
DEVELOPMENTAL ARTICLES

THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS 1993-2002: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

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ABSTRACT

The Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, was a unique initiative of the Asian and Pacific region - the only region to take such action and focus further specific attention on disability issues following the end of the first UN Decade, 1983-1992. One of the main strengths of the Asian and Pacific Decade was the Agenda for Action, which was the blueprint to guide policy development and implementation by Governments and non-Government organisations, and laid out specific targets in 12 key policy areas. Evaluation of achievements made during the Decade indicated that significant progress had been made in many policy areas, but that progress had been from such a low base, that even areas with good progress could be identified as priority areas requiring further concentrated action. The need for further action was translated into a resolution proclaiming the extension of the Decade for a further ten year period, from 2003-2012. This resolution was adopted by member states of the Asian and Pacific region at the 58th session of the UNESCAP Commission, in May 2002. A new framework to guide action, the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards a Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, was adopted in October 2002.

INTRODUCTION

In theory, the rights of person with disabilities, as with the rights of all other persons, have been upheld by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, declared in 1948, and all other mandates that have followed. But in practice, this has not been the case and achieving rights for persons with disabilities has been an elusive goal. For decades, persons with disabilities were either neglected, rejected and ignored, or they were placed in institutions where they could be kept carefully segregated from their non-disabled brothers and sisters.

The United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) in 1981, marked the beginning of serious attention to disability issues by the global community. IYDP was followed by the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, declared in 1982 (1) and

followed by the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons 1983-1992. The goals of the Decade were the prevention of the causes of disabilities, rehabilitation and the full participation and equality of persons with disabilities. Careful reviews of the information available on the progress of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, suggested that the major achievement of the Decade had been an increase in world-wide awareness on disability but that this awareness had not translated into action. It was concluded that very specific and well-focused action at all levels was essential, in order to achieve the positive changes that would result in equal opportunities and the full integration of disabled persons in society (2). The Expert Group Meeting to review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons in the Asian and Pacific Region, organised by UNESCAP in Bangkok, in August 1991, recognised that there was a clear need for a second decade of disabled persons, to consolidate and extend the gains that had been achieved upto this point in time.

The Asian and Pacific region was the first and only region to promote a specific regional initiative in the area of disability, following the end of the first United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, 1983-1992.

THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS, 1993-2002

This unique Asian and Pacific initiative was launched at a meeting held in Beijing in December 1992. The Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region, was adopted at this meeting and the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, was launched. The primary focus and goal of the Decade action was the expansion of opportunities for the full participation of people with disabilities in society and their equality in the development process. It was aimed at encouraging Government Ministries and Departments, NGOs, international organisations, including United Nations agencies and bodies, and committed individuals to take action to achieve these goals. It was hoped that there would be tangible results in villages, towns and cities of the region, with a significant improvement in the quality of the lives of people with disabilities, as a result of the impetus of the Decade.

The lessons learnt from the first United Nations Decade clearly indicated the need for very specific guidelines if the decade was to bring about real change in the lives of people with disabilities, apart from merely focusing on needs and barriers. The Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), at its forty-ninth Commission session in 1993, attempted to fulfil this requirement. It consisted of 12 major policy categories considered essential to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities, in every aspect of the national development agenda. The policy areas included national coordination, legislation, information,

public awareness, accessibility and communication, education, training and employment, prevention of causes of disability, rehabilitation, assistive devices, self-help organisations and regional cooperation. The Agenda has become an effective tool for Governments in the ESCAP region to guide policy, planning and implementation of programmes concerning people with disabilities. During the evaluation process at the end of the Decade, many Governments cited the Agenda for Action and its very specific guidelines as the key factor responsible for the progress they had made towards achieving the goals and targets of the Decade agenda (3).

