
WHITE COLLAR INVASION: DEVELOPED COUNTRY POLICIES LEADING TO ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN SOUTH

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Interdependence among nations has been on the rise since the last century and is rapidly increasing in this era of globalization and liberalization of economies. The trans -country flows are in all areas including financial capital, human resources, tradable commodities, environmental resources and services, and intellectual property. This international interdependence has contributed to significantly improved standards of living in most countries. Yet, these improved standards of living have not come without a cost.

Huge environmental debts have been incurred by nations to provide for improvements in their domestic livelihood conditions. These environmental debts are not necessarily, been paid back by the debtor countries. The debts are often passed on to other countries or left for the future generations to pay leading to inter -country and inter-generational environmental debts. Other environmental debts may be simply unserviceable as the capital to repay back has been lost forever and facing environmental oppression may be the only option open for some nations.

This paper delves into the dimension of environmental debt -transfer to understand whether developed countries have led to environmental unsustainability in the developing countries.

1.2 Growing Economies, Increasing Gaps

Inequitable development has been the characteristics of global growth and developmental processes. Between 1980 -1994, the per-capita GDP growth averaged 1.5% in developed countries and was 0.34 in the developing countries. (Pritchett, 1997). The distribution of benefits has always been skewed in favor of those economically better -off whereas those deprived only corner a smaller share of the benefits. The argument is substantiated by the fact that Gini coefficient, which is a common measure of global inequality, has been worsening over the years. World inequality increased from a Gini coefficient of 62.5 in 1988 to 66.0 in 1993. (Economist, 2001). Inequitable development has been the reason behind the emergence of the so -called developed and developing nations.

This inequitable development trend has changed little over the last century and the gaps continue

to widen - between the rich and the poor, and more recently between those environmentally well-off and those not. (UNDP, 1998). It is therefore not a revelation that it is the poor people in developing countries who inhabit the most environmentally fragile and degraded lands (IIED, 1991) and bear a higher cost of environmental degradation. The situation at the inter-country level is no different, and it is the developing countries who shoulder a larger proportion of the environmental debts (much larger than their national environmental debts) because of the inherent inequalities in the developmental processes. It has now become an even tougher struggle for these countries to bear environment debt inequalities along with other social, economic and political inequalities.

1.3 Environmental Currency Perspective

Decades of industrial growth and manufacturing-oriented economies of the west have had their impact felt on the environment. The acid rains over Europe, and the increase in radioactive radiation over the northern hemisphere due to the ozone hole are some of the indicators of mankind's ignorance about the limits to growth and the impact unrestrained macro-level economic activities can have on the environment. As the impact of environment degradation started to be felt by the civil society in the west through pesticides in food products, pollution of local streams and increase in cases of skin cancer, it led to an awareness that "environment matters" and it is a limited resource.

As a consequence, around the late sixties, pressure started to build on the governments from within the developed countries to arrest the deterioration of the environment. There was a realization that the capacity of environment to act as a buffer against pollution and large-scale material throughput activities may be finite and solutions need to be found so as not to transgress the elastic limit of earth's carrying capacity. Environment therefore emerged as the new global currency and since then has been high in demand.

The proponents of the weak sustainability model argue that the demand for environmental currency is elastic with high-income. In their opinion, environment is a luxury good which people demand for improvements in their quality of lives once their other needs are met. (Pearce and Atkinson, 1993). In other words, environmental entitlements for each individual are better guaranteed in countries with high per-capita incomes. From the visual reality, this seems to be true. Developed countries have clean air, cleaner technology and safer sanitation and waste-disposal systems. Developing countries, on the other hand, are marked by polluted air, open waste disposal systems, non-existent effluent treatment plants and polluting technology. Developed countries therefore have emerged to be at the vanguard of environment protection whereas poor countries seem to be lagging behind as squanderers of environmental resources.

The verdict seems to be loud and clear that it is the developing countries themselves to be blamed for their environmental unsustainability conditions. Developed countries on the other hand have managed their environment well and have also sustained their economic growth.

The reality however, is different from what appears to the eye. In my hypothesis, the developed countries are to be significantly blamed for causing environmental unsustainability in developing countries. I base this hypothesis on the argument that developed countries used up a considerable proportion of their environmental resources for their national economic growth processes and are now building up their environmental currency reserves at the cost of their depletion in developing countries. To prove this, I will try to identify processes, which transfer environmental currency from developing to developed nations in the subsequent sections.

