

## **University Education of the Maasai Girls in Kenya at Crossroad: A Viewpoint of the Role of local leaders and Socio-Cultural factors.**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to determine the role of community leaders and socio-cultural factors on maasai girls academic performance in secondary schools in Narok County and their subsequent transition rates to university Education. The study was conducted in 20 secondary schools in Narok County. A questionnaire was given to a sample of 181 teachers out of 400. Focus group discussions were conducted for 180 Maasai girl students and an interview for 20 Principals. The study adopted mixed methods design and pragmatic philosophical paradigm. Data analysis utilizes descriptive and non parametric statistics. The research findings found enrollment of girls in Transmara west decreasing at the rate of 40 % (primary) and 10% (secondary) and Narok North increasing at the rate of 10% in both primary and secondary schools. For every 15 girls enrolled for KCPE, only 1 join secondary school in Transmara West and for every 10 girls, only 1 join secondary school in Narok North. Girls' transition rate to University is 2.4% (Transmara West) and 1.0% (Narok North). Pearson tests reveals significant relationships between the parents' education ( $p=0.04$ ) and mediating cultural factors; FGM ( $P=0.03$ ), Pregnancies ( $p=0.00$ ), Early marriages ( $p=0.03$ ) on girls' participation. Coupled with poverty, low parents' level of education and fear of teenage pregnancies add force to FGM and makes girls to opt for early marriages, shy off or absent in class and consequently drop out of schools. The study recommended for empowerment and enforcement of women and girl's rights through participatory/advocacy for education-in-culture and culture-in- education.

**Key words:** Socio- Cultural factors, Academic performance, University Education

### **Introduction**

This research focuses on negative cultural practices that are still being practice. The study shed lights on the reasons behind their perpetuation and how they constitute barriers to low academic performance of girls in Narok County. Culture and Education are inseparable as the primary definition of education is acculturation. Obanya (2005) asserts that every

human society irrespective of its level of technical evolution devotes great attention to transmitting its cultural heritage to the young. Obanya argues that education in its true sense was first threatened by schooling and most societies have been questioning the educational effectiveness of schools ever since they were invented.

WHO (2006) argues that in traditional African societies education for all was taken for granted while in colonial setting, schooling for all was formal thus became a problem to Africans. What Africans desired was an education that keeps them psychologically in their socio-cultural frame, contrary to education that is equated to schooling. There is a need to take the drastic step of moving from merely “talking culture” to promoting positive cultural practices through advocacy and participatory approach

UNDP (2010) asserts that most African communities engage in outdated cultural practices because the education has not been relevant to their needs. The basic problem is that educational structures were formulated by colonialists who had a cultural background different to that of Africans. Although Africa is politically independent, it remains technologically and economically dependent on countries that colonised it. Reforms in African education were conceived and implemented within the framework of conditions tied to the grants, hence the governments did not go far to develop and foster African Culture. Values, norms and traditions may be different for individuals from different cultures yet these can produce an understanding of potential classroom adaptive skills and conditions under which they can be utilized to enhance learning (Jagero & Ayodo, 2009).

### **Literature Review**

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is recognized internationally as a violation of human rights and women (UN, 2007). The practice reflects deep-rooted inequality between men and women, and constitutes discrimination against women (WHO, 2011). FGM or female circumcision is one of the cultural practices still being practiced in developing nations and has spread to other parts of the world such as Europe and North America, where immigrant families have settled despite global efforts to abandon the practice (UNICEF, 2005). Some 3 million girls face FGM every year (Aldebero, 2008). The argument for FGM continuation is that the practice is a traditional cultural rite of passage (Achoka et al, 2013). UNICEF (2010) argues that early marriages deny the girl-child the right to education.

