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Entrepreneurship Development and Grassroots Governance in Nigeria: Limitations and Opportunities for Social Change

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Abstract

Background: To become a commercial and industrial hub of the world, is the dream of every nation because it is the basis on which nations are recognised and respected in the comity of nations. However, to realise these goals, the citizenry has been mobilised and galvanised to use their innate abilities to further the individual and collective interests of the nation. One of the surest and quickest ways of achieving greatness in these areas is through entrepreneurship development.

Aim: This article, therefore, examined the interface between entrepreneurship development and grassroots governance in Nigeria, to identify the limitations and opportunities for social change.

Method: To scientifically analyse the issues raised, the article is anchored on the bottom-up approach. This article adopted a qualitative approach and is descriptive; authoritative scholarly sources were reviewed during a desktop study to identify the relevant publications.

Result: The article concludes that despite the challenges facing the attainment of entrepreneurship development goals in Nigeria, there are still enough opportunities in the country to enable it to attain the heights it desires but this can only happen if there is political will and commitment by its leaders at all levels mostly the grassroots, to do the needful.

Conclusion: It therefore concludes and recommends among others that; the education sector needs to be overhauled and well-funded and its curriculum reviewed to incentivise technological skills and innovations as its baseline and their outcome domesticated in the country in general and the grassroots in particular where the majority of Nigerians are domicile.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, development, grassroots governance, risk, social change

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous Black Country in the world with a population of over two hundred million people. Its human resource is regarded as one of the most vibrant, skillful, and versatile in any part of the globe. With these potentials, it is expected that the country would be rubbing shoulders with the industrial giants of the world. This was the aspiration of most Nigerians at independence. Several government development plans and strategies articulated the vision of making the country a land of bountiful and borderless opportunities for its citizens and the black race all over the world. But all these could only happen where there are opportunities for the citizenry to engage in creative and gainful enterprise. Yet, in a developing country like Nigeria, entrepreneurship development is very much needed to expand economic opportunities in the country (Igbokwe-Ibeto 2019). The enterprises could lead to commercial and industrial growth as well as the development of the

country (Adaga, Egieya, Ewuga, Abdul & Abrahams 2024; Nkoana & Mashamite 2024; Odeyemi, Oyewole, Adeoye, Ofodile, Addy, Okoye, & Ololade 2024).

To become a commercial and industrial hub of the world is the dream of every nation because it is the basis on which nations are recognised and respected in the comity of nations. However, to realise these goals, the citizenry must be mobilised and galvanised to use their innate abilities to further the individual and collective interests of the nation. One of the surest and quickest ways of achieving greatness in these areas is through entrepreneurship development. While this concept may not be new to the government at all levels, the centrist approach to it by successive governments has tended to produce a slow pace in realising its goals thereby leading to the underdevelopment of the country (Akhakpe 2020).

Given the perennial failure the achieve socio-economic growth and development in the country and the threat currently posed by massive unemployment, hunger, and penury, this article explores the role local government can play, what application of the new public management strategy of entrepreneurial government could bring into dousing the threat of unemployment through entrepreneurship development and how to relaunch the grassroots on the path of sustainable industrial development. This becomes imperative given the previous failed efforts at employment generation and attainment of industrial development in the country.

To address the issues raised in this article, it is structured into the following five sections. Aside from introduction and methodology, the first section revolves around the conceptual and theoretical underpinning. The second examines the interface between entrepreneurship development and grassroots governance. The third explores the socio-economic significance of entrepreneurship development. The fourth discusses the challenges confronting entrepreneurship development towards social change. The fifth explores opportunities for social change, conclusion, and implications.

Methodology

This research is based on a scholastic literature review. The scholastic literature review is about varying contributions that have been made to a specific problem, to gain greater levels and degrees of understanding and making interpretations based on a specific problem (Hart, 2018:95). A scholastic literature review is based on unobtrusive research techniques, secondary data and authoritative scholarly sources were reviewed, during a desktop study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinning

The definition of an entrepreneur is contentious, as scholars and researchers have yet to reach a consensus. In this study, an entrepreneur is defined as an individual who identifies and/or generates market opportunities, acquires resources, and establishes and expands a business venture to meet these demands, thereby contributing to economic growth and societal value (Engelbrecht & Engelbrecht 2024). The individual undertakes the risk of managing enterprises of varying sizes, from small to medium to large-scale, and is compensated with profits upon success (Nieman 2023).

