



Online Consultation Summary Report South and Central Asia Region

18 June – 10 July 2015

This report summarizes the online comments and contributions received as part of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) global online consultation for South and Central Asia. The report will inform the regional consultation meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 28-30 July 2015, and be integrated into the formation of priorities for the first WHS in 2016.

About the online consultation

The moderated¹ discussion forum provided an open, public forum² to provoke debate and stimulate thinking about how to keep humanitarian action fit for the future, in order to inform the regional consultation meeting. Participation in the forum was open to anyone who registered, from any origin or location. **More than 3,617 individuals viewed the discussions and 342 comments were received from 104 individuals from more than 32 countries** in the region and beyond, representing a broad range of countries and organizations.³

A total of eight questions were discussed, sparking lively debate around the four themes of the WHS, as well as cross-cutting issues and other topics of regional interest. The discussion questions were developed by the Discussion Chair and Moderators in consultation with the OCHA Regional Office and WHS Secretariat.

Discussion Questions

Part 1 of the discussion consisted of five initial questions focused on how to make humanitarian action fit for future challenges. In part two, five follow-up questions were posted by the Chair and Moderators.

Table 1: Number of comments received to each question⁴

Questions:	Comments
PART 1:	
1. PROTRACTED CRISES: How can the role of the most vulnerable in local decision-making be strengthened in protracted crisis situations?	70
2. CONFLICT: What are the implications of increased localization of humanitarian response on protection and access in conflict settings?	51
3. DISASTERS: How can national legal frameworks ensure that all actors respond efficiently & appropriately during a disaster?	32
4. PEACEBUILDING: How can humanitarian action better recognize & support peace building & conflict resolution?	67
PART 2:	
5. PROTRACTED CRISES: What conditions are needed to enable the most vulnerable to participate in response & recovery efforts?	33

¹ The discussion took place at: www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_scasia, moderated by Gabrielle Emery, Coordinator, Asia Pacific Disaster Law Programme, IFRC Malaysia, Amjad Mohamed-Saleem, Independent Consultant, Sri Lanka, Abdullah Al Razwan, Regional Focal Point, UN Major Group for Children and Youth, Bangladesh, Devanand Ramiah, Head, Southeast Asia and Pacific Cluster, UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and Pacific, Bangkok, Emmanuel Roussier, Humanitarian Response Specialist, UNFPA Sub-Regional Office, Kazakhstan.

² The discussion was publicized through a number of channels including humanitarian and development media and networks such as ReliefWeb, IRIN, United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs, through UN Member States, social media and via emails to various humanitarian groups.

³ Comments were received from individuals, national governments, international NGOs, regional institutions, community-based organizations, research organizations, donor organizations and independent consultants, based at headquarters, regional and national offices and in the field.

⁴ Many participants posted more than once and responded to more than one discussion question.

6. Q. 2. CONFLICT: What are the mechanisms needed to institutionalise localised response?	46
7. Q. 3. DISASTERS: What role can/should law play to institutionalise localised response & ensure community involvement in decision-making?	20
8. Q. 4. PEACEBUILDING: When nations in the midst of protracted conflict or in political transitions are faced with sudden-onset disasters, how can humanitarian action be used to build peace and foster reconciliation?	33

Discussion Summary

Detailed summaries of the contributions to the discussion are annexed below in the interim summary and available online here: Part 1: Weeks 1-3 | Part 2: Week 4. The discussion engaged a diversity of humanitarian actors inclusive of intergovernmental organizations, private sector, students, activists, international NGOs and community level people.

1. Protracted Crises

Part 1 Q.1: How can the role of the most vulnerable in local decision-making be strengthened in protracted crisis situations?

Part 2 Q.2: What conditions are needed to enable the most vulnerable to participate in response and recovery efforts?

A number of key recommendations emerged from the online consultation pointing to the crucial role that vulnerable populations – including women, youth and children, older persons, people with disabilities, minority groups and others – could play in protracted crises. Participants in the discussion emphasized the rationale and added value for their participation, as well as the need for mechanisms to be put in place to enable their participation. A number of factors which increase vulnerability were highlighted, including poverty, lack of education, health issues, disabilities, gender inequality and lack of youth empowerment. One respondent pointed out that gender disparities affect how protracted crises are experienced, a theme that was reinforced by several respondents highlighting that the specific needs of women, young people, especially adolescent girls, and children, in relation to safe spaces and access to basic services, are often ignored in protracted crises.

The importance of looking at what vulnerable groups can offer was raised by one respondent, *“it is important to not only view women and girls as vulnerable, but also their capacities and potential to be key actors in response and recovery”*. Indeed women – and often young women – are the backbone of resilience, sustaining their households and communities and bringing problem-solving skills and local knowledge to recovery processes. Yet while women and young people's vulnerability in crises is often highlighted and must be addressed, several respondents underscored the importance of ensuring the role of vulnerable groups in preparedness efforts.

In most crises, especially protracted ones, reducing vulnerability and managing risk cannot be achieved without empowering and engaging the most vulnerable people. Women, adolescent girls and young people must have their voices heard, their propositions considered and even prioritized. Only then will there be real change. This calls for meaningful engagement of vulnerable groups, not only in the design and implementation of humanitarian responses, but also in the planning of longer-term strategies to ensure that their specific needs are prioritized. Humanitarian organizations have a role to play in ensuring that vulnerable populations are involved in humanitarian initiatives.

An appropriate combination of engagement, empowerment and skills building for the most vulnerable populations is much needed and should be a priority for all responders as well as in the preparedness phase. This would reduce their specific vulnerabilities as they bring their concerns to the table as women, young people especially adolescent girls, older people or people with disabilities. By empowering these different groups, we may not only train them on some pre-established procedures, but also incorporate their suggestions and feedback to improve such procedures. Empowering all groups of vulnerable groups when drafting for instance some risk reduction strategies or humanitarian response may not only increase the humanitarian effectiveness of the response but also improve the resilience of the whole society. Eventually, as mentioned by one respondent, vulnerable people that are empowered to act and take part to the response will be strongly motivated with a strong “sense of fulfilment” later when they see the positive contribution they made for their community.

With limited or no access to health care in protracted crises, the most vulnerable people, such as elderly, patients with chronic diseases or people with disabilities, and women and adolescent girls, may hence be prevented to actively participate in the response. The mainstreaming of gender in humanitarian and development project requires not only the active involvement of women, as described above, but also a change in attitude and recognition by men, policy makers and government leaders, as indicated by several respondents. This would ensure that their needs in relation to their health, well-being and protection - including services for sexual and reproductive health, preventing and treating gender-based violence, and reducing HIV risk – would be prioritized.

One respondent raised an important question, *“how can one expect meaningful engagement [from the most vulnerable people] without a secure environment available to them?”* Indeed, with the deteriorating state of services available in protracted crises, the likelihood of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation increase. Participants emphasized the importance of protection – particularly for women, young people and children. Establishing safe spaces can make it possible for vulnerable populations – especially women, young people and girls – to be in an environment that is secure, where they may find comfort, seek medical care and find psychosocial support.

PROTRACTED CRISES: Key recommendations:

1. Prioritize **empowerment** of and **enabling environment** for vulnerable populations, especially women, young people and adolescent girls, for effective preparedness, response and recovery efforts.
2. **Involve vulnerable groups as partner of choice**, especially women, young people, people with disabilities others in **key decision making processes** such as needs assessments and third party monitoring and evaluation.
3. Integrate two-way communication in the humanitarian system and develop ‘communication with communities’ strategies to enable vulnerable populations to both **make their voices heard** and to **access key information**.
4. Strengthen the collection and use of **population data**, disaggregated by sex, age, ability and other vulnerability factors, to inform planning and decision making.
5. Establish **safe spaces and secure environments** for vulnerable populations to enable them to seek support.
6. Support women’s groups, youth networks and others to raise a **collective voice**, advocating for their needs and influencing their future.
7. Provide services for **sexual and reproductive health** and gender-based violence prevention and response as an integral part of reducing vulnerability and managing risk for humanitarian response.
8. Continue to reinforce **gender mainstreaming** in all humanitarian and development interventions.
9. Reinforce the key role women play in the **resilience** of their families and communities.
10. Create **livelihood and income-generating opportunities** for vulnerable populations, to decrease the need to resort to negative coping mechanisms, e.g. child/forced marriage, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, etc.
11. Develop approaches that **bridge** humanitarian, peace and security, climate change and development efforts to reduce vulnerability and manage risks.
12. **Adapt** humanitarian strategies to context and culture, rather than a “one-size-fits-all” approach.
13. Adapt **new technologies** to the needs of vulnerable populations to enable them to take an active role in humanitarian response.
14. Develop local **partnerships** to ensure appropriate strategies and sustainability.

