is “Be knowledge, pass it on”. Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life training lasts for six days. This course stresses youth health, consisting of the progress in the health behavior of the young generation, genetics, and the preventive measures against the infectious

diseases such as HIV/ AIDS. The courses on sexually transmitted infections, changes in puberty and reproductive system and teenage pregnancy are lectured by the trainers in sex discrimination. According to Myanmar culture, such courses are thought to be improper subjects using nasty language. The course trainers also deliver a lecture on the future life which will be experienced by the young people. With regard to the training course, a girl aged seventeen years said,

“At first, when the course which was connected with sex was delivered, it sounded very strange to my ears and felt very shy. Later, I came to realize that I ought to know such facts for sex education since I have come of age”.

A girl of age 17 years said:

“At the beginning in Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life of training, I have to be flexible to deal with their environment, parents, relatives, and friends. I really understand the importance of health awareness from this training. And I decided to share my knowledge with others for the benefit of their health, and encouraged other youths to attend these trainings”.



Figure 1 Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life Training

In the Skill Development Training (SDT), Youth had to undergo the assessments made by the programme trainers. After passing this, 60 are chosen to sit for a viva voce examination. Out of them, 40 are chosen again. Those chosen 40 are qualified to attend Skill Development Training as well as Leadership Training. Afterwards, they have to participate in post-leadership activities. Skill Development Training lasts for 3 days. Five topics, lectured at Skill Development Training, are as follows;

- (a) Principles of basic communication
- (b) Principles of adult learning
- (c) Behavior change communication
- (d) Peer education
- (e) Effective presentation

The young people who are attending this course have come from different places and they have different ideas and characters. They are interested in attending youth leadership development training course. During the course, the youths came to know that communication plays a vital role at the workplace, so they shared the knowledge on behavioral change communication with other people (See figure-2). After a youth has finished attending the “Skill Development Training Course” he must inspire five of his peers to be interested in Youth Development Programme so

that he will have the opportunity to attend “Youth Leadership Development Training”. In addition, he must volunteer for the Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life training course. Those who attend the “Skill Development Training” should be interested in “Youth Development Programme” and can spend time on it. Skill Development Training is opened three or four months a time. Those who would like to attend this course must do designated preparations before the course is opened. A boy of age 19 years old said:

“Through the Skill Development Training, I can improve my knowledge as well as my personal values (honesty, fairness, discipline, etc.). I have chances to understand the healthy life style, having responsibility, taking accountability and behaving well. This training supports the empowerment of participation and strengthens leadership skills”.



Figure 2 Youth activity

Youth Leadership Development Training (YLDT) is one of the most vital and leading trainings for youth. Youth Leadership Development training is a 3 day-outdoor training. Thus, the approvals of parents are needed. Youth Leadership Development training helps the youth build their capacities and brings them up to be leaders. When the course is over, they have to participate in the activities as group leaders. The programme gives knowledge to the youth on what leadership means and what leadership skill and capacities they should have to be a good leader. Apart from these areas, group-solutions to problems by playing games are also added. Youth leadership Development Training course consists of the following areas;

- (a) What is leadership?
- (b) Competencies of an efficient leader
- (c) Self – assessment
- (d) Personal development
- (e) Strategic Thinking
- (f) Team building
- (g) Motivation
- (h) Time management

One who wants to attend the “Youth Leadership Development Training Course” must pass the interview questions set by Youth Development Programme. Since it is an outdoor training, the respective parents’ permission is essential. The training course is held twice a year. The activities of a course are different from past training sessions. The trainers always have to create new activities (See figure-3). The trainees come to realize that their team ought not to be notorious because of them. They also come to recognize that to become a good leader, one must be a good follower.

A boy of age 22 years old said:

“From the Youth Leadership Development Training, I get the one who could exactly go straight forward to the goal. I knew the perfect knowledge of the weaknesses and the strengths of the followers. A leader has to take great care of his followers, understand and share their feelings at any time to. Every difficulty can be overcome if one has self-confidence. A leader needs to motivate his team go forward in unison, happiness, and friendliness to reach the goal.”



Figure 3 Youth learn from leadership training

The youth who attend and finish Youth Leadership Development Training courses have to participate in the activities funded by UNFPA the aim of which is to offer them not only theories on paper but also practical approaches in field works. A trainee of age 23 years said:

“Our programs mainly focus on capacity building for younger generations. To live well it is important to get essential information (such as health, social and education etc). My life must be active, enjoyable and healthy. These programs produce youth as human resources for future development.”

Capacity Development Training (CDT) is specifically given to those who remain unemployed after completing Youth Leadership Development. Capacity Development Training opens once a year for vacancies of peer educators and other posts. When the youth finishes CDT, they wait for the job but firstly they have to work at the programme as part-time volunteers. CDT course provides trainees with the knowledge of the whole process of Youth Development Programmes project step by step while they are working. CDT training is composed of the following subjects.