Aikman and Unterhalter (2006) assert that International declarations on EFA adopted a liberal feminist approach to gender equality in which gender was equated with girls and equality was associated with parity. The declarations continue to focus on achieving gender parity in enrollment, while increasingly, emphasizing the importance of a quality education. For example, the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2010) set a goal to eliminate gender disparities in Primary and Secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. The Millennium Development Goals (2000) also focus on increasing access to Primary school education (Goal 2) and eliminating gender disparities (Goal 3). Sifuna and Chege (2006) found that women constitute about 42.1% of primary teachers and 35.4% of secondary school teachers in Kenya. They noted that the factors that have depressed women's access to schooling have restricted their entry into the teaching career. The factors include attitudes, financial constraints and cultural considerations. These have led to regional and gender disparities and of concern are the low transition and high dropout rates of girls compared to boys in the Pastoralist communities. Oloo (2003) observes that children whose parents are of high educational levels have a better chance of doing well in class work. Yara et al (2012) says that female students in pastoralist areas have been victims of diverse and turbulent circumstances that have made them to either drop out of school or obtain low quality academic grades.

UNESCO (2010), Roy and Edwina (2005) argue that provision of quality education to children in a pastoral community is a nightmare. When girls reach sexual coercion, unwanted pregnancy and early marriages may interfere with their academic performance and force them to drop out of school (Yara, 2010). The UNICEF (2010) Report on Education for All (EFA) states that two-thirds of the 759 million adults lacking literacy skills today are women. UNESCO (2009) advocated against discrimination of women and girls in governance, skills development and education. The discrimination is due to ethnicity, restrictive traditional roles for women and endemic poverty. It was reported in the same conference that Girls

from marginalized groups are often sexually harassed due to neglect by the government. Gurian (2002) argues that most of the girls are forced to travel great distances to the nearest school thus increasing the risks to their security.

Otero and Coshan (2005) argue that transition from one level of education to another has been influenced by financial constraints. The decision to waive tuition fees in Kenya for all secondary school students and offer free secondary day education in 2008 was a bold step that was expected to address the rising cost of secondary education (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Levine et al (2008) argue that though many countries have adopted free basic education to ensure girls retained in school, indirect costs in Kenya continue to be barriers to enrollment and retention of girls in secondary school education. Lee (2008) observes the cause of girls' drop out at secondary school in Kenya is attributed to reluctance of parents to buy essential school materials for the girls.

Mathooko (2009) claim that women form a smaller percentage of students enrolled in higher institutions of learning. In 2007, only 5851 female's students representing 36 percent were admitted into regular programmes while 10300 male students constituting 64 percent of the students' admitted. Gender inequality in education entails losses in the society as educating the girls enhances the well being of children, reduce fertility and improve the prospects for future generations.

Tobik (2009) observes that the males became the beneficiary of the education system and the female factor was ignored. Analysis of distribution of education on enrolment in marginalized areas reflects disparities between the sexes. The number of girls who were in schools was less than 50% of the total enrolment. The study further found high drop-out rate among the girls as they advance from primary to tertiary levels. The research findings of Tobik showed high education enthusiasm among non-maasai minorities who have migrated to the area. Kwasiga (2000)) asserts that certain customary practices such as early marriages have negative effects on education of girls in marginalized areas.

In Kenya macro-economic analysis indicate that about 50% of Kenyans live below poverty line and therefore children are unable to access basic education (Republic of Kenya, 2003). Many parents especially in rural areas and semi-arid regions and slums in urban centers have been unable to provide their children with necessary educational requirements. In such circumstances children whose parents cannot afford cost of school uniforms and other expenses tend to be absent in schools and finally drop out of schools. Most girls from poor families spend substantial amount of time running households such as siblings, fetching water, collecting firewood and some cases cooking at home (World Bank, 2004; UNESCO, 2004).

Juma et al (2012) and Jones et al (2011) note that Parent education and family interaction patterns during childhood linked more directly to the child's developing academic success and achievement-oriented attitudes. In the general social learning and social-cognitive behavior is shaped in part through observational and direct learning experiences. Those experiences lead to the formation of internalized cognitive scripts, values, and beliefs that guide and maintain behavior over time (Anderson et al, 2003)

Prazak (2007) observes that the psycho-socio status of the girl is radically transformed after the initiation ritual while Messi- Mathei (2008) reveals that tradition dictates and outweighs academic demands. The Maasai girl easily opts for her cultural ways at the expense of educational opportunities. The girls have been encultured with an attitude that formal education through the school system belongs to the little uncircumcised ones not her. Tarayia (2004) says that despite the progress that has been made to rectify gender disparities in Sub-Saharan Africa cultural practices remain barriers to girls' access to quality education in the region. UNICEF (2012) says that as long as girls do not have equal access to education, equality is far from being achieved.