Entrepreneurship could be said to be as old as mankind. It began with a man putting together to come up with tangible goods or artifacts for subsistence and in exchange for other goods. It was the basis for inter-group commerce and the trans-Sahara trade which brought other parts of the world closer to Africa. With time, this form of human existence and mode of production metamorphosed into a complex and sophisticated system of production and exchange of goods and services.

According to Ebijuwa (in Adefarasin 2021), development must represent the whole gamut of change by which the whole social system could move along from the condition of life widely or largely perceived as unsatisfactory towards another condition regarded as materially and spiritually better. Thus, development could be regarded as a social change from one positive state to another using a people's cultural values as the pivot of such change (Akhakpe, 2020). Culture is important in the process of development because it gives meaning, direction, and sustenance to it (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Akhakpe 2012). Also, for culture to promote entrepreneurship development and grassroots governance, actions should be taken towards cultural re-orientation to make it useful to our governance (Igbokwe-Ibeto, Eqwuim & Agbodike 2015). Corroborating this position is Lawal, Kio, Suleman, and Adebayo (2017) who see entrepreneurship development as following a cycle of stimulating, supporting, and sustaining development.

Flowing from the above, stimulating activities involve getting people to be aware of what it takes to engage in an enterprise, particularly about expanding a business, risk-taking, and developing initiatives needed for a business to succeed (Lawal et.al. 2017). It is a supporting component that involves the promotion of infrastructural facilities, resources, information and technology, abilities, and skills, needed for a business to succeed. The sustaining aspects of entrepreneurship development encompass devising ways for ensuring the growth and continuity of an enterprise through modernisation, expansion of the business, embracing new technology, diversification of product lines, and provision of a conducive environment for the survival of the business (Lawal et.al. 2017).

While an entrepreneur is either the originator of a business venture or a manager who tries to improve an organisation's unit (Mlambo, Manganyi, & Mphurpi 2022), entrepreneurship is the process of creating a business establishment capable of entering a newly established market (Adaga, Egieya et al. 2024). Thus, entrepreneurship involves developing material resources and people in ways that could develop a new organisation in the society that could, in turn, produce goods and services (Daraojimba, Abioye, Bakare, Mhlongo, Onunka, & Daraojimba 2023; Oriji, Shonibare, Daraojimba, Abitoye, & Daraojimba 2023; Tamunomiegbam, Amugo, Bariledum, & Afolabi 2023).

Viewed from this perspective, entrepreneurship could be regarded as a nursery for manufacturing and industrialisation in any human society. Nigeria as a country has been in search of sustainable industrial growth and development. But as much as it has tried in this regard, industrial development remains elusive. Other countries that started industrial development planning with Nigeria have since crossed the middle spectrum level of industrial development. For example, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Singapore can no longer

be regarded as less developed countries (LDCs). Rather than develop its industrial base to engage in genuine production of intermediate and capital goods, Nigeria has become a dumping ground of goods from other parts of the world. As Sanusi (2020) graphically puts it, equally important is the indication that since 1999, Nigeria has become a trading outpost for goods produced elsewhere with little domestic transformation of output of the primary sector by the secondary sector.

In the mid-70s and 80s, import substitution industrialisation was seen as the pathway to industrialisation of the country. It imported completely knocked-down components from abroad with which it sought to produce capital goods. However, this experience ended up destroying the technical capacities of the country's workforce and increased the import receipts of the country as the country gradually became an import-dependent country (Akhakpe 2020). By implication, the Nigerian economy remains agrarian, dominated by peasant production of crops for consumption and export. The seemingly high contributions of the tertiary sector to output suggest that the sector is not only servicing the Nigerian economy but indeed, the economy of the trading partners. These distortions and disarticulations of the country's economy have made it difficult for the manufacturing sector to grow and develop.