2. Conflict

Part 1 Q.2: What are the implications of increased localization of humanitarian response on protection and access in conflict settings?

Part 2 Q.1: What are the mechanisms needed to institutionalise localised response?

All participants recognized the value of local participation, and focused on how to enable increased localization of humanitarian response in conflict settings. What was still unclear was how to achieve this. Central to the discussion was the trust deficit between humanitarian actors and communities which needs to be addressed. According to Sultan Haider, Community World Service Asia (Pakistan), *“We gain trust when we keep our commitments: without trust we can’t engage disaster affected communities thus without engaged relationships we won’t [...] expect effective humanitarian response.”*

It was suggested that engaging in localized responses could help to overcome the trust deficit that so often exists between the international and local communities. It was suggested that it is the responsibility of international actors to work sensitively and in cooperation with local people, who are often already vulnerable due to the conflict. This responsibility includes leading through compassion and example, suggested Jeanine Joy, Peace Worker and Consultant (USA) who felt that local populations can also gain a great deal from non-local assistance, *“...Exposure to others has the potential to be of benefit and communities that are accustomed to treatment (i.e., it’s the norm in their environment) that are considered inhumane by the majority of the world and that local populations are well served by having non-local assistance.”*

Participants suggested that one way to help overcome the trust deficit is developing the capacity of local actors. The World Food Programme’s [Community Based Participatory Planning \(CBPP\) tool](#) was shared as an example of methods that can be used to build trust by communities identifying their own solutions to their problems. As David Kaatrud from WFP (Thailand) states, *“Affected communities need to be much better engaged in all phases of the humanitarian response – both in conflict situations, natural disasters and protracted crises.”* It was recommended that this type of planning and disaster risk reduction method should be developed and used more broadly.

Participants felt that increased capacity building and better resilience frameworks for local staff and volunteers to work within are all critical for sustainable, community-based protection systems that local people can manage themselves. Community capacity building should also include conflict sensitivity skills, leadership development among community actors, and skills development in effective coordination, information management and

CONFLICT - Key recommendations:

1. Expand our understanding of ‘who’ and ‘what’ constitutes localised response.
2. Ensure a proper framework for comprehensive capacity building for local organisations, with an inbuilt system for preparedness planning and advocacy through schools, colleges and faith institutions.
3. Donors to support the establishment of or the running of existing national information centres to support coordination and communication during crisis as well as providing comprehensive information and potentially advocacy and organising annual national and local conferences on disaster preparedness.
4. Develop partnerships with universities and think tanks to embed researchers within response programmes to provide real time information on programmes and systems needed to be developed or modified.
5. Engage private sector’s technical expertise, not only financial support.
6. Improve ICT infrastructure, e.g. use tax incentives to increase mobile phone penetration in rural areas for advocacy and coordination during crisis.
7. Dedicate funding for planning, preparedness and advocacy using existing and indigenous knowledge and mechanisms.
8. Enhance accountability and transparency by pooling funds, where possible and administer independently of donors and host governments.
9. Recognize the media as a local actor and strengthen infrastructure to enable media support to localized response through improved coverage, advocacy and education.

communication. It was also emphasized that it is important to value and use indigenous knowledge to be able to respond. Annual national and local conferences were suggested as a platform to mobilize greater stakeholder engagement.

The need to apply conflict sensitivity and context analysis was discussed for both local actors as well as for humanitarian actors. The establishment of accessible information agencies to provide contextual analysis for decision-makers and responders, both local and international, and accurate, locally-collected data was proposed as one way to ensure participation is sensitive and effective. It was suggested that such a database or centre should include everything from topographic and demographic information through to political, religious and community behaviour data. Such agencies could benefit from international experts to provide technical knowledge which is then contextualised to the local situation. Good context analysis would help determine whether a localised response itself is useful or whether it should be part of something larger.