Tobik (2009) states that 60% of the maasai children in rural areas do not attend formal schools and only 8% of all girls in rural areas of Maasailand have had a chance to complete

secondary school education. The Maasai Association argues that the greatest hindrance to girls receiving an education is that they are being sold into early marriage after undergoing FGM. The parents neglect the education of the girl child so that she drops from school and get married.

Bunch (2005) asserts that early marriage is a barrier to girls' education as young girls drop out of school to get married which impacts negatively on the future of girls' young generation. The practice stands in direct conflict with the goals of millennium development goals especially the promotion of basic education and fight against gender disparity. Bunch observes that the widespread practice of child marriage makes it difficult for families to escape poverty in the developing world. Clark et al (2004) found that about 30 percent of women in developing counties are married by the age of 18 years with the highest in Sub-Sahara Africa. The study shows that African women in general marry at a much earlier age than their non- African counterparts leading to early pregnancies and child bearing hence denying them the opportunity to persue higher education.

### Statement of the Problem

The great concern in this study is the continual low academic achievement of girls in secondary

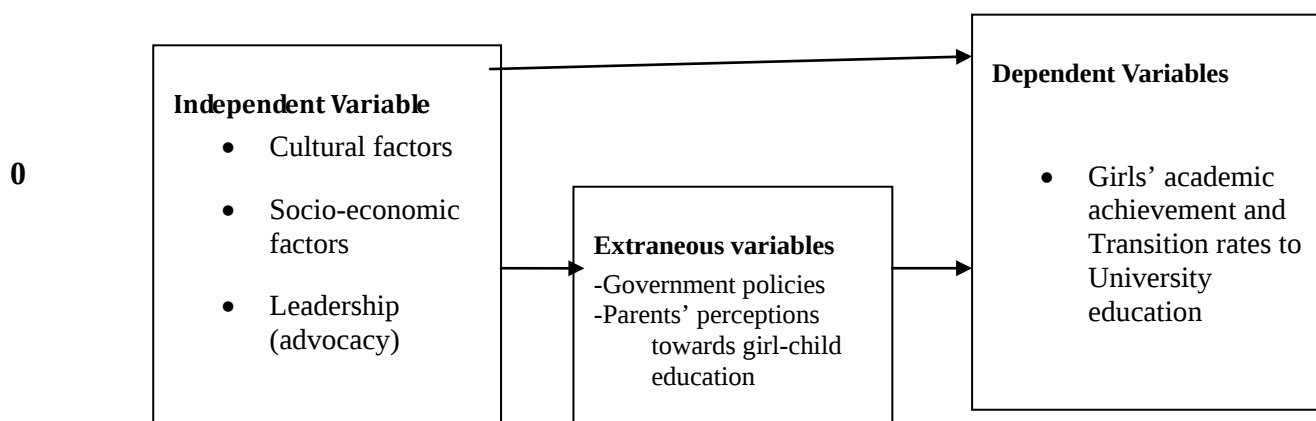
schools in Narok County. There is no girl who has ever achieved a mean grade of A or A- in KCSE in Secondary Schools in Narok County for almost three decades. The Kenya Constitution (2010, CAP 4, Article 27, clauses 3 and 8) requires that both women and men have the right to equal opportunities. The girls' failures to attain the university requirements deny them their rights to university education and equal opportunities.

UNESCO (2010) asserts that gender disparity in education persists despite many World and National policies being put in place to make gender parity a reality. Sheila (2006) says that the challenges face by women in nomadic communities in Kenya is that they have not been given sufficient attention by the government in spite of the enactment of laws and policies.

This underlines the need to determine the role of leaders and socio-cultural factors on girl's academic achievements in secondary schools in Narok County.