However, since independence in the 1960s, spirited efforts have been made to boost the manufacturing and industrial output and their contribution to the economy. Yet, despite efforts by successive governments to promote manufacturing and industrial development in the country, the contributions of the manufacturing and industrial sectors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) remain low (Akhakpe 2020). As Sanusi (2020) argued the Nigerian manufacturing subsector is made up of large, medium, and small-scale enterprises as well as cottage and handcraft units. Despite the spirited efforts made to boost manufacturing output and various policy regimes, manufacturing has not made any significant contributions to the growth of the economy. The industry contributed only 11.3 percent of the GDP in the 1960-70 owing largely to the crude petroleum and gas production during the decade. The contribution contrasted to 38.6 percent in the 1980s and further to 29.4 percent during 2001-2010. These numbers portray the poor contribution of the manufacturing subsector to aggregate output in Nigeria compared with its peers in Asia and Latin America.

The low contribution of the manufacturing and industrial sectors to the GDP is not unrelated to the import-oriented nature of the country's economy which was further reinforced by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the country embarked on, in the mid-1980s (Akhakpe 2018). Subsequent policies and programmes in the sector only go to solidify the import-dependent of the country vis-à-vis the developed economies of the West. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ruling political and economic elites are more interested in commercial capitalism than the productive one. This clearly shows that not much has been done to promote the development of the manufacturing and industrial sectors through entrepreneurship development which could have helped to build the industrial base of the country and reduce the level of unemployment.

Theories in social and management sciences are guides to empirical research as they provide a roadmap for navigating the undulating terrain of social phenomena (Igbokwe-Ibeto 2019). To scientifically investigate the issues raised, the article is anchored on the bottom-up approach which emphasises community involvement and empowerment, local ownership and decision-making, capacity building and skill enhancement, inclusive and equitable opportunities, collaborative partnership, and networking. The bottom-up approach resonates with frameworks like Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) which focuses on leveraging local assets and strength. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which involves community members in analysis, planning, and decision-making. Third is the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) which emphasises building resilient and adaptive livelihoods, these frameworks serve as strategies for entrepreneurship development and grassroots governance in Nigeria, fostering inclusive and sustainable growth.

The Interface between Entrepreneurship Development and Grassroots Governance

The concept of grassroots governance as elaborated in this article is about catalysing government that promotes grassroots development by empowering the youths and other human capital in communities to bring about the much-desired sustainable development from the grassroots. As articulated by Osborne and Gaebler (in Laxmikanth 2012), the ten principles or features of entrepreneurship governance or New Public Management (NPM) consist of community-owned government which entails government strengthening and empowering its citizens, families, and communities to solve their problems, catalytic government, that is a government that prioritises catalysing the public, private sectors and voluntary/non-governmental actors into actions to solve societal problems, decentralised government that entails dispersing authority from higher to lower levels and market-oriented government that emphasises market mechanism rather than bureaucratic control (Laxmikanth 2012).

A close perusal of these principles shows that they are what grassroots governance under management approach as have articulated should incentivised and leveraged on to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship development to thrive. As earlier argued, development plans and strategies have not substantially achieved their goals, the resultant effects have been that grassroots development and governance are in a sordid state, unemployment is constantly on the increase, and youth restiveness has become endemic. Entrepreneurship development is a veritable tool for job creation and getting the teaming population of the unemployed gainfully engaged in production activities and taking them off the streets.

Unemployment and its consequential outcome might be a worldwide phenomenon, but they affect countries differently. This is why the United Nations (UN) in its inauguration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), put quite enough emphasis on these issues. Specifically, in SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 12, the UN calls on governments at all levels to give special consideration and emphasis to these issues and concerns (UN, 2016). But as have argued, public administration at all levels has roles to play in achieving the goals encapsulated in SDGs (Akhakpe 2018).

Indeed, unemployment and poverty are ticking time bombs that must be diffused before they explore and consume the country and Africa in general. The World Bank has raised alarm regarding Nigeria's unemployment situation which it said needs urgent attention because the country needs to create 30 million jobs by 2030 (World Bank 2020). According to a World Bank report, between 2018 and 2022, the number of unemployed quadrupled and the unemployment rate reached 33 percent (World Bank 2023). Though the country created 450,000 jobs between the third quarter of 2017 and 2018, many more Nigerians trooped into the labour market (Punch Editorial 2022).