- Training on STI, Birth spacing, HIV/ AIDS
- Basic counseling Training
- Presentation skills
- Personal Grooming
- Internship Programme
- Other Seminars

The trainings provided by UNFPA are as follows:

- Project Cycle Management
- Report Writing
- Production of Training Materials
- English Language Proficiency

The young people who are attending the “Capacity Development Training” are interested in employment prospects. They contribute their labor to the necessary sites as part-time volunteers. They get much experience while they are put on a waiting list. They can also join the non-governmental organizations.

Youth Participation in Community Development Program

Since 2013, the youth who finished the youth development trainings participated in the activities of the community development. As some of the community members have less health knowledge, the youth share knowledge on peer education, basic health education with the community members. The case study of the community development activity led by post leadership youths took place at No. 126th Ward in Eastern Dagon Township. There is a monastic education school in the ward. Most of the needy students go to this school. There, they can learn from kindergarten class to matriculation class. From the permission of the abbot *sayardaw*, some medical doctors from “Youth Development Programme” have opened a clinic for the communicators. Treatment is free of charge. Although a library has been built, there are no books yet. With the aid of UNFPA, Post Leadership youths from “Youth Development Programme” are encouraged to do community development activities. The ward is densely populated and health care is insufficient. The community people in that ward interestingly participated in the activities led by the post leadership leaders. The activities in which local people participated are as follows:

1. Peer education
2. Basic health education
3. library awareness
4. library arrangement
5. library fair

1. Peer education

Post-leadership youths shared knowledge on peer education with local community people in Ward No.126, Eastern Dagon Township. The elders of the Ward No. 126 made an announcement over the loud speaker when and where the education programme was going to start. The Presiding Buddhist monk who led and opened the Free Monastic Educational School let them use the classrooms there.

Post-leadership youths gave talks on peer education for seven days consecutively. There were 80 local community people participating in that activity. Post-leadership youths not only give knowledge about peer educated local people but also studied how much they were interested in it. They were allowed to choose interesting topics and give talks among the group. The contents in the talks on peer education given to locals consist of personal hygiene, anti-smoking, anti-narcotic, HIV/ AIDS, teenage pregnancy, required skills in sharing knowledge and discussion of choosing topics to share (See figure-4). Mutual discussions and talks were held. Studies were made on how many locals were organized and how much knowledge was shared to them. Finally, four youths of those who were excellent in organizing and giving talks were chosen to attend Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life training from Youth Development Programme. In this way, local community people can hand down peer education knowledge to others and the next generation. A male age of 36 years old from this ward said:

“Young people who are the members of Youth Development Programme often visit the wards and give a talk on vices such as smoking, drinking, alcohol, chewing betel and gambling. Some people are fond of doing such kinds of vices. The members of Youth Development Programme discourse on the disadvantages of these vices. They listen to the local people’s feelings and emotions and counsel them too. They also give the local people a lecture about HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.”



Figure 4 Knowledge sharing activity (peer education)

2. Basic Health Education

Basic Health Education through discussions and talks were held with local people and to avoid dangers of health in their environment. The activity lasted for three days and was included ten local youths. The quarter-elders made an announcement to the local people to attend that discussion. On the first day, ten local youths shared knowledge on puberty change, teenage pregnancy, HIV/ AIDS and preventive measures against them. On the second and the third days, talks on basic health and environmental conservation were given. That course consists of; systematic hand washing, pure drinking water, cleaning the bushes, making the drainage system, building fly proof toilets, teaching and practicing dengue fever prevention ways (See figure-5).

To prevent local people from suffering from diarrhea, they have to wash their hands systematically, use fly-proof toilets, and to boil the water before drinking it. To avoid suffering from dengue hemorrhagic fever, they have to clean the bushes, make the drainage system, and take preventive measures against breeding mosquitos. A lady age of 31 years old from this ward said:

“I always attend the discussions and talks of basic health education. These are included in healthy life, Hygiene, and practicing the dengue fever prevention ways etc. By using this awareness, I can take care my relatives”.



Figure 5 Hand washing activity

3. Library Awareness

Post-leadership youths carried out activities in Ward No. 126, Eastern Dagon Township to increase the knowledge of local people when a library was donated and built at the monastic educational school. Library awareness activity was offered by post-leadership youths to make local people aware of the library, to prepare it, and to enhance the knowledge through reading. They give talks on using library systematically and reading at libraries to increase knowledge. The youths and local people participated in that activity. The topics about library are; benefits of reading, library survey questions, giving library pamphlets, introducing Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life training from Youth Development Programme. Post-leadership youths did this activity let the local people know the location of the library and urged them to read books at the library so as to make right decisions in whatever they do.

4. Library Arrangement

Post-leadership youths placed bookshelves, benches, and tables in order. The categorization of books, listing, catalogues, notice cards and motto cards were also due played for 7 days. All the expenses for interior decoration and necessary books aware supported by Youth Development Programme and post-leadership youths worked as volunteers (See figures - 6 and 7). A boy of age 28 years from 126th ward said:

“Among their activities, the activity what I preferred most is concerned with Library. I love reading; I can get many kinds of book from only one place”.