### Conceptual Framework

Socio-cultural factors are conceptualized to influence girls' transition rates. The relationship between independent and dependent variables of the study were conceptualized as illustrated below



**Figure 1:** The Conceptual Framework for determining influence of leaders and Socio-cultural factors on Girls' academic achievements and transition to University Education.

The conceptual frame work reflects social change in modern and traditional society. When the parents' level of education and income is high; the probability of the girls' level of academic

achievement is higher because the mediating factors of FGM and early marriages are considered to be of little benefit.

## HYPOTHESIS

The null hypothesis tested in this study was: There is no significant statistical difference between socio-cultural factors and Girls' transition rates in Secondary schools in Narok County.

## Methodology

This study adopts pragmatic world view that allows the use of a mixed methods design, an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms in tandem or concurrent so that the overall strength of the study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative. It involves mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2007).

## Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Stratified, Purposive and simple random sampling were used to select the respondents. Purposive sampling was used to pick the two constituencies of Transmara west and Narok Norh and the principals in a sample of 20 secondary schools. The schools were stratified per the constituencies. Simple random sampling was used to pick the girls for the study. The researcher identified the names of the Maasai girls in the class attendance register. The three Maasai girls from form 1, 2 and 3 classes were randomly picked giving a total of 9 girls for the focus group discussion in each school. There were a total of 180 maasai girls in the study. The sample size for 200 teachers was determined using the Sloven's formula of determining the sample (n) for finite population while the number

of schools was determined using proportionate sampling.

**Research Instruments** The researcher used questionnaires that comprise close-ended questions to obtain numerical data for testing the hypothesis in the study, thus providing the objectivity of the research. The use of focus group discussion and interview schedules provided qualitative data that reflects the actual feeling of the respondents in the community. Since the culture is surrounded by beliefs and theories, it was worth to seek the opinions direct from the participants themselves as regard to the impact of negative cultural practices on the girls' transitional rates.

## Data Analysis

The final step in the data analysis was to present the results in tables and discuss them. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages for determining the girls' enrolment and transition rates.

## Results

The data on girls' academic performance in secondary schools for the last three years was obtained through document analysis at county education office. The performance was based on Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) administered by The Kenya Nation Examination Council (KNEC) .The data were analyzed and the results are as shown in table

**Table 4.11: Analysis of Academic performance of Girls in Transmara West and Narok North Constituencies**

| Year | Category  | Frequency<br>Grades<br>(A-A <sup>-</sup> ) | Frequency<br>Grades (B-<br>B-) | Frequency<br>Grades<br>(C□-C-) | Frequency<br>Grades<br>(D□-E) | Total<br>number and<br>mean |
|------|-----------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2009 | Transmara | 0                                          | 3(0.6%)                        | 80(15.9%)                      | 321(63.7%)                    | 504(4.0)                    |
|      | Narok N   | 0                                          | 9(2.5%)                        | 86(23.6%)                      | 260(71.2%)                    | 365(3.6)                    |
| 2010 | Transmara | 0                                          | 3(0.8%)                        | 90(27%)                        | 239(71.6%)                    | 334(3.7)                    |

|                            |          |   |           |            |            |          |
|----------------------------|----------|---|-----------|------------|------------|----------|
|                            | Narok N  | 0 | 13(3.5%)  | 94(25.5%)  | 263(71.3%) | 369(3.7) |
| 2011                       | Transmaa | 0 | 8(2.2%)   | 113(34.5%) | 228(63.5%) | 359(3.8) |
|                            | Narok N. | 0 | 47(10.1%) | 180(38.5%) | 311(66.6%) | 467(4.8) |
| Average<br>(2009-<br>2011) | Transmar | 0 | 5(1.2%)   | 94(25.8%)  | 265(67.3%) | 399(3.8) |
|                            | Narok N  | 0 | 23(5.4%)  | 120(25.8%) | 263(66.3%) | 401(4.0) |

The performance of girls in both constituencies is negatively skewed towards lower grades with an average majority of girls in Transmara West 265 (67.3%) and Narok North 263 (66.3%) scoring from D to E in KCSE. The results indicate that no girl schooling in the two constituencies has ever achieved a mean grade of A or A- in KCSE. Unlike Transmara West with almost constant low performance, Narok North has been improving since 2009.