Part of the connectivity needed is increasing the use of ICT, where there is a role for the private sector to enable and fund localised capacity building. Participants recommended increasing coordination with and funding from the private sector. It was also suggested that governments work to address the link between conflict and digital and economic disparities, for example through tax incentives and subsidies for mobile technology, *“At the national level, policies and regulations could be created to bridge the gap between the poor and rich, urban rich/poor and rural poor. Also increasing the ICT penetration index - so that the handsets reach even the remotest village in the country. Thereby reducing the digital divide.”* In addition to funding local capacity building, it was suggested that large multinationals also contribute technical support to local organisations, *“...With their [the private sector’s] technical strength, they do have a role to play. For example PWC can provide its technical support to build the financial systems of local organisations.”*

Local and national government also have a role to play, particularly in enabling conditions for education on disaster preparedness to be undertaken at the school and university level as well as with and through faith institutions, where a large part of the community advocacy can take place.

It was highlighted that capacity building of local actors should include both skills to respond in an emergency as well as the need to develop ‘growth mindsets’ among localized actors, being mindful that mental/emotional and behavioural health needs are also considered. Jeanine Joy (USA) proposed promoting cross-party exchanges and training to enable better understanding of alternate beliefs and viewpoints, *“Expanding our repertoire of potential perspectives increases our mental agility and our ability to take the perspective that supports increased thriving.”*

What constitutes ‘local community’ and ‘local actors’ was challenged by some participants who recommended looking beyond the usual community-based organizations to widen the scope of engagement and constituents to include for example the role of media and how they can support localized response in terms of coverage. The media can also be used for advocacy and education, and a need was identified to strengthen the surrounding infrastructure to enable this.

In terms of information sharing, participants highlighted the need for good documentation and credible field research through embedding researchers into programming to help improve systems and policies and support capacity building and information sharing.

Discussion of funding expanded to include the issue of clarity and accountability in the handling of donor funds locally. It was suggested that inappropriate use of funds by local organisations could be combated by, *“Dialogue engagement amongst individuals and groups will strengthen efforts and also cut down on 'double dipping'.”* The concept of a pooled funding mechanism administered independently was suggested to allay concerns about the funding being perceived as an extension of a country’s foreign and security policy. Finally, it was recommended that donors should increase funding for mechanisms for disaster risk reduction and preparedness, such as strengthening community communication mechanisms.

3. Disasters and Legal Frameworks

Part 1 Q.3: How can national legal frameworks ensure that all actors respond efficiently and appropriately during a disaster?

Part 2 Q.3: What role can/should law play to institutionalize localized response and ensure community involvement in decision-making?

All participants recognized that humanitarian action works best when it is localized and involves a number of actors, including and most importantly the community itself. It was clear from participants that legal frameworks for disaster risk management should also reflect and enable this approach, as well ensuring strong governance across the disaster management continuum from risk reduction to recovery.

There were differing opinions on how community involvement should be mandated. Some thought that law does not necessarily need to ensure community participation *per se* in decision making, but rather law has an important role to ensure local governments are empowered on disaster management, who in turn need to be accountable to their communities.

There were however some sentiments expressed that there continues to be a reluctance by some local authorities to declare a disaster for smaller-scale emergencies which would trigger the necessary federal/central mechanisms including appropriate funding to effectively manage these smaller-scale emergencies.

The need to **strengthen involvement of community groups in disaster risk reduction planning at the local level** also came out in many of the comments, which in turn could also foster greater engagement in response.

A participant from Turkey rightly stated that the *“first step to ensure the participation of the community in decision-making is the creation of disaster culture in individuals”* and that an environment must be created for individuals and communities to strengthen their awareness about disasters, their risk and how to strengthen their resilience. In this regard, law could play a positive role to institutionalize disaster response and disaster education in all levels of the government and in particular through schools, as well as to mandate public awareness campaigns for disasters.