Figure 6 Arranging books in library



Figure 7 Making arrangement in library

5. Library Fair

The library was opened on 27, December, 2014 at Ward No. (126) and post-leadership youths participated in the library opening ceremony so as to motivate local people. The activities drew their attention. Local people thus, participated in the library fair held in their quarter. Post-leadership youths have to draw the plan on how to decorate, what souvenirs were needed, and what survey questions should be prepared. After drawing the plans, post-leadership youths went to the Ward No. 126, Eastern Dagon Township for the purpose of decorating and buying souvenirs in preparation of the library fairs.

The library fair was held from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Local people happily participated in the library fair and the youths from Youth Development Programme gave necessary help. The activities they did at the library fair consist of: library promoting section, health education (men/

women), nurturing children, making handicrafts, playing games and feedback section (See figures - 8,9,10 and 11). A female age of 38 years old from this ward said:

“Young people from Youth Development Programme have opened a library in the ward. In the past, the children used to play on the streets. The parents were worried about their children. Now they go to the library and read books. Not only the children but also the grown-ups go to the library and read books.”

During the activities, youth from YDP encouraged locals to attend YDP’s training for upgrading their capacity.



Figure 8 Children promoting section



Figure 9 Hand- made section



Figure 10 Game section



Figure 11 Library promoting section

Discussion

In Myanmar, the youth development program (YDP) was started by the Myanmar Medical Association in 2003 and the training was basically self-help. In 2007, UNFPA started to support the Youth Development Programme. The Four courses opened at the Youth Development Programme are based on the objective and the lessons to give knowledge on the youth's health, social activities and education which is concerned with the quality of life. Rt. Hon. Eugene Odoh and Eme, Okechukwu Innocent (2014) pointed out that development is related to the human capacity to improve the quality of life by transforming the way production and other human activities are carried out in order to eradicate poverty, unemployment and social inequalities.

The course on The Happy and Healthy Adolescent Life stresses the youth's health, consisting of the progress in the health behavior and how the youth should make right decision consisting of self-criticism, ability to differentiate advantage from disadvantage, consulting with

parents or elderly persons about the plans in life in order to be successful or not to take wrong paths, and self-decision-making. The Skill Development Training course, The Youth Leadership Development Training course and Capacity Development Training course are skill building courses and those courses help the youth to build up their capacities for leadership, social networking, how to positively express their opinions, collaboration and so on.

According to J. Rubin, and S. Rubin (2001), community development occurs when people strengthen the bonds within their neighborhoods, build social networks, and form their own organizations to provide a long-term capacity for problem solving. The foregoing shows that every community development programme should be aimed at changing an undesirable situation. Youth engagement and contribution in community development activities allow youth involvement in community service, and creating opportunities for youth decision-making at various levels of government. The activities on peer education, basic health education and library offer opportunities for youth to participate in independent or shared decision making, supporting youth to volunteer and contribute to the community. In addition, it is also fostering youth-led initiatives and other opportunities for youth leadership.

On the one hand, the youth engagement and contribution help the community members to know the fundamentals of personal grooming, bad impacts of smoking, drinking, and abusing drugs that generate infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, impact on the value of Myanmar culture, resulting in teenage pregnancy and other factors. Basic health education activity knowledge for community people that washing hands and boiling water before drinking help improves their health. In order to prevent dengue hemorrhagic fever, the youth in cooperation with the locals removed the dirt in drains and bushes where mosquitoes can breed. By doing so, the young leaders established the regular habits of preventing diseases in the quarter.

In the library activity, the youth trained the locals how to use a library, how to systematically preserve libraries and the benefits acquired from reading at library. The activities perform by the youth was to draw the locals' attention. To promote attraction of locals, youth planned to celebrate the library fair. By celebrating the library fair, many local could come there. They had the notion of sharing with others what they read. The knowledge on preserving libraries could be handed down to next generations. It can be said that establishing a library is an important factor in the developments of the community.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the youth development training of the Myanmar Medical Association in Yangon and explores the effects of YDP on the community development of the 126th ward, East Dagaon Township. The courses of the YDP navigate the healthy ways which provides the groundwork for an exciting and promising array of programs for adolescents as well as adults. Furthermore, YDP provides youth with opportunities for positive adult and peer relationships. By implementing the development process together, the youth come to realize the benefits of cooperation among young people. They had the practice of dealing with peers as well as adults. Taking up the responsibilities from the start to the end helped them understand the value of dutifulness and accountability. They learned the need to exchange knowledge by sharing what they gained. While sharing knowledge, they gained self-confidence.

Local people also come to know how to behave to live a healthy life, the value of washing hands before eating and boiling water before drinking to prevent them from suffering bowel diseases. Local people attempt not only to know but also share them with families and their environment. Through the knowledge of peer education, they consequently avoid of smoking, drinking, and abusing drugs that harm not only themselves but also their environment. They value their marriage to avoid infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and at the same time, they prefer the monogamy marriage system. The library also provides a space for the locals to read books in their leisure hours. That space creates safe spaces that are tailored to the needs of youth and children including physical infrastructure as well as emotional safety. Finally, it may be concluded that YDP makes knowledge and education available to youth and community, connecting and integrating health and social services so there is a continuum of care and support at a community level.

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