The findings revealed that examinations at the end of primary and secondary schooling form a barrier

to access to further education in Kenya. This is evident by high enrolment in primary schooling and low transition rate to the next level of schooling. Secondary schooling is characterized by low enrolment and academic performance thus hindering transition of girls to University Education.

The data from the County Education office was collected using Document analysis schedule on the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary schools in the County. The data were analyzed and the results are as shown in the table.

Table 1: Analysis of Transition Rate of Girls from Primary to Secondary schools

| Year                   | Category    | STD 8 | Form 1 | Transition rate (%) |
|------------------------|-------------|-------|--------|---------------------|
| 2009-2010              | Transmara   | 840   | 447    | 53                  |
|                        | Narok North | 1439  | 448    | 31                  |
| 2010-2011              | Transmara   | 879   | 508    | 57                  |
|                        | Narok North | 1607  | 657    | 41                  |
| Average<br>(2009-2011) | Transmara   | 860   | 478    | 55                  |
|                        | Narok North | 1523  | 553    | 36                  |

In both constituencies, the transition rate of girls has been increasing since 2009 as indicated in Table 1. However, the average transition rate of girls from primary to secondary schooling in Transmara West is higher (55%) than Narok North (36%). In average, there are fewer girls (860) who are enrolled for examinations in primary schools in Transmara West than Narok North (1523). The enrolment of girls in both

constituencies is inversely proportional to transition rate. The higher the enrolment of girls in primary school the lower their transition rate. There is lower enrolment of girls in both primary and secondary schools in Transmara west but has higher transition rate. On the other hand, Narok North has higher enrolment in both primary and secondary schools but has lower transition rates.

Once the girls get an opportunity to do examinations in standard 8, there is higher chance (55%) for them to access secondary school education in Transmara West than Narok North(36%).This indicates that more girls drop-out in primary schools in Transmara West before

reaching standard 8. But, in Narok North, majority of girls drop out after completing standard 8, thus access to secondary education is minimal. The transition rate of girls from secondary to University education is shown in table.

**Table 2: Analysis of Transition Rate of Girls from Secondary Schooling to University Education**

| Year                | Category    | No. of Form 4 girls (Candidates) | No.joined University | Transition rate (%) |
|---------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 2009                | Transmara   | 334                              | 6                    | 1.8                 |
|                     | Narok North | 495                              | 1                    | 0.2                 |
| 2010                | Transmara   | 432                              | 8                    | 1.9                 |
|                     | Narok North | 336                              | 0                    | 0                   |
| 2011                | Transmara   | 467                              | 10                   | 2.1                 |
|                     | Narok North | 359                              | 16                   | 4.5                 |
| Average (2009-2011) | Transmara   | 411                              | 10                   | 2.4                 |
|                     | Narok North | 397                              | 4                    | 1.0                 |

Generally, there are very few girls 14(3.4%) who access direct university education in both constituencies as shown in Table 2. However, the transition rate of girls from secondary schooling to university education has been increasing in both constituencies since 2009. Narok North posed an average transition rate of 4(1.0%) girls to university education for the past three years. Transmara west has a better transition rate 10(2.4%) than Narok North constituency.

pay school fees on time. Only 3(15%) and 2(10%) of the head teachers have parents who are willing to pay the school fees for their daughters. This is in agreement with the reports from the teachers that majority of the parents have negative attitude towards girls' education and do not provide adequate educational resources for them to perform better. The head teachers reported during the interview that most of the parents depend on bursaries and other donations.