The Asian and Pacific region consisted of 61 member and associate member countries and territories, 57 excluding four donor nations from outside the region, at the start of the Decade. At the fifty-ninth Commission session of UNESCAP, Timor Leste was admitted as the sixty-second member. Subregional representation extends to east and north-east Asia, south and south-west Asia, north and central Asia and the Pacific island countries, and includes 13 least developed countries. It is home to two thirds of the world's population, including its poorest people, among whom persons with disabilities are over-represented. With such diversity within the region, it was not unexpected that achievements would be uneven. By the end of 2002, 43 countries had signed the Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities, in the Asian and Pacific Region. Dates of signing ranged from 1992 to 2002, with those who signed more recently, being Governments in Central Asia and the Pacific subregion. This indicates a lower rate of participation and a shorter period of engagement with the Agenda for Action for many countries and territories, in these two subregions. The Governments of Afghanistan and New Caledonia signed the Proclamation in October and December respectively, in 2002.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS, 1993-2002

The review process was an integral part of implementing the Decade, required by the resolution by means of which the Decade had been proclaimed. Review meetings were held every two years. At the meeting in 1995, 73 specific targets were adopted under the 12 policy areas of the Agenda for Action, and gender dimensions were added. At the third review in 1999, the targets were reviewed and revised and extended from 73 to 107, reflecting changes and new dimensions, since the start of the Decade in 1993. Increased attention to inclusive education and a focus on new technologies were examples. In 2001, a regional survey was undertaken, soliciting information from Governments, on their major achievements towards implementing the Agenda for Action, and asking them to identify priority areas for further action. It was expected that Governments would consult with NGOs in this review process and thus provide a more comprehensive picture of progress made and the current situation of persons with disabilities across the region.

The results of the 2001 survey, and information from a variety of other sources, formed the basis for the reports on national and regional level achievements which were presented for consideration at the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, which was held in Otsu, Shiga, Japan, in October 2002 (3). Responses were obtained from 91 per cent of Governments who were signatory to the Proclamation at that time.

Findings

A common outcome across many areas of the Agenda for Action, was a picture of significant progress made, but off such a low base that the same area could also be identified as a priority for further action. Countries which had been engaged with the Decade Agenda from 1993, had progressed in many areas, whereas many Pacific and other more recent signatory countries were just beginning to address the need to develop disability policy and to establish coordination committees.

National Coordination and legislation

National coordination was an area of considerable achievement. In a Decade which spanned the paradigm shift from a charity to a rights based approach to disability issues, the development of national coordination mechanisms is a significant indicator of acceptance, of a multi-sectoral approach to disability as a broad cross-cutting issue. Many countries reported having formed such committees in direct response to the Decade Agenda and more were in the process of formation. Many coordinating committees were still placed within Ministries of Social Welfare, but signs of change were evident with disability included in national development plans in India, Philippines and Thailand. Increasingly, persons with disabilities were represented on these committees and in several countries, regular consultation took place with specially formed consultative committees of people with disabilities. Committees were being formed at grass-roots level. In spite of the evident progress, it was not clear as to what extent these mechanisms were effectively advancing a disability agenda that was reflected in policy planning, implementation, budgetary and evaluation processes, without which any action represents little more than tokenism.

Legislation is the key to enforcing of implementation of programmes and policies. Less than 25 per cent of ESCAP countries have passed comprehensive disability legislation and only 8 have anti-discrimination measures. The right to equality for people with disabilities, is explicitly enshrined in very few Constitutions. A major constraint to achieving equality for people with disabilities, has been the failure of Governments to pass and then strictly enforce legislation, with significant penalties for non-compliance.

Information and public awareness

One of the most critical issues in the region, is the lack of data and accurate information. The Decade was not able to be more accurately represented. Data are not available to verify the claims of many Governments. The problems surrounding disability data are many and of a serious nature. Adequate universally accepted definitions have not been available within the region, data collected have not reflected the full extent of disability, collection procedures have not been transparent and comparison of data is meaningless.