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) puts underemployment at 20.10 percent. It reported that as of 2018, only 70 million Nigerians were employed full or part-time out of the 90 million actives in the labour force, leaving 30 million unemployed (NBS 2020). The matter is made worse by the galloping population in the country, but at 2.6 percent annually, growing faster than the economy which grew at an average of 2.0 percent in 2018 and 2019 (Punch Editorial 2022). All these figures go to show that the country is in a precarious position and its pitiable condition needs to be urgently arrested.

Indeed, successive governments in the country have demonstrated appreciation of the challenges posed by unemployment and the need to address them through programmes that promote large, medium, and small-scale enterprises. The government has been funding the sub-sector through short, medium, and long-term loans, to micro-small and medium-scale enterprises in the country and various public institutions. For example, the Bank of Industry (BOI) provides development funds to about 15 states through the Bank's Cooperative Lending Scheme (Akhakpe 2020). Another such scheme is the 90-million-naira Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW) being executed on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs which provides these soft loans to women entrepreneurs (BBC 2014).

In the same vein, the launch of a 50-billion-dollar Dangote SMEs fund in partnership with BOI is a huge step in unlocking the credit market for micro-small and medium-scale businesses (Punch Editorial 2022). This amount is expected to increase to 20 million naira. These funds would no doubt impact directly on 13,000 registered groups in the entire country, thus, impacting the lives of some 250,500 micro-entrepreneurs (Punch Editorial 2022). Given the level of unemployment, poverty, and rising population in the country, these and many other such efforts by government at the federal, state, and local government levels would go a long way in reducing the magnitude of the unemployment crisis in the country.

The Socio-Economic Significance of Entrepreneurship Development

At this critical juncture in the socio-economic life of the country, it stands to gain significantly from a concerted sustained programme and strategy of entrepreneurship development. Entrepreneurship development will reduce the rate of unemployment in the country caused by years of poor planning and economic underdevelopment by opening alternative areas of job opportunities in the formal and informal sectors, thereby reducing the emphasis on the government as the major employer of labour. It also, will take the youth

out of the street, and prevent or reduce criminality and insecurity in the society that has gained ascendency in recent years due to policy failure of the government and indifference to the plight of the growing number of unemployed Nigerians. Certainly, an idle hand is a devil's workshop. Entrepreneurship activities will keep the citizens busy in gainful activities.

Development of Micro-Small and Medium scale Enterprises (MSMEs) would help to raise the entrepreneurship spirit and managerial skills in the people as they embrace the values and virtues of entrepreneurship spirit. Most Nigerians are trained on skills of reading and writing with little or no vocational training. A mix of both will make the citizens more productive.

Also, in Nigeria where the population is increasing in geometric progression, the labour-intensive method of micro and small-scale enterprises will help to expand the employment opportunities and income redistribution system the country so many desires. The government can no longer keep pace with the growing number of unemployed in the country as its capacity and resources are limited (Oyedele 2019). Small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) hold the key to job creation in today's Nigeria. SMEs would lay a solid basis for industrial take-off in the country unlike what the import substitution industrialisation tried to achieve. From little beginning, the SMEs could expand to become the catalyst for industrialisation. The industrial revolution in Europe did not begin overnight; it took patience and perseveration to be achieved.

With the promotion of SMEs, the vast resource endowment in the various communities in the country that are lying fallow could be harnessed for the sustainable growth and development of the country. Indeed, every part of the country is richly endowed with resources that can be exploited and creatively used for the development of the individual and the country at large.

Entrepreneurship development will assist in curtailing the level of general merchandise and capital goods in the country with the concomitant balance of payment deficits, thereby reducing the rate of foreign exchange depletion in the country. The import bills of the country have been on the rise since independence (Akhakpe 2020). However, it can be reduced drastically through entrepreneurship development.