1.4 Ecological Footprints of Developed Nations: setting foot on other's land

Ecological footprints of nations are the biologically productive areas necessary to continuously provide their resource supplies and absorb their wastes under the prevailing technology. The available biologically productive area is however not a variable quantity but has an upper value - which is the carrying capacity of the earth. In other words, the average per -capita productive land area available for human use is limited and is around 1.7 hectare (Wackernagel, <http://www.dieoff.org/page13.htm>).

Comparing ecological footprints of developed nations with their available biological capacity is a good indicator of the transfer of environmental currency resources. The average ecological footprint of the world in 1995 was 2.5 hectare. In comparison, the ecological footprint of US was 9.6 ha (as against its available capacity of 5.5 ha), Japan was 4.2 ha (as against its available capacity of 0.7 ha), and Germany was 4.6 ha (as against its available capacity of 1.9 ha). Developed countries account for much larger footprints as compared to developing countries. Ecological footprint of India is 1 ha (as against its available capacity of 0.5 ha), Argentina has a footprint of 3 ha (as against its available capacity of 4 ha.), and China has an ecological footprint of 1.4 ha (as against its ecological capacity of 0.6 ha). The figures indicate that developed countries have been using up a higher proportion of the earth's carrying capacity and are also using the carrying capacity available with developing countries to boost their domestic growth. Interdependence of nations, specifically trade, is one of the mechanisms by which the developed countries appropriate carrying capacity from developing countries and are able to increase their own ecological footprints. The case of environmental currency transfer therefore builds up.

Over-consumption is one of the key reasons behind the large footprints of developed countries.

For example, in 1790 the estimated average daily energy consumption by Americans was 11,000 kcal. By 1980, this increased almost twenty -fold to 210,000 kcal/day (Catton, 1986). The high growth in energy and material consumption in rich countries is reducing the ecological space available to poor countries and is causing transboundary externalities, which are borne by developing countries.

For instance, industrial countries produce most of the global warming gases that cause climatic change, and yet, it is the developing countries that are likely to feel the most environmental damaging effects. The densely populated nations of South Asia, East Asia, and West Africa, where millions of people live on vast deltas at or below sea -levels are most vulnerable to rising sea-levels. Further, due to high population and low economic growth, developing countries are not able to effectively soften these detrimental environmental impacts and it leads to cascade form of environmental destruction.

1.5 A simple market decision: *to buy, to produce or to take -over*

As mentioned earlier, the interdependence of nations has never been an egalitarian relationship. It has always been skewed - more favorably towards the rich and powerful nations. They control this relationship through physical means (conquest and colonization), economic means (trade rules, trade embargoes and sanctions), and political means (G -8 caucus, UN veto powers, immigration control and Most Favored Nation status). The case of environment and natural resources is no different and developed countries have been strategically using interdependence of nations for their own economic benefits since centuries under different garbs - from colonization to tied aid to eco -imperialism.

From a reductionist perspective, the underlying mechanism adopted by developed countries is better explained in terms of market theory: to buy, to produce or to take -over. Developed countries have assumed that it is a wiser decision for them to procure environmental goods and services from developing countries if it is more expensive or damaging to produce them in their own countries. And it may be strategic to dominate the countries, which produce goods that are in demand, but are not available in the host country. This simple market theory has proved to be the bane of environmental sustainability in developing countries and is being practiced even at present.

For example, in the case of rapidly depleting global bio -diversity, which is more commonly found in developing countries, developed countries have shown an interest to negotiate an agreement quickly. This is because a quick agreement offers these countries a smaller but immediate share of the benefits of tropical forests or biodiversity preservation, and it may be better than waiting for

a later agreement that offers a larger share of reduced set of benefits.

1.6 The past: Conquests and Colonization

Countries lying within the tropical belt have always been rich in natural wealth and bio-diversity and it has always attracted the eyes of other nations to possess this wealth - to provide raw material for wars and to fuel their own economies. The conquest of India by the British for its abundant natural wealth and year-round agricultural season; of Mekong valley by the French and the British for teak forests; and countries in Africa by Britain for diamond and mineral mines are some of the glimpses of conquests over natural resources. Imperialism sowed the seeds of environmental unsustainability in these countries that were to later emerge as developing countries.

Under the imperial rule, the British forced Indian farmers to cultivate indigo, cotton and tobacco as it was a very profitable crop for them but it totally degraded the farm land and rendered it unfit for cultivation of other crops. In the course of this agrarian revolution, there was a clear felling of economically profitable forests in many parts of Northern India for example in *Dehradun* where the mountain slopes were practically denuded of trees. In the *Ganga-Jamuna Doab*, the destruction of forests caused a warming of the region within a few decades. It led to a drop in the water-table, followed by salinization of the flatlands between the rivers. This had far-reaching consequences for the quality of the soil, the amount of available water and finally the fertility of the area. Within a few years the soil had suffered degradation which was compounded by the intensive farming of cash-crops. Cholera appeared for the first time in the Doab in epidemic proportion after 25 years of British rule. (Mann, 1994).

When British left India there was a total breakdown of the indigenous systems for preservation of natural wealth such as ancient tank irrigation systems, traditional seed storage, and community forest management systems. There was a loss of bio-diversity wealth and there was a greater commercialization of its natural resource based activities as against their earlier household-centered use.

1.7 The Present: Blue Collar and White Collar Invasion

Even at the end of colonialism, developed countries continue to plunder the resources of developing countries in overt and covert ways, and what I term as blue-collar invasion and white collar invasion.

Blue Collar Invasion: *Trans-border waste movement*

In the 1980s, the environmental regulations governing waste treatment in the developed world

became more stringent and the costs of domestic safe disposal increased. This saw a simultaneous increase in the activities of the toxic terrorists in shipping waste to the developed countries. A significant amount of hazardous waste generated in industrialized countries has ended up in developing countries in the 1980s as a result of legal (or illegal) contracts to accept waste in exchange for cash. (Third World network, 1992).

In 1987, as a result of a deal between businessmen, 4000 tons of hazardous chemical waste from Europe found itself in the port of Koko in Nigeria. The farmer owning the land was paid just \$250 a month to store the waste. People living near the dumpsite fell seriously ill and all hell broke loose when investigating officials discovered leaky drums of the waste on the site. Nigeria recalled her ambassador from Rome and prosecuted the importers. (Mandel, 1999; Third World network, 1992) In the same year, the Mexican navy had to prevent by force unsanctioned dumping in Mexico by an American barge. One reaction to this incident was that it reflected the "scorn" some in the United States felt toward Mexico, viewing it as their "outhouse". (Mandel, 1999) And this is despite the fact that the EPA admits that the US has adequate capacity to deal with all the wastes it generates within its own borders. These are but two examples of toxic traders from the industrialized nations to the developing countries South and the prevalent attitude to treat developing countries as a dumping site disregard to the environmental havoc that would be caused there.

The Basel Convention on the 'Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal' did come into effect in 1992 but it was not a total ban. It allowed transboundary movements if it could be shown that the wastes were needed for recycling in the state of destination and there was prior informed consent. And, in fact between 1989 and 1994 there were 693 proposals from developed countries to export waste to the Third World. (Schultz, 1999). This exposes the truth that developed countries would rather export their chemical and nuclear wastes than generate less of it.

White collar invasion

The world is under the siege of the new economic order which allows the so-called free movement of goods and services, yet the tension among countries over the control of natural resources remain. The Gulf War is an indicator of this tension. Iraq's claim over Kuwait's oil fields and the US military support to Kuwait to ensure that oil barrel prices in US remain ridiculously low is a reflection of this resource ownership and control politics.

Nations still invade other nations for environment resources but do so more covertly and from within their own national borders. The conventional warfare has shifted to economic and political

warfare where powerful nations can mould policies of developing countries and often the global wisdom in their favor. The subsequent paragraphs describe some of the white-collar invasions.

Skewed Economic Models

Developed countries under the guise of Ricardo's comparative advantage theory have often justified the role of developing countries to produce cash crops for export even though they have high local environmental costs (ActionAid, 1999), and render the economy of these countries dependent on the fluctuating prices in the international markets. Emphasis on export production means a shift towards cash crop production, harming availability of food crops for the poor, and clearing of forests and dislocation of the local people. The case of banana prices grown for exports in Latin America hitting rock-bottom and the resulting economic consequences suffered highlight the flaws in application of popular economic models. The environmental disaster caused by the emergence of rich cacao farms in parts of Brazil and their collapse due to sharp decline in world's chocolate prices is yet another example of artificially induced unsustainable development patterns in developing countries.

Ricardo's comparative advantage principle works on the basis of static efficiency: export what is comparatively cheapest to produce. However, depending on primary produce export for foreign exchange may not be sustainable in the long run and may lead to degradation of the environment (Teriba 1996). The theory of comparative advantage fully services the need of developed countries to consolidate the inequality of growth potential by referring to the international division of labor.

Skewed Global Environmental Agenda

A look at the environmental conventions debated at the international level provides useful insights of the skews in how the global environment agenda is defined. The actively debated conventions are those that strengthen and safeguard the interests of developed countries or which concerns them directly. Issues like global warming, loss of ozone layer, preservation of whales and dolphins are the priority global environmental issues and they attract a high proportion of global funds. Environmental issues raised by developing countries are often left on the backburner due to lack of interest among the developed countries. For example, the Convention on Combating Desertification and the Convention on Habitat and Settlements are little debated and even less funded as they have directly to do with environmental issues faced by developing countries. This reflects the hegemony of developed countries in deciding which problems are of significance or are of global in nature and which are those that of concern to only developing countries. A huge participation gap excludes developing countries in deciding which problems are truly global.

Runaway wisdom and intellectual capture

Developed countries have often clouded the global wisdom and collective thinking to serve their objectives. The availability of vast resources for research and development are used to justify what is illogical and unethical and results in huge environmental impacts. This intellectual capture has always been a serious threat to environmental conditions in developing countries.

Towards the latter half of this century, developing countries have seen the terms of trade turn against primary products and some of the smaller countries especially have become increasingly dependent on foreign sources of goods. In this light, some western thinkers have argued that it is rationale to have lower levels of environmental quality in such countries since they have more immediate needs to fulfill and polices can be made lax than they are in the industrialized countries. This is the key argument behind the western assumption that developing countries have a comparative advantage in the waste trade since they can assimilate more waste.

Crossing all ethical boundaries, in 1991 Lawrence Summers of the World Bank wrote in an internal memo that the costs of pollution depend on loss of earnings owing to injury or death and such costs are lowest in the poor countries. Moreover, demand for environmental quality rises with income and lastly as pollution rises, costs rise disproportionately so pollution ought to move to cleaner locations. He used these points to argue for the migration of dirty industries to the third world. ((<http://www.jacksonprogressive.com/issues/summersmemo.html>))

Even recently, the Bush administration dismissed the study on global warming done by the world scientific body under the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and demanded a similar study be done by US Scientists in the hope of getting a toned down version of the report. The Inter-Governmental panel report had clearly stated that global warming is a reality and developed countries are much to blame for it. Bush administration however argued to force developing countries to undertake cuts in carbon emissions along with developed countries. The fact that developing countries have contributed little to current concentrations of GHGs in the atmosphere and their national priorities are economic development and alleviation of poverty has never penetrated the domain of locked thinking of some of the western think-tanks.

The capture in intellectual thinking inhibits these think-tanks to maintain an open mindset about other studies and alternative view points. The truth is that not all developing countries are treading on the path of "pollute first, clean later". Many of them are already contributing to climate change mitigations as they pursue their economic development, and they will continue to do so as they achieve their objectives. Recent steps by Capoor *et al.* (1996) and Reid and Oldenburg (1997) have documented significant steps that are being taken by developing countries to reduce

rates of growth in carbon emissions. Indeed, since the 1992 signing of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), carbon emission savings in developing countries may be greater than those attained by industrialized countries (Reid and Goldemberg, 1997).

1.8 The prevalent *mantra*: Think Local, Act in other's Local

National sovereignty has always dominated the policies and actions of developed countries in environmental matters. The Bush administration declined to sign the Convention on Biodiversity not because it simply disagreed with its objectives but it required the signatory governments of developed countries to alter their systems of patent protection to transfer technology to the governments of developing countries on "most favorable" terms. It reflects the desire of some developed countries to not just maximize the benefits accruing to them but also to divest much of the environmental costs associated with them to the developing countries. This process of externalizing externalities has led to unsustainable development patterns in developing countries over which the respective governments have little control.

Bio-diversity loss in Bahia : a case -study

Brazil's tropical state of Bahia has a booming economy. Once a backwater - slavery was not outlawed until the end of the nineteenth century. The state now has a prospering manufacturing sector and is popular with leading multinationals, including automobile companies to put their factories there. The economic developments in the region are certainly substantial but then so are the environmental costs. The state of Bahia lies in one of the world's biological "hotspots" - the Atlantic Rain Forest. The economic valuation of natural resources destruction brought about this economic activity would be incalculable. In 1993, biologists working in an area south of Salvador (the capital of Bahia) held a world record of 450 tree species in a single hectare. (A hectare of forest in the north-eastern United States typically contains 10 species). Cases like Bahia are spread all over developing world and are a grim reminder of the legacy left by developed countries in the form of environmental unsustainability to be borne by the present and future generations.

Source: State of the World 2001.

Developed countries have always found it much easier to change the policies of the developing countries to make way for their externalities rather than change their own domestic policies to cause less environmental damage. Changing their domestic policies would entail change in production and consumption patterns which is no -debate area. Countries like US, would rather have Amazon rainforest cut down to make way for cattle ranches to provide beef in Mc. Donald's burgers rather than bring about a change in their domestic policies. This positioning of developed countries to look outside their national borders for solution is rigid and has been taken as the

starting point for many of the instruments and treaties to protect the environment. For instance, the traditional aid donor concludes that investment in pollution abatement in a developing country is more efficient than undertaking investments for this purpose at home. The analysis of the current patterns of aid and the meek Kyoto Protocol substantiates this.

Aid Pattern

The study of current areas of aid flow makes an interesting study. The level of development assistance from donor governments continues to drop over the years and is way below the 0.7% mark. This is suffocating the financial resources available to some of the developing countries to improve their environmental conditions. Even within the current magnitude of aid, a part is tied aid, which benefits the donor country. This could be in the form of securing access to some forms of natural resources. For example, the Japanese funding to large -scale plantation projects in southern India in the nineties was tied to buying back of the timber for its own paper industry.

More significantly, a part of the official development assistance is now used for financing global public goods such as protecting the ozone layer, which further reduces the amount of aid available to developing countries to solve local environmental problems. The returns to developed countries per unit of aid are therefore much higher as a significant part of it is getting spent to solve the problems caused by them.

Kyoto Protocol

Kyoto protocol has been hailed as a landmark convention where developed countries have taken a lead to cut down their national carbon emissions to check global warming. Even without the recent exit of US, the Kyoto Protocol has been a very meek initiative. The emissions reduction target of 5.2 per cent over 1990 levels for industrialised countries as a whole simply means 'business as usual' at 1996 levels. Further, the treaty is ridden with loopholes by which developed countries could meet the lower emission standards without any real changes within their national sovereignty. (CSE, 1998)

The much-hyped clean development mechanism would allow industrialized countries to meet part of their reduction commitments by carrying out 'certified' emissions reduction activities in developing countries. For example, planting trees in Costa Rica can be certified as an emission reduction activity. The protocol allows for the use of afforestation as a 'sink' which will fix, and hence reduce, carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. So countries with afforestation programmes can show a reduction in their carbon dioxide levels, without doing much to reduce emissions from burning fossil fuels.

1.9 The Future: good sense has still to prevail

There seems to be little change in the attitude of western governments over time. As we will see in the subsequent paragraphs they have failed to recognize that they are instrumental in causing many of the environmental problems in developing countries. They continue to treat these countries as a "supply-house" or "sinks" to boost their economy without any change in their domestic policies.

Developed countries are now moving towards eco-imperialism by forcing developing countries to adopt the higher western environmental standards through measures like health standards, and phyto-sanitary guidelines. Yet, imposition of additional costs on the exports of developing countries, through environmental regulations, will likely lead to lower wages in these countries. The export of rich countries' environmental standards would thus happen at the expense of poor workers forcing them to further exploit their local environment to safeguard their livelihood, and in process exacerbating the environmental damage. It is ironical that developed countries are trying to impose the same trade rules on developing countries, in the absence of which the developed countries have been able to economically prosper. This is suffocating developmental processes and is forcing developing countries to remain as subsidizers of western economies.

Financing for Environment: lacking transfer of technology and funds

Developed countries still fail to fully accept and work towards undoing the harm they have done to the environment in developing countries. This is evident from the fact that no funds have been expressly created to help developing countries fight the externally induced environmental problems and there has been a vehement opposition against any forms of transfer of technology. Within the Kyoto protocol, developing countries asked for a 'technology transfer mechanism' which would assist them in getting environmentally sound technologies and know-how on non-commercial and preferential terms. This was not acceptable to the US which tried to link the potential transfer of technology with quick implementation of the clean development mechanism. (CSE, 1998)

Global Environmental Facility (GEF) is the pilot funding that has been initiated to give funds at concessional terms to developing countries to fight global environmental problems. The funding is inadequate and largely reflects the western agenda. The fund is totally managed by the donor governments in the driver seat and developing countries have little role to play in deciding the areas where the fund is to be spent. Further, funding from GEF is provided for only that component of environmental project which produces global benefits. For instance, funding from GEF may not be used to bear the full afforestation cost of land degraded by export-oriented

shrimp farming but could be used to fund only that part of the project for which benefits are of global nature (namely forests as global sinks). In simpler terms, GEF is not directed to reversing environmental degradation trends in developing country but is intended to cheaply fund solutions for Northern environmental problems.

In absence of untied funds available to developing countries to reverse the environmental damage, it may be almost impossible for them to come out of this vicious circle. The truth is that the commitment of high-income countries to global environmental conservation depends most strongly on the marginal benefits of conservation to these countries. Unless, they can capture a substantial benefits of their investment in conservation, wherever that investment occurs, they will have little incentive to commit to any agreement. Indeed, this is a part of the reason for the high income countries' interest in developing intellectual property rights in genetic discoveries.

Repaying Debt: paying interest on miseries suffered

The plight of many African countries could not be worse than this. After decades of colonial rule which witnessed brutal exploitation of their natural resources wealth, the resources of these countries are once again being exploited and this time on their own to service the debt accrued to the colonizers.

Debt servicing is wrecking havoc with environmental conditions of these countries as they are forced to exploit their natural resources to the fullest to avoid payment default that could lead to economic sanctions against them. Overexploitation of oil, mineral wealth and coal becomes essential to cope up with food problems and financial obligations to the developed countries.

Inter-generational Oppression and Environmental Racism

The turn of the century has not lessened the environmental burden on developing countries and from the current trend it seems that this burden would continue to rise and will flow to generations yet to be born in developing countries. Environmental degradation and pollution would become a lasting oppression for the future generations in these countries - a legacy to which developed countries have significantly contributed.

Environmental racism will continue to be practiced by developed countries and shall remain the unwritten norm behind all development processes. Environmental injustice means imposing environmental burdens on persons that had nothing to do with the generation of such burdens. Environmental inequity implies the skewness of the distribution of environmental risk by race, nationality or class. These lead to the concept of environmental racism that implies the deliberate targeting of specific communities for dumping of waste or other harmful activities. (Adeola, 2000)

1.10 Conclusion

It is an irony, that one of the most valuable resource - environment - essential for human survival continues to be exploited and appropriated by the west even beyond their national borders. Allowing over-consumption and non-payment of environmental debts has become a rigid element of their policies.

The world does not lack the financial resources to establish a healthy environment on planet Earth. Over 745 billion dollars gets spent on military costs annually in the world whereas all the environmental problems such as global warming, providing safe and cleaner energy could be provided at 20% of this cost. (UN Poster). What is lacking is the attitude and the need to change the resource flow equations and bring about policy changes in domestic arena . National benefits and immediate benefits overcede the need for equitable and inter -temporal sharing of benefits, and developing countries and its future generations are on the receiving end of the short -sighted policies of the west. As premium on environmental resources increase, the developed countries would be at a much powerful position to divest developing countries of all their environmental currency to add to their own reserves. Eco -imperialism will then get embedded as yet another powerful means to wield global control.

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