Disasters and Legal Frameworks - Key recommendations:

1. Humanitarian action works best when it is localized and involves a number of actors, including and most importantly the community itself.
2. Legal frameworks for disaster risk management should also reflect and enable this approach, as well ensuring strong governance across the disaster management continuum from risk reduction to recovery.
3. Strengthen community involvement in risk reduction initiatives, particularly at local level; law has the potential to institutionalize this.
4. Used effectively, law could be central to building safer and healthier communities. Particularly evident in building codes, early warning and public education and the strong role law can play in these areas.
5. Strengthen the relationship between central and local-level decision-making processes, including empowering and funding local-level governance on risk reduction.
6. Improved dissemination and awareness of disasters, and risk reduction across the whole of government both central and local, within the general public and other actors - law can be central in providing a framework for this.
7. Increase attention to displacement caused by natural disasters in law and policies at both regional and national levels.
8. Overall, strengthen domestic legal and policy preparedness for disasters, including to facilitate international assistance.

The centrality of **law and good governance to build safer and healthier communities** also came out in participants' feedback. There were several comments related to the need to strengthen the norm setting and implementation of building code and to mandate such things as early warning systems in legal frameworks.

Law could also play a positive role in regards to funding and to ensure sufficient finances are available, particularly at the local level, for risk reduction initiatives and disaster preparedness. A participant from Tajikistan stated that, *"...disaster preparedness and risk reduction must be given more priority by governmental authorities and taken up to the local (district or region) development plans including financial back up for further sustainable implementation"*.

Information flows and the dissemination of disaster information both across government and from central to local levels, and among non-government agencies and with the community came up frequently and participants considered that this could also be better regulated under legal frameworks. One participant eloquently stated that a good legal framework for disaster management *"should provide smooth and timely flow of information up and down the structure from national to outside actors to grass roots or vice versa, and among appropriate authorities."*

Furthermore, it should mandate the dissemination of *"appropriate needed information through media, diplomatic posts, international organizations and local outlets, as well as provide mechanisms for monitoring, evaluations and revisions as needed."* **Flexibility of frameworks** also came up in many of the comments, to cater for the different types of actors and in order to ensure that national and local arrangements could also provide a framework for different types of disaster.

Engagement of civil society and humanitarian organizations was generally viewed positively, however, there were some comments on the role of law in **certifying and providing some kind of registration mechanisms for agencies** operational in countries. Often countries are not well prepared in major response operations for the influx of international actors and do not have mechanisms for facilitating and managing outside international assistance, including processes for registering such entities. **Legal and policy preparedness**, in accordance with the [IDRL Guidelines](#), was seen to help remedy some of this confusion and better manage outside assistance and countries were encouraged to strengthen their arrangements before disaster strikes.

It was noted that **displacement due to natural disasters** has not been sufficiently well recognized in national and regional laws and policies and that outcomes of the Sendai Framework for Action also call on states to adopt programmes and policies related to disaster-induced human mobility. Professor Walter Kaelin, Envoy of the Chairmanship of the Nansen Initiative (Switzerland), commented that when considering, *"the effects of climate change in low-lying, coastal areas of Bangladesh, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and the mountainous regions of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan, it is critical to undertake steps through relevant national and regional frameworks now to planning to avoid disaster displacement when possible, and to prepare and respond when flight is the only option."*

4. Linking peace building and humanitarian efforts

Part 1 Q.4: How can humanitarian action better recognize and support peace building and conflict resolution?

Peace building - Key recommendations:

1. Clarify the interlinkages between humanitarian action and peace building in protracted emergencies to foster greater collaboration between actors.
2. Undertake further research on local coping strategies and cultural norms and develop clear guidelines for humanitarian actors to build on local peace capacities.
3. Revisit humanitarian assessment tools to incorporate information on conflict dynamics to enhance the peacebuilding opportunities of humanitarian action.
4. Develop additional indicators for measuring humanitarian action results in protracted emergencies, which go beyond beneficiary-focused indicators and touch on peace building by measuring contributions to addressing root causes.
5. Raise awareness on the peace building and humanitarian action interface amongst peacebuilding and humanitarian actors.
6. Convene a forum and or undertake further research on the role of religious and civic leaders in humanitarian action, focused on eliciting experiences on the peacebuilding interface.
7. Develop guidance notes and training for humanitarian actors to move beyond 'do no harm' approaches to play a proactive peacebuilding role in protracted emergencies.
8. Explore avenues within the humanitarian architecture to provide funding and/or to partner with peacebuilding organizations in the response period.
9. Explore avenues to embed peacebuilding experts within humanitarian organizations.

Part 2 Q. 4: When nations in the midst of protracted conflict or in political transitions are faced with sudden-onset disasters, how can humanitarian action be used to build peace and foster reconciliation?

There was strong consensus from the participants that humanitarian action can indeed support peace building, amidst recognition that operationalizing the concept is a challenge. Participants provided some good examples of the humanitarian and peace building interface along with recommendations. Participants also raised a number of challenges on supporting peace building and conflict resolution through humanitarian action. The crux of the argument in this regard was that peace building is considered very 'political' which in turn could endanger humanitarian workers.

Key findings emanating from the discussions are as follows:

- The genesis of most protracted emergencies are democracy deficits and crisis of governance. Addressing this requires dealing with the root causes. However, within the humanitarian paradigm there is a lack of understanding of whether the root causes can indeed be addressed through humanitarian action.
- The programmatic cycles and the humanitarian architecture in its current configuration are not conducive to concisely supporting peace building: the timelines for peacebuilding are longer and process heavy, while the humanitarian action timelines are shorter and less focused on process. This could and does present operational challenges.
- Delivery of humanitarian aid provides an important entry point for peace building, as it can serve as a connector on 'horizontal integration'. This requires focus on ensuring that aid delivery takes peace building and social cohesion dimensions into account right from its design.
- Emergency education is a concrete entry point to integrate peace building if conceptualized appropriately. Within the context of humanitarian action, peace education can be integrated and delivered under emergency response timeframes.
- Humanitarian action needs to identify and build on local capacities to support peacebuilding. In most cases humanitarian action and peace building ignores local capacities, thereby doing more harm than good.
- There is very little understanding amongst the humanitarian actors on local cultural practices and coping mechanisms. Identifying and connecting with legitimate local organizations and understanding cultural practices enhances acceptance of humanitarian and peacebuilding operations. Furthermore it builds on existing foundations making the interventions sustainable.
- Trauma healing and counselling are critical in the humanitarian phase and can contribute to peace building. The focus on an individual's emotional wellbeing has peace dividends and is often ignored in humanitarian action, which focuses on physical needs.
- Humanitarian assessments needs to integrate analysis related to conflict dynamics in order for them to support peace building. The current assessments tools are not conceptualized to gather information related to conflict dynamics, peace capacities and local actors, which would enable peacebuilding activities and also make humanitarian action conflict sensitive.
- Religious leaders are an important part of the social fabric of many affected populations. Humanitarian action would be better served by working closely with these actors to deliver humanitarian aid, which also would enhance peace building.
- Sudden onset disasters in conflict situations provide a critical window of opportunity for peace building and conflict resolution.
- In a disaster-conflict interface situation, peace building cannot be separated from relief. Involving local actors and taking into account the conflict context would contribute to peace building.
- 'Do No Harm' (DNH) and 'Conflict Sensitivity' are essential to humanitarian action. In protracted emergencies humanitarian actors do not have the luxury of ignoring peace building or taking a minimalistic approach of focusing only on DNH.
- There needs to be greater understanding of the impact – positive and negative – of humanitarian assistance on conflict.
- Humanitarian action needs to focus on preventing a relapse into conflict as an overarching goal. This will incentivize humanitarian action to integrate peacebuilding as a core component.

- There needs to be greater awareness-raising on the humanitarian architecture and how it functions, especially with local stakeholders including states and rebel groups. This would enhance collaboration as well as understanding of the constraints faced on the ground.
- Not all humanitarian organizations are considered impartial and politically neutral. This can be an impediment for peace building and requires self-regulation within the humanitarian community to denounce organizations that do not adhere to international norms. This would enhance credibility and also open greater access to the legitimate players.

Comments on this report are welcomed. Please post online at:

www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/whs_scasia or send to: scasia@whsummit.org.

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This report was drafted by the Discussion Chair and Moderators with support from the WHS secretariat, OCHA Regional Office and UN Online Volunteers: Christelle Cazabat (France), Lyndall King (UK), Tina Mason (UK) and Aleksandrina Mavrodieva (Bulgaria).

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