Training workshops were conducted by UNESCAP and the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) to promote strong awareness of the need for the collection of comprehensive, accurate and regularly updated national information on disability, that can be disaggregated according to a variety of variables. These were conducted towards the end of the Decade and it was realised that this will need to be a priority area for action beyond the end of the Decade. Training will need to be undertaken in all the subregions.

During the Decade, nine Governments did establish national data bases, with five more in the process of development. Questions on disability were included in the national census in eight countries, and specific databases, serving particular purposes in a further eleven. Data collection to facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education, was reported by Bangladesh and Pakistan as well as Samoa and the Federated States of Micronesia. Sample and household surveys were also conducted in some countries. Several Pacific Island countries have undertaken comprehensive surveys, assisted by and in partnership with the Asia-Pacific branch of Inclusion International and New Zealand Overseas Development Assistance. These have been completed in the Cook Islands and Samoa and are planned for Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. This is in keeping with an increased attention to disability issues in Pacific Island communities. The issue has been addressed by Pacific Island Ministers of Education in December 2002, and is on the agenda of the Leaders Meeting of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, scheduled to be held in New Zealand in August 2003.

UNESCAP supported widespread dissemination of information throughout the Decade. This was achieved by many means, but included the development of the Decade home page website in 1997, recently updated and in the process of further modification (<http://www.unescap.org/sps/disability.htm>). It currently includes the use of interactive discussion as part of preliminary preparation for expert group meetings on such topics as the proposed international convention on the protection of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Decade documents and publications were translated into national languages.

Public awareness, one of few success stories in the 1983-2003 UN Decade of Disabled Persons, expanded enormously within the region during the Asian and Pacific Decade. It

ceased to be an annual event held on one day a year only. Many Governments provided financial support for, and participated in such activities. Activities extended from sporting activities to include artistic, and cultural participation. Interesting developments have included a pilot project started by the Government of India to create awareness of disability capabilities in 22 districts. In a potentially far-reaching measure, they have also introduced disability concerns into the national academies for training of administration personnel and civil servants.

Perhaps the most significant measures for creating public awareness were the annual Campaigns of the Asian and Pacific Decade, attended by increasing numbers of persons with disabilities, as the Decade progressed. Campaigns were held in Japan (1993), Philippines, (1994), Indonesia (1995), New Zealand (1996), Republic of Korea (1997), Hong Kong, China (1998), Malaysia (1999), Thailand (2000), Viet Nam (2001) and the final Campaign in Osaka, Japan (2002). The impact on the host country was very great, and resulted in many steps taken by Government as a result, and strengthening of motivation amongst all participants for working towards the goals of the Decade. Some of the side benefits were the strong networks formed (women with disabilities), and life-long friendships made, across all barriers.

Accessibility and communication

Lack of access to the physical environment has been one of the most restrictive barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the region, even more so for people in rural areas or living in slum conditions in urban poverty. This was an obvious area of need and has received a lot of attention. Tangible results have been achieved and momentum gained to continue the necessary work to make the Asian and Pacific environments universally accessible.

UNESCAP has played an active and comprehensive role in promoting non-handicapping environments. Regional guidelines were developed, covering planning and building design, access policy provisions and legislation and the promotion of public awareness to improve access. Pilot projects were carried out to support the implementation of the guidelines at municipal level. They were implemented in Bangkok, Beijing and New Delhi. In each city, a pilot project site of approximately one square kilometre was selected and made accessible. Training workshops were carried out in each of the pilot project cities, with disabled persons as participants, in the final workshop. In Bangkok, a beautiful and fully accessible park is used by thousands, on the banks of the Chao Praya river. Braille blocks abound, five of the sky train stations are accessible, and the underground train system currently approaching completion, will be fully accessible.

Published training guidelines for disabled trainers (4) have been field-tested in India, Thailand and Malaysia. Training on accessible transport was carried out in China in 2000. An innovative event was held in Bali, Indonesia, also in 2000, when the first Asia-Pacific

Conference on Tourism for Persons with Disabilities, was organised by the CBR Training Centre in Solo, Indonesia, in partnership with the Government of Indonesia and UNESCAP. This was a clear indication that disability concerns were penetrating mainstream development in many areas and now included tourism.