Also, entrepreneurship development would make those at the grassroots remain there to develop their communities rather than migrate to the cities in search of elusive white-collar jobs. Thus, SME development, will stem the tide of rural-urban migration in the country and assist in developing the rural areas by preserving and utilising the resources in the development of the area.

Nigeria is the most populous Black Country in the world with a large market that can make the SMEs sub-sector lucrative for businesses to thrive in. Its goods and services can leverage this vast market to make Nigeria the choice destination for investors and the business hub of the world. The mono-commodity (oil) economy has adversely affected the growth and development of the country as what ought to be a blessing has now become a "curse". Yet, SMEs could help diversify the economy from an oil-based to a multi-commodity-based economy that will provide the country with alternative sources of income

and wealth for its citizens. Ultimately, entrepreneurship development particularly around SMEs will release idle funds that politicians pilfer for private use into more productive SME sub-sector, thereby making the government smaller, leaner, and more efficient and effective.

Challenges Confronting Entrepreneurship Development toward Social Change

Having seen the significance of a vibrant and robust SME sub-sector can bring to a developing country like Nigeria that is in dare need of sustainable development in critical sectors of the society, while these positive contributions might not be new to a vast majority of Nigerians and their leaders, certain factors still stand on the path of achieving them. Some of these factors the article shall discuss briefly in this section.

Entrepreneurship development in the country through SMEs is currently hindered by a lack of appropriate data showing the contributions of this sub-sector to job creation and economic development of the country. Although the challenge of paucity of data is not exclusive to this sub-sector, it nonetheless limits the ability of government and planners to track its progress and find out its limitations to correct them.

Also, the funding gap has often characterised entrepreneurship development programmes. While governments could have good plans for this sub-sector, the financial wherewithal to carry out these plans and programmes remains short relative to what is required. With better financial management and emphasis on the productive sector, this sub-sector could receive a boost. Yet, it is not the case of lack of funds but conflicting priorities, corruption, and waste that have led to the crisis currently experienced in the economy and other aspects of society. The enormous resources the country has made in the past and continues to make can make the country an industrial giant within a short period. However, this goal might not be attained given the level of corruption taking place daily in public institutions.

Relative to the funding issue is the infrastructure deficit in the country such as bad roads, poor and epileptic electricity power supply, obsolete technology, high cost of communication, etc. With a reduction in corruption and more focus on governance issues, the challenges are surmountable. Monies are voted yearly for sectors and sub-sectors of the economy, but their implementation has often fallen short of expectations.

Flowing from the foregoing is the challenge posed by inconsistencies in government policies. It is difficult to maintain a stable policy environment in the country because of political instability and the practice of every government coming up with its policies and programmes, irrespective of the government or party in power. This affects policy continuity, an important ingredient for sustainable development in all sectors of the economy and society.

Also, the issue of access to the market within and outside the country has not been properly addressed. With the border closure and failure of government regulatory agencies, most goods produced in the country hardly gain access to the market within and outside the country. Policies in this direction need to be clear and taken out of political manipulation. It would appear the government is not effectively exploiting the African market.

Furthermore, multiple taxations tend to discourage infant SMEs. Apart from throwing money around, the government is not putting in place a flexible tax regime that would allow the young SMEs to find their footing, particularly, in the face of competition from their more established competitors in the same or similar industry. Young entrepreneurs are facing a lot of challenges in trying to survive in a harsh socio-economic and political environment.

It is doubtful if the majority of the local governments in Nigeria would be able to shoulder the responsibilities and sponsor the initiatives to drive the process of entrepreneurship development from below or in a bottom-up manner due to their financial status. As has been severally argued, most local governments rely basically on statutory allocation from the federation account which is further reduced by state governments before they finally get to local governments accounts. It is hoped that the recent local government autonomy would guarantee the financial autonomy of local government in the country. While governments should champion the course of establishing entrepreneurship development centers to train youths in various areas of human capital development that could get them gainfully employed, the resources to execute such plans are lacking relative to the demands for them.