Out of 20 head teachers interviewed in both constituencies, 15(75%) said that parents do not

**Table 3: Results of Pearson correlation Test on Cultural factors and girls' participation in schooling**

|                                             | Maasai girls engaged in sexual experiences. | Sexual practices by maasai girls lower their academic performance. | Teenage pregnancies in the community is common | FGM influences early marriages of maasai girls |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Maasai girls engaged in sexual experiences. | 1                                           | .294**                                                             | .431**                                         | .376**                                         |
|                                             |                                             | .000                                                               | .000                                           | .000                                           |
|                                             | 181                                         | 181                                                                | 181                                            | 181                                            |

|                                                                    |        |        |        |        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Sexual practices by maasai girls lower their academic performance. | .294** | 1      | .311** | .219** |
|                                                                    | .000   |        | .000   | .003   |
|                                                                    | 181    | 181    | 181    | 181    |
| Teenage pregnancies in the community is common                     | .431** | .311** | 1      | .223** |
|                                                                    | .000   | .000   |        | .003   |
|                                                                    | 181    | 181    | 181    | 181    |
| FGM influences early marriages of maasai girls                     | .376** | .219** | .223** | 1      |
|                                                                    | .000   | .003   | .003   |        |
|                                                                    | 181    | 181    | 181    | 181    |

From the results in table 3, the p-values in all the rows and columns (0.000 or 0.003) are less than the significance confidence interval level of alpha 0.05, thus the paired variables has significant associations. This means that engagement of girls in sexual practices lower their academic performance and leads to teenage pregnancies. The results implied that FGM has linkage to early marriages of the maasai girls. It also has association to girls' engagement to sexual practices and teenage pregnancies as indicated by the Pearson correlation test of 0.00 or 0.003 which is less than the significance confidence level of alpha 0.05

## Discussion

The research findings revealed that when resources are scarce and the children to be supported in schools are many, the parents ignore the girl- child. The head teachers assert that the maasai community give emphasis on the boys because they are seen as a means of continuity in the lineage while the girl is on transit.

This finding agrees with Levine et al (2008) and Sheila (2006) that regional differences still exist in terms of access to quality education and that the target for Education for All by 2015 may not be met in pastoral communities unless efforts are made to change the trend of access to education for marginalized and hard to reach children. National examinations in Kenya contribute to barriers to girls' access to higher education. The

girls drop out of school because they cannot perform well in the tests thus being frustrated.

This research has also demonstrated that parents in Narok County still fear that their daughters may drop out of school due to pregnancy and may also transfer the family wealth to their marital homes. The parents therefore become reluctant to pay school fees and provide less attention for the girl-child education. Atsiaya (2010) study established that more girls get pregnant in schools and consequently discourage other girls.

Most of the principals argue that the Maasai community does not observe children's rights to education as enshrined in the constitution of Kenya (2010). This assertion is in support to the study of Muola (2000) which established that stereotypic gender dispositions do not favour the girl-child education. The study findings agree with Otero and Coshan (2005) who blame the decline in secondary school enrolment on high subsidized education costs. The assertion of Omoraka (2001) agree with the findings that children whose parents are poor lack personal effects thus reducing their concentration . Couple with poverty and attitude, the provision of quality education for girls in marginalize communities are far from the attainment.

## Conclusion

The enrollment of girls in Transmara West Constituency has been declining at the rate of

40% in Primary and 10% in Secondary schools for the last three years while the enrollment in Narok North has been increasing at the rate of 10% in both Primary and Secondary schools.

For every 15 girls enrolled for KCPE in class 8, only 1 girl join secondary school in Transmara West. However, in Narok North, for every 10 girls enrolled in class 8, only 1 join secondary school. It implies that there is high rate of girls dropping out of school in Narok County.

The father's level of education influences girl's academic performance ( $p=0.049$ ). Majority of the parents in Narok County are illiterate with the mothers being in the lead 81(45.0%) and the fathers 78(43.3%) thus motivation to educate girls is low.

FGM and early marriages are common among the girls who are in primary schools especially class seven who are suppose to prepare for their KCPE. There is statistic significant relationship between FGM and Early marriages in the county. Soon after FGM, majority of the girls drop out of school and get married to old rich men as second or third wives.

The leaders who are expected to enforce the legislations are part of participants in the cultural practices Majority of women are not aware of their rights and the few who are aware are suppressed by outlawed cultural practices. The findings indicate that most mothers do not decide about the education of their daughters nor consulted when selling cattle, but instead the father is the sole decision maker in the family.

## Recommendations

The study recommended that the local leaders together with other stakeholders should enforce women and girls' rights through participatory/advocacy for education-in-culture and culture-in- education.

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