A series of regional training of trainer workshops on the promotion of non-handicapping environments for persons with disabilities have taken place in Bangkok in 2000, 2002 and 2003. Teams of architects, urban planners, and disabled persons from 11 countries have attended, building up national level expertise to address the issue of accessible environments. This initiative has resulted in the formation of a regional network of persons with disabilities, architects and urban planners who are actively engaged in training concerned government officials, advocating non-handicapping environments at municipal, provincial and national levels. They exchange information and seek advice from each other by means of internet, with rotating network coordination role. This has been a highly successful outcome of the Decade, with increased expertise as a result of the emphasis on capacity building within the region.

Accessible communication has improved during the Decade, but is clearly not available to the majority of people with disability, particularly those who live in rural areas and urban poverty. In Thailand sign language was declared the national language of deaf people, and sign language interpreters are widely available for hire. In the region, Braille, sign and close captioning are still not widespread.

Access to information and communication technology (ICT), has become an issue for persons with disabilities during the course of the Decade. Computer and ICT literacy are of the utmost importance in transforming lives and enhancing capacity, to gain jobs and livelihoods. The Republic of Korea conducted an interesting research which revealed that persons with disabilities have 75 per cent less opportunity to access the internet, than non-disabled persons. As a result, legislation has been passed to take action to redress this imbalance and enhance the ICT capacity and skills of persons with disabilities. A number of other countries are taking steps to ensure that persons with disabilities are not on the wrong side of the digital divide. In Turkey, free access to computers is provided.

Education, and Training and Employment

The issue of access to education for children with disabilities, is one of the most critical concerns facing the region. Failure to educate young children with disabilities, limits all opportunity for their future development. It reduces their chances of receiving training, employment, engaging in income generation or business development, and of becoming valued members of their families and communities. It greatly increases the likelihood of their lives being lived in poverty.

Data available from a survey conducted by UNESCAP in 1999, suggested that only 2 to 5 per cent of children with disabilities were receiving an education (5). Few countries know how many children with disabilities they have, how many are in school and whether this number is increasing. This situation exists 13 years after the Education for All initiative was launched in Jomtien, in 1990 and reaffirmed in Dakar, in 2000 (6).

By the end of the Decade, there was evidence that education was receiving more attention by Governments in the region. Twenty countries had passed legislation mandating education for all children, although only seven reported that children with disabilities were included specifically in national 'education for all' plans. More emphasis was being placed on data collection on children in education and on the provision of Government funding, for the education of children with disabilities.

Special schools were still the most common form of educational provision, often started by NGOs, and mostly located in urban areas, but inclusive education was becoming much more widespread. Compulsory education in China, mandated in 1993, and significant programmes of integrated education in India have reinforced this trend. An innovative project in Laos PDR, has received a lot of attention and is viewed as a model for neighbouring countries. In 1993, there was only one school in Laos serving 25 children with disabilities. In 2002, there were 65 kindergartens, 142 primary schools, and 9 secondary schools all operating on an inclusive model. By 2005, it is expected that all 141 districts will have at least 3 inclusive education schools. The Laos example is important because it refutes the notion that only wealthy countries can afford to develop an inclusive education system (7).

Early intervention became more widely available, with services planned or in place in 22 countries. Pre-school services were growing and there was some access to post-school or tertiary education for young people with disabilities. Teacher training was still limited, with only 13 countries reporting that they included special training for regular class teachers. Major barriers to the provision of quality education for children with disabilities, includes the lack of early identification and intervention services, negative attitudes and exclusionary practices, inadequate teacher training, particularly training of regular teachers to teach children with diverse abilities. There is a need for restructuring of schools to link them more closely with their communities, to ensure that curriculum is more flexible, specialist support staff and appropriate teaching equipment and devices available. These issues will need to be addressed in the next Decade.

