

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Building a Sustainable Startup; what needs to be done?



The 2ND Innovation and Technology Forum
December 2021

PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

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The 3rd Edition of the Innovation and Tech forum was organized by Media Convergence in partnership with the UNDP through the Funguo Innovation Programme.

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The second Innovation and Tech Forum conducted December 3rd 2021, was a good learning experience on the best approaches of conducting the forum. The challenges from the coordination, implementation and convening itself was stimulating onto applying the best way forward onto the next forum. Arising from aspects beyond our control, we had delayed the meeting a good one hour after the set time resulting into most attending participants leaving before the event had started, same applied with the promoted online links of the event which was to be aired through Zoom and a livestream link shared on Social Media. We would like to acknowledge and appreciate all participants who really wished to be part but were not able to. More so to those who were able to participate and stayed from the start to the end of the event. While we apologize for the inconveniences imposed, we are on the other hand happy that it had provided worthy lessons to build onto the next forum.

We extend sincere gratitude to our custodian, Dr. Amos Nungu – the Director General of Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) for gracing us with his presence and opening of the event, the United Nations Development Programme's Funguo Programme team led by Mr. Joseph Manirakiