

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FOREST POLICIES OF PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

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Abstract. Pakistan has very low forest cover, but these forests are very diverse in nature and of significant importance for the livelihood security of millions of rural people who live in and around these forests. Policies, institutions and processes form the context within which individuals and households construct and adapt livelihood strategies, on the other hand these institutionally shaped livelihood strategies may have an impact on the sustainability of natural resource use. The present paper aims to critically analyse the forest policies of Pakistan. Implications for sustainable forest management and livelihood security of forest dependent people are also given. The first forest policy of Pakistan was announced in 1955 followed by the forest policies of 1962, 1975, 1980, 1988 as part of the National Agricultural Policy, 1991, and the latest in 2001. Most of the forest policies were associated with the change of government. There was much rhetoric in some recent policies regarding the concept of “participation” and “sustainable livelihoods” but in practice these policies are also replica of the previously top-down, autocratic and non-participatory forest policies. Pakistan needs to develop a sustainable, workable, research-based, and people-friendly forest policy enable to catering to the changing needs of stakeholders including government.

Keywords: forest communities, forest management, forest policy, sustainable livelihoods

1. Introduction

Pakistan has about 4.2 million ha covered by forests, which is equivalent to 4.8 percent of the total land area (Government of Pakistan 2003), which is very low when compared with 30 percent for the world (FAO 2001). Total forests area of different provinces and territories of Pakistan viz. Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab, North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Azad Kashmir and Northern areas is 0.92, 0.33, 0.69, 1.21, 0.42, and 0.66 million ha respectively (Government of Pakistan 2003). This shows that most of the forest distribution is in northern part of the country (40 percent of country's total forests are in NWFP, 15.7 percent in Northern Areas and 6.5 percent in Azad Kashmir). There is a great variety of species because of the country's great physiographic and climatic contrasts. The forests of the country are of various types such as (a) littoral and swamp forests, (b) tropical dry deciduous forests, (c) tropical thorn forests, (d) sub-tropical broad-leaved evergreen forests, (e) sub-tropical pine forests, (f) Himalayan moist temperate forests, (g) Himalayan dry temperate forests, (h) sub-alpine forests and (i) alpine scrub.

The predominating species are of coniferous type (Ahmed and Mahmood, 1998; Qazi 1994; Poffenberger 2000; Suleri 2002).

Forests are an integral part of daily lives of the rural population living close to forested areas of NWFP. The benefits local people enjoy from forests include firewood, timber, forest soil, pastures, raw goods for cottage industries, medicinal/edible plants and royalty payments. Forest depending communities are among the poorest segments of the society, heavily dependent on the natural environment for their livelihoods. Degradation of the forests affects the rural livelihoods, most strongly of those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale (Durr 2002; Khan and Naqvi 2000; Warner 2000). The choice of livelihood strategies is driven in part by people's preferences and priorities. But it is also influenced by the policies and by the formal and informal institutions and processes that impinge on people's everyday life (Baumann and Sinha 2001; Munir 2002).

The issues of sustainable livelihoods and forest degradation are ranked highly on the international discourse. Attempts have been made to document linkage of these issues together in a "downward spiral" – un-sustainability of livelihoods is seen as a cause of forest loss, and forest loss contributes to maintain or even increase poverty. There is nowadays a broad consensus about the multi-dimensional and dynamic character of livelihoods. Growth is not the only route to livelihoods security, and aspects related to distribution of assets (for example land), vulnerability and human development are proving equally important (Hobley 1987; Sneddon 2002). There is increasing recognition that efforts in economic development, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and social equity cannot be successful in the absence of appropriate governance structures and processes. Governance systems define the relationship between government, civil society and the private sector. Over the past decade, two major and seemingly contradictory shifts have been affecting forestry, among other sectors: globalisation on the one hand, and decentralisation on the other. Forest management is being influenced by freer flows of labour, capital, goods and information between countries. It is also being affected by more pluralistic institutional arrangements, the devolution of responsibilities to a local level and the adoption of participatory processes within countries. The roles and responsibilities of government, the private sector and civil society are being realigned and the relationships between them are changing (FAO 2001).

In order to utilise the potential of forests in poverty alleviation, forest policies of many countries as well as the international lending institutes are being revised to be more of a policy on forestry for rural development and poverty alleviation (Dupar and Badenoch 2002; Larson 2002; Shackleton et al. 2002). Hence, forestry becomes an instrument of policy rather than an object of the policy. This new trend in shaping forest policies not only has a potential to maintain a balance among four pillars of sustainable development, but also to secure sustainable livelihood. Pakistan is also attempting to adopt this trend with the financial assistance of some international development agencies. Thus forestry sector in Pakistan makes an interesting case

study to assess the role of environmental policies in fostering sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

2. Critical Analysis of the Forest Policies of Pakistan

The term “forest policy” is used in many different contexts, from a general statement of overall aim, goal or general objective of forest resource management for a country, to a fairly detailed prescription of a course of action with specified objectives for a rather narrowly defined field (Fraser 2002). In this paper the title “forest policy” is used as specific forest policy promulgated by the Government of Pakistan from time to time.

A brief review of the past forest policies is given in this section.

2.1. FOREST POLICY 1894

Pakistan emerged as an independent country in 1947 and after independence timber supply was cut off from India and pressure on Pakistani forests for timber supply was increased. Pakistan inherited the prevalent forest policy made by the Government of British India in 1894. The management of forests in the Indian subcontinent was a critical issue for the British colonial government, which recognised the importance of forests as a resource with the potential to yield significant economic returns (Ahmed and Mahmood 1998; Qazi 1994). After colonisation of the Indian subcontinent, around the middle of the nineteenth century, British started with their land settlement process. The state extended its control over forests through Indian Forest Act of 1878, and as such nationalised one fifth of India’s land area. Under this legislation punitive sanctions were introduced against transgressors, and a forest department was set up to police the forests in addition to regulating tree felling in the areas brought under government supervision (Banuri and Marglin 1993; Hassan 2001) The spirit of that act continued in the Indian Forest Policy of 1894. The forest service traditionally placed greater emphasis on holding of government control and the enforcement of edicts than on the needs of the communities who lived in and around forests (ICIMOD 1998). As a result, existing community rights to forest resources became proscribed. The then existing Indian Forest Policy of 1894, setting guidelines for forest conservancy, was adopted and continued to be implemented by the Government of Pakistan until 1955.

This policy resulted in a small, well-preserved public forest estate, but provided nothing for improving and extending forests. It also lacked participation of forest communities, and allowed forest rights and concessions to multiply to the point where right holders’ demands could not be satisfied without damaging forest growth. Ahmed and Mahmood (1998) assumed that this policy was an outcome of the normative-autocratic approach of the administrators and foresters trained and experienced in colonial tradition. While Khan and Naqvi (2000) commented “this

form of colonial governance was effective only so far as the administration did not misuse its power and community needs for forest products were relatively limited. In a more fundamental sense, it was flawed. The top down, non-participatory approach drove a wedge between communities and their birthright by denying them to say in its management and subjecting them to legal process, which was often arbitrary. The unprecedented levels of degradation that country is witnessing currently, partly has its roots in it. Alienated from their resource base, communities are becoming profligate in its use.”

2.2. NATIONAL FOREST POLICY 1955

The first forest policy agenda of the Government of Pakistan was issued in 1955. The guidelines for the first policy were provided by the then Central Board of Forestry constituted in 1952. This policy aimed at increasing the area under forests. With the introduction of canal irrigation system, the land (closer to the canals) was reserved for raising plantations. Unused government lands were given to the provincial forest departments to grow forests. Extensive linear plantations were to be established along roads, canals and railways. Some new irrigated and linear plantations were established (FSMP 2003). But as the policy had not addressed the problems of hill and scrub forests, these continued to deteriorate. Forests could hardly meet right holders demands for timber and livestock grazing. The policy also ignored the pressing need to afforest denuded hills and to manage watersheds and rangelands. Forest resources, particularly in the uplands, became rapidly depleted and the policy was realised to be inadequate. Ahmed and Mahmood (1998) wrote “this policy failed to play an effective role in monitoring the policy process and policy implementation. The professional norms of elite foresters trained in the British tradition continued to mould forest policies. The consultation process, if any, remained confined to professional and administrative circles.”

In 1958 the first martial law in Pakistan was imposed. The then army chief took over the control of the government and started the process of reviewing and updating the previous policies including forest policy. Thus the prevalent forest policy of 1955 was revised and replaced by a new forest policy in 1962.

2.3. NATIONAL FOREST POLICY 1962

The National Forest Policy 1962 (like forest policy of 1955) was formulated entirely by representatives from federal and provincial governments. In this policy some unconventional suggestions were made. These included: shifting population out of the hills, acquisition of rights of tree removal and grazing from public forests, compulsory growing of a minimum number of trees on private lands, encouraging farm forestry by the Agriculture Department through research, and imposing tax on highly eroded private lands. To boost forest production, it encouraged fast-growing species and shortened rotations. This policy went on to recommend moving

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people from mountains to plains in the critical watershed areas and else where consolidation of scattered homesteads to currently located villages. While some suggestions were implemented, others such as the shifting of populations were found to be impractical, as it would have adversely affected the livelihood of local communities. There was no substantial increase in forest area or production and forests continued to deteriorate as demand for wood and other products continued to increase (Ahmed and Mehmood 1998; ICIMOD 1998).

This policy also emphasised the management of public forests and was particularly concerned with the expansion of area under forests. The primary objectives of forest management, as envisaged in this policy were generation of revenue and maximisation of yield from forest. These forest policies served to set the tone for a top-down approach towards forest management, and reinforced the notion that communities had no interest in forest management and no stake in preservation of the public forests in particular.

2.4. NATIONAL FOREST POLICY, 1975

In 1971 the East wing of Pakistan was separated (which is now Bangladesh) and a new (democratic) government took over the control of Pakistan, in this background the new forest policy was formulated in 1975. The policy marked an important departure from the first two policies in that the drafting committee for the policy included representatives from both governmental and non-governmental institutions. This policy was somewhat “people friendly” policy, in that it recognised that the management of *guzara* forests (private forests which are managed by the state for the owners) should be entrusted to owners themselves, with state taking only supervisory responsibilities (Hassan 2001; ICIMOD 1998). The policy recommended the formation of owners’ cooperative societies, but recommended that forest harvesting should be carried out entirely by public sector corporations. According to Ahmed and Mehmood (1998), “the only policy that has been people friendly is that of 1975, which emphasized awareness raising and recommended use of negative legal measures as a last resort.”

In 1977 the then government was overthrown by the military, and the new (martial law) government started the procedure of analyzing the conditions of forests, rangelands and other natural resources. As a result the new forest policy was promulgated in Pakistan in 1980.

2.5. NATIONAL POLICY ON FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE 1980

The National Policy on Forestry and Wildlife 1980 was formed as a part of the 1980 National Agricultural Policy. After stressing the inadequacy of forest area, shortage of fuel-wood and timber, and the deplorable condition of watersheds and rangelands, it provided a listing of general statements on future forestry; suggested improvement measures included; planting of fast-growing species and fuel- wood

plantations outside public forests, involvement of people for tree plantation and nature conservation through motivation, coordinated development at provincial and national levels, creation of national parks, departmental forest harvesting on scientific lines and production of medicinal herbs on wild-lands (FSMP 2003). Reasons for and approaches to achieve these objectives were never given and the policy lacked proper incentives. Resources continued to deteriorate under increasing population pressure and insufficient reforestation efforts.

In 1988, the new (democratic) government constituted a National Commission on Agriculture, which also made some recommendations on forestry. Most of the recommendation of the Commission were finally incorporated in the 1991 Forest Policy.

2.6. PAKISTAN FOREST POLICY 1991

The revival of interest in forestry as a distinct discipline has much to do with the influence of donor agencies who had become prominent players in the development initiatives in Pakistan in the eighties. The policy of 1991 was influenced to a considerable extent by donor agencies involved in implementing forestry programmes at the grass root level without necessarily relying on any support from the forest departments. This policy emerged after a consultative workshop of various stakeholders. It called for multiple uses and the consideration of social and (particularly) environmental objectives, although it remained vague about the means for achieving those objectives (Ahmed and Mehmood 1998). The main objectives of this policy, which was announced as part of the National Agricultural Policy were; to meet the country's environmental needs and requirements of timber, fuel-wood, fodder and other products by raising the afforested area from 5.4 percent to 10 percent by 2006; to promote social forestry programmes; and to conserve biological diversity and maintain ecological balance through conservation of natural forests, reforestation and wildlife habitat improvement (FSMP 2003).

This policy contained guidelines for forest conservancy. While providing for government ownership of forest lands and thereby creating a small area of public forests under the provincial Forest Department, the policy gave vast discretionary powers to the officials of Forest Departments in determining what they deemed "reasonable forest requirement." This policy was also perceived as reflecting "the colonial form of governance these laws and institutional structures are meant to increasing the government's income, depriving people of their rights on natural resources, and suppressing the people's aspirations through centralization of bureaucratic powers." (SAFI 2000).

In October 1999, the military once again took over the control of the government and General Musharraf became new chief executive of the country. Immediately after the coup the General announces his 7-point-programme. The devolution of power to the grass root level was one of such point. According to Geiser (2000) "the military coup led by General Musharraf added an additional dimension to the

already complex forestry reforms.” The new government again reviewed the forest policy and the outcome of this process is the new National Forest Policy of 2001.

2.7. NATIONAL FOREST POLICY (DRAFT) 2001

The new Forest Policy of Pakistan was prepared in 2001, but it is still waiting its formal approval from the parliament. This policy covers the renewable natural resources (RNR) of Pakistan i.e. forests, watersheds, rangelands, wildlife, biodiversity and their habitats. The policy seeks to launch a process for eliminating the fundamental causes of the depletion of RNR through the active participation of all the concerned agencies and stakeholders, to realise the sustainable development of the resources. It is an umbrella policy providing guidelines to the federal government, provincial governments and territories for the management of their RNR. In consonance with it the provincial and district governments may devise their own policies in accordance with their circumstances. The goal of this policy is to foster the sustainable development of RNR of Pakistan, for the maintenance and rehabilitation of its environment and the enhancement of the sustainable livelihoods of its rural masses especially women, children and other deprived groups.

This policy also stressed the stricter control over the public forests. According to Government of Pakistan (2001), “this policy shall encourage the provincial governments to create, effectively managed protected area networks in areas under their control seeking the needed financial and technical assistance from the federal government.” But at the same time this policy recognised the importance of community involvement in the resource management. “Appropriate institutional mechanisms shall be devised for the collaborative management of such protected areas with the local communities in order to give them an economic and environmental stake in the endeavor” and “in the poverty alleviation and other development programmes, high priority shall be given to integrated land use projects for the sustainable rehabilitation of RNR with the participation of organized local communities. Such projects not only provide employment to the rural poor but also improve the environment and increase the supply of firewood and fodder” Government of Pakistan (2001).

2.8. PROVINCIAL FOREST POLICY 2001

According to constitution of Pakistan, forestry is a provincial mandate and the provinces can make and implement their own forest policies within the framework of the national forest policy. In this context the new forest policy of the North West Frontier Province (which contains more than 40 percent of the country’s remaining forests) was announced in 2001, in which the new participatory approach in forest management finally achieved legalised status. Participation of local communities, promotion of private sector investment, and recommendations for the revision of

the forestry legislation has been included. Illegal harvesting and the local need for fuelwood and construction timber have been recognised as core problems. The policy for the first time not only addressed the traditional forests but also the management of rangelands, wastelands, watersheds and farm forestry. In this regard, the document can be seen as a trendsetter in Asia (Suleri 2002a). Nevertheless, a non-governmental organisation *Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad* (SAFI) criticised the new policy as a completely donor-driven document, giving no more than lip service to real issues, and as such that would not lead to a real change in the forest department's attitude towards local people (Steimann 2003).

2.9. PROVINCIAL FOREST ORDINANCE 2002

It is a proven fact that none of the policy initiative or the policy in itself can be successful and effective without a legal basis. The North West Frontier Province forest ordinance, which was promulgated on June 10, 2002, defines the institutional details for forestry in the province, following the guidelines given by the Forest Policy 2001. The territorial staff of the forest department can now carry weapons on duty for self-defence, although only range officers are allowed to open fire. It is interesting to see that the ordinance also provides a legal cover for the participatory approach of village land use planning and joint forest management and describes the staff's involvement in the work with communities. For many observers, this is a serious contradiction that will result in a status quo of the present situation. Several civil society organisations unanimously rejected the ordinance and held public protests against it. SAFI even announced to observe June 10 as a "black day" (Steimann 2003; Suleri 2002a).

It is pertinent to mention here that so far the existing laws (including the North West Frontier Province Forest Ordinance) are punitive in nature. They provide only penalties for contravention of their provisions but do not contain incentives for compliance, as had been recommended in the National Conservation Strategy, Forestry Sector Master Plan, and forest policies of the Punjab and North West Frontier Province. According to Ahmed and Mehmood (1998), "most forest policies, until recently, have viewed people as the prime threat to the forests, and have attempted to exclude groups other than the government from decision making." This approach did not only affect the sustainability of the livelihood strategies of the local people, but also increased the vulnerability of the marginalised sections of the communities. It ultimately led to unsustainable management of natural resources and forest depletion. Suleri (2002a) writes "the Forest Ordinance of NWFP contradicts the spirit of different policy measures. It is punitive in nature and tend to increase the policing role of forest departments." For instance, the proposed NWFP forest ordinance designates forest department staff a uniform force bearing arms and also enhances their police powers, which go against the intent of the forest policy that enshrines the principles of participatory social forestry. Similarly, the discretionary powers of forest officers to revoke a community-based organisation

(CBO)/Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) agreement as suggested in this ordinance would result in uncertainty and insecurity among different JFMCs/CBOs.

3. Discussion

Analysing the forest policies of Pakistan, it is found that, most of the policy initiatives, until recently, were aimed at forest conservation and ignored the livelihood provisions for local communities. However, even the conservation aspect of those policies was never implemented effectively. People's participation in plantation and management of forests was not given sufficient attention and social and cultural aspects of forest management were ignored. The roots of this approach can be traced back to the colonial era.

Till 1975 all previous forest policies (1894, 1955 and 1962) were top-down, autocratic, aimed at saving public forests, increasing forest area by acquiring the land under the control of forest department, enhancing public forest yield and creating more revenues from the forests. The policy resolution of 1894 depicted the sole objective of managing state-owned forests for public benefit which meant restriction and regulation of rights and privileges of the local forest dependent population. The top-down (colonial) approach of governance was also reflected in the first national forest policies of 1955 and 1962. These policies recommended greater powers to the forest department. The policy of 1962 recommended not only the enhancement of penalties under the Forest Act but also demanded magisterial powers to the forest officers. The 1975 forest policy was the first policy which recognised the people living in and around forest areas as stakeholders. However this policy was more political in nature than being public service oriented. This policy remained theoretical whereas practically the attitude of an average official of the forest department remained the same as set by previous policies. He liked to exhibit more authoritarian and possessive behaviour, quite similar to a policeman. There was less checks and balances on the officials of the forest department regarding their own illegal actions.

The 1980 forest policy was developed under the umbrella of the military government. This policy also recognised the importance of the involvement of local people in tree plantation but at the same time it limited the rights of local people by bringing more land under the control of state and establishment of national parks. In 1991 there was again democratic government in the country and it presented a "donor driven" policy. Its focus was on meeting the environmental needs of country in a sustainable manner. Quite similar to some previous policies it was also targeted to increase forest production and area. This policy generated concepts like forestry extension and appointment of green man (forest extensionist) who was entrusted to educate farmers to develop farm forestry and involvement of local people in the forest management. The draft forest policy of 2001 provided the concepts such as active participation of stakeholders, sustainable forest management, sustainable

livelihoods etc. But this policy continued negative aspects such as encouraging the police like behaviour of the forest department.

The analysis also depicts that the past forest policies (1955, 1962, 1975 and 1980) were associated more or less with the change of the governments to meet the government's political objectives. However the policies of 1991 and 2001, are claimed to be participatory, but the civil society organisations blamed these to be "donor driven" policies, ignoring the ground level realities and needs of the local population

In fact policy initiatives cannot achieve their objectives unless and until the sustainable livelihood of stakeholders is not taken care of. According to Geiser (2000), "in practice, forest resources are made inaccessible for the poor and marginalised sections of the communities, whereas the influential along with members of the timber mafia consumed these resources at their own sweet will." This dichotomy created a sense of lack of ownership among the marginalised sections not only adding to their miseries but also encouraged them to adapt illegal means to meet their needs from forest resources.

The dilemma with most of the natural resources management policies in Pakistan in the recent past has been the absence of attention to human dimension aspects and a focus on a "pro-conservation" approach even at the cost of local livelihoods. Part of the problem stemmed from the non-participatory culture that prevailed in Pakistan. The trends are changing now and today the world is no longer tied up in the "conservation" versus "development" debate. Rather a new approach "conservation as well as development" has now emerged (FAO 2001; Shackleton et al. 2002; Wily 1997). The proponents of this approach include many governments, international donors and international lending agencies are revisiting their "vision and mission statements" to reposition themselves in a scenario that leads to development without distorting the conservation of natural resources.

On the face of it, this trend seems very good and in this context the journey of forest policies in Pakistan that started from The Forest Policy of 1894 to the draft National Forest Policy of 2001 (at federal) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) Forest Policy 2001 (at the provincial level) is a giant leap. However, for any development effort to be the pro-poor, good governance is a must. Unfortunately, Pakistan (like other developing countries) lacks good governance. Although during the formulation of new policies, the consultation with a group of experts has become a common practice during recent past, yet the consultation process remains confined to the folds of professional circles. Thus, the policies become stronger on technical consideration but lacking the required flexibility to make them work in real life situations, presenting multiple sets of actors and factors.

Consequently, the stakeholders often find themselves in a situation where state policies either do not support or have harmful affects on their livelihood strategies. It is in this scenario that policies do not meet the expectations of people who in turn are forced to utilise the natural resources unsustainably to secure their livelihoods. Consequently neither the developmental nor the conservational objectives are met.

4. Implications for the Sustainable Forest Management and Livelihoods Security

Following suggestions are made regarding the forest policy for sustainable forest management and livelihoods security of forest dependent people

- The forest policy should have foundation of carefully organised policy research studies conducted by the academia of both from forestry and social science disciplines. These studies will ensure the involvement of grass root level people and civil society organisations.
- There is need to put people at the centre of development. This focus on people is equally important at higher levels (when thinking about the achievement of objectives such as poverty reduction, economic reform or sustainable development) as it is at the micro or community level. The forest policy should ensure poverty alleviation of forest dwellers through utilisation of systematic approach of development i.e. training in alternate vocations (non timber forest products), providing education, health and infrastructure development etc.
- Provision for the identification, training and involvement of volunteer forest managers, who should join hands with the government for the management of forests, may be incorporated in the future policy.
- Forestry is a provincial responsibility in Pakistan with planning, execution and implementation of forests and range management programmes vested in provincial forest departments. Yet policy is a federal responsibility. The lack of coordination between federal and provinces leads to a fragmented forestry sector, with provinces having autonomy in forestry matters, the sector as a whole lacks cohesion and unity of efforts. It is therefore suggested that the measures should be taken to improve coordination between federal and provincial governments.
- Frequent change of forest policies indicates the lack of political will. The policies are framed by the government officials or some selected “government friendly” NGOs without taking care for the local population. Such policies are changed with the change of governments. If the policy is not sustainable in itself then how can it ensure sustainable forest management? It is not advisable to change horses in the midstream.
- The forest policy should be flexible enough to be adopted according to the local situation. It is therefore suggested that the management of state forests should be decentralised at the district level, so that the forest management can be done according to the prevailing local condition.
- Livelihood would be secured only if policies work with people in a way that is congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environment and ability to adapt. People, rather than the resources they use or governments that serve them, are the priority concern. Adhering to this principle would not only ensure provision of sustainable livelihood but would also enhance involvement of all sections of society in sustainable natural resources management. In this

context, it should be realised that generation of income and employment is as important as generating government revenue alone; and forestry should be an instrument of sustainable forest management policy rather than its object, otherwise, the poor will remain mired in poverty pushing us into a spiral of over exploitation in the wake of all forest policy failures.

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