The importance of vocational training for youth with disabilities was beginning to be acknowledged and there was a shift taking place which enabled more young disabled people to participate in integrated training services. In Hong Kong, more than 80 per cent of graduates from skill centres found jobs in open employment. But the over-representation of persons

with disabilities in poverty statistics, suggest there is a long way to go, before youth with disabilities have equal chances of gaining skills and entering employment.

A wide range of strategies for employment promotion were in place, with quota systems ranging from 3 to five per cent. In India this is funded from poverty alleviation programmes. Enforcement was encouraged by means of incentives and fines. Additional strategies included the use of job search agencies, employment placement and support centres, wage subsidies, job coaching, trial employment, and industrial profiling. Positive collaboration was increasing with partnerships between Government and trade unions and between employer networks and federations of employees. There was real concern to increase measures which would result in income generation, self-employment and rural employment. Increasing employment opportunities is one of the key measures needed to reduce the incidence of people with disabilities living in poverty.

PREVENTION OF CAUSES OF DISABILITY, REHABILITATION AND ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Awareness on the importance of prevention of the causes of disability was well-developed during the Decade and 25 countries reported strategies implemented through their health programmes. Early identification and early intervention services for infants with disabilities and their families improved. There was a reduction in infant mortality, and in disability in infants due to preventable causes such as deficiencies in iodine, folic acid and vitamin A. Nutrition education was expanded, as was health and family planning for girls and women with disabilities. Some improvement in reducing disability due to birth injury, was achieved by giving extra training to traditional birth attendants. Immunisation programmes were widely implemented. The training of grass roots workers in preventing causes of disability has led to the establishment of an extensive network of rural district rehabilitation centres.

Community based rehabilitation (CBR), has been extensively developed in countries like India, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Other countries which are increasing their CBR coverage include Thailand, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands and Vietnam to name a few. Some examples of 'urban' CBR were reported, particularly in densely populated Hong Kong. Some concern was expressed that the impetus to develop CBR programmes was diminishing. The Decade has seen a debate about the most appropriate CBR models, and the role of people with disabilities in the management and leadership of CBR programmes.

Although some countries have actively pursued a policy of developing capacity to make low-cost, local assistive devices and aids, others are totally reliant on donor agencies, for support to provide these essential devices. In either case, there is a significant shortfall in availability

and the need within the region, is largely unmet. Priority attention needs to be placed on this issue, at regional and subregional level, to alter the situation for millions of persons with disabilities, who are currently prevented from participating fully in family, community and economic life. As is so often the case, the situation is worse for rural people with disabilities. The development and dissemination of indigenous technology and materials in China and India, and the School of Orthotics established in Cambodia, need to be examined to see if they offer solutions that could be used by other countries in the region.

Self-help Organisations (SHO)

The voice of persons with disabilities has strengthened during the Decade. The paradigm shift from a medical to a social model of disability, has been accompanied by the realisation that people with disabilities have the right to speak for themselves, and should be consulted on all matters which concern them. In addition to the extensive networks of national organisations of the World Blind Union and the World Federation of the Deaf, 22 national cross-disability organisations of people with disability, have been formed in the region, with others in the process of being started. Governments were increasingly seeking consultation with these self-help organisations (SHOs), and providing funds to support their development, indicating that the Government values the role that they play in disability concerns.

The extent to which SHOs operate at extend to the grass roots level is not clear, but in a number of countries, they are playing an important leadership role in community-based services. In some Pacific island countries organisations of families with disabled members have been formed and have been effective in advocating successfully for appropriate education for their children, and on other issues of particular concern, to them and their families. The need for SHOs to adopt issues of children with disabilities in their advocacy platform is apparent. Children with disabilities are unable to advocate for themselves. Parents are frequently not welcome as members of SHOs. This weakness may have contributed to the very slow progress made in the region in achieving the right to education for children with disabilities, in spite of international mandates. Advocacy can be a powerful tool and needs to be used in the interests of all person with disabilities, including children with disabilities.