Moreover, the educational system in the country, from primary, and secondary to tertiary levels does not prepare citizens for self-employment and technical skills. It has been observed that many graduates of various universities in Nigeria lack proper knowledge of the subject they claim to have studied…many of them find it difficult to even defend the research project they claimed to have conducted before their certificates are awarded (Gbero 2016; Atoyebi 2017). The education curriculum still emphasises reading and writing skills rather than technological skills and innovation.

Entrepreneurship Development and Grassroots Development: Opportunities for Social Change

In spite of the many limitations confronting local governance in its effort at promoting entrepreneurship development and its attendant social change at the grassroots, there is still light at the end of the tunnel that could lead the country to that position it desires in the area of industrial development in the comity of nations. This optimism stems from several efforts government is making to address the challenges identified in this article.

In terms of funding, entrepreneurship development through MSMEs and BOI has been very active in providing funds for different categories of entrepreneurs. According to Olukoyede Pitan, a former managing director of BOI, "We are looking at enterprises or companies that have a focus on using local raw materials, companies that generate employment and bring down their cost of borrowing" (Onuba 2018). To this end, Olukoyede said the $750 million equivalent two hundred fifty billion naira (#250bn) syndicated loan facility which it received from the African Export-Import Bank will be disbursed at single digit interest rate (Onuba 2018). More such funding is needed to make a substantial impact on the current funding gap in the SME sub-sector.

Also, more jobs are being created by MSMEs in the face of daunting challenges in the economy. The Internal Labour Organisation (ILO) in its report noted that SMEs in Nigeria employ a percentage of labour force contributing 48.7 percent to the nation's GDP in 2018 (Akhakpe 2020). Also, according to NBS (2020), the total number of persons employed by MSMEs in the same year stood at 59,741,211, representing 84.02 percent of the total labour force. However, these impressive performances should be leveraged for inclusive and sustainable development.

The government regulatory system should be strengthened and deepened to be efficient and effective in providing the enabling environment for this sub-sector to grow and develop to contribute meaningfully to match sustainable development in the country. As it stands currently, there is no ease of doing business internally as Nigeria was ranked 131 among 190 economies in the ease of doing business (World Bank 2023). There are multiple taxation and inconsistency in government policies. All these must change in a positive direction.

The government should declare a state of emergence in the infrastructure sector in the country if it is interested in achieving gainful employment, industrialisation, and sustainable development, especially in the road, transportation, and power sectors. The poor state of infrastructure in the county stifles business expansion and makes the cost of production very high.

The education sector needs to be overhauled to bring it to speed with current realities in the global community. First, it should be well funded, and its curriculum reviewed to incentivise technological skills and innovations as its baseline and their outcome domesticated in the country in general and the grassroots in particular where most Nigerians are domiciled.

Local government must improve their financial status if they are to play a significant role in the current push towards job creation through entrepreneurship development. There are many sources through which local government can generate revenue. But first, the mentality of "feeding bottle federalism" must change, if local government must have any chance to promote entrepreneurship development and social change in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The trend currently is the ability of countries to leverage their human capital to promote inclusive and sustainable development. Nigeria has abundant human and material resources waiting to be harnessed for inclusive growth and sustainable development of the country. Despite the challenges facing the attainment of these goals, there are enough opportunities in the country to enable it to attain the heights it desires but this can only happen if there is political will and commitment by its leaders at all levels mostly the grassroots, to do the needful. The imperative need is to embrace the potentials offered by entrepreneurship development to break the jinx of stagnation in industrial and socio-economic development.

Implications

The implication of the findings of this article which suggest that there is a positive relationship between entrepreneurship development and grassroots governance in Nigeria is that, the vogue of local governments generating revenue internally only through community tax and rates; property (tenement) rates; general/development rates; licenses, fees like marriage registration fees, cart/truck licenses as well as allocations from the federation as practice in the country has met with little success and therefore needs to be re-examined in line with the bottom-up approach within the context of entrepreneurship development. In an increasingly competitive and turbulent labour market, governments are largely leveraging entrepreneurship development for job creation. Local governments must embrace entrepreneurship development if they are to play a significant role in job creation and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to report which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article

Ethical Approval

The authors disclose that all the accepted ethical guidelines and requirements were adhered to, and there is nothing to report regarding live subjects.

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