Regional Cooperation

One of the outstanding achievements of the Asian and Pacific Decade was the strength and collaborative nature of the partnerships formed, harnessing energy from diverse sources, to help make the Decade dream, a reality for people with disabilities in the region. The Central Asian and Pacific subregions became engaged with the Decade later and to a lesser degree, than countries from the other subregions, but by the end of the Decade 15 of 21 Pacific island countries had signed the Decade Proclamation. The Pacific subregion was the first to establish clear priorities for the next Decade. It has developed strong internal networks with organizations of persons with

and without disabilities working closely together toward common goals, extending reach and assisting countries not yet engaged with the Decade agenda.

A coordination mechanism named, the Thematic Working group on Disability-related Concerns (TWGDC) (previously known as the RICAP Committee) had members from Government, United Nations Agencies, international, regional and national NGOs and others with a specific concern about disability issues. This group was the main implementing, monitoring and evaluation partner of UNESCAP throughout the period of the Decade. The annual Campaigns were organised by the Regional and National NGOs (RNN). The distinguishing feature of TWGDC was the strength of the NGO participation. Many Governments contributed significantly by hosting a variety of meetings, workshops and seminars, focusing on policy areas of the Agenda for Action, in addition to the countries which hosted the annual Campaigns referred to, earlier. The Government of Japan, and to a lesser extent the Government of China, provided support and generous contributions which enabled the many and varied activities of the Decade to be carried out so successfully.

THE FUTURE

The progress of this first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, exceeded expectations but the clear message that came out of the detailed evaluation of achievements, was that there is no room for complacency. Progress made was uneven and in most cases from such a low baseline, that it would be surprising indeed, if ten years of attention were sufficient to wipe out the decades of neglect and rejection, which persons with disabilities, have experienced for generations in this region, and indeed around the world.

Significant changes in attitude, in acknowledgement of the rights of persons with disabilities, still have to be translated into continued action, to fully empower persons with disabilities and to ensure that their concerns are reflected fully in national development agenda throughout the region and that progress toward this goal is maintained and sustained. The link between poverty and disability must be addressed - and redressed.

At the fifty-eighth session of the Commission a resolution was adopted by member Governments, proclaiming the extension of the Decade for a further ten year period, from 2003 - 2012. At the Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, held in Otsu, Shiga, Japan in October 2002, members adopted the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities, in Asia and the Pacific (BMF) (8). This is the policy framework that will guide Governments and their partners, in implementing actions to achieve the goals and targets of the second Decade.

The BMF has identified seven priority areas for action, but has nominated these with the understanding that the Agenda for Action of the first Decade will be maintained to guide action

in countries, where progress is at an early stage, as is the case for many Pacific Island and other least developed and developing countries. The seven priority areas of the BMF are: self-help organisations of persons with disabilities and related family and parent associations; women with disabilities; early detection, early intervention and education; training and employment, including self-employment; access to built environments and public transport; access to information and communications and assistive technologies; and poverty alleviation through capacity-building, social security and sustainable livelihood programmes. For each priority area critical issues, targets and action required to achieve the targets, have been identified. Where appropriate, a disability dimension has been included in the Millennium Development Goals, which were designed initially with no reference to persons with disabilities (9).

The framework is concise, the targets clearly defined and the actions for achievement specified. Commitment within the region is strong, collaborative partnerships are established and it is hoped that the next ten years will bring measurable improvements to the quality of the lives of persons with disabilities, thus enriching the lives of all who live in the Asian and Pacific region.

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CHILDREN WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

A Manual for Therapists, Parents and Community Workers

Author: Archie Hinchcliffe

This is a practical guide designed to help therapists and community workers understand the nature of cerebral palsy and how to deal with it. It describes the process of assessing children with cerebral palsy, and helps to design and carry out a treatment programme in partnership with parents and community workers. The book includes appendices on making simpler and cheap equipment, and appropriate play activities during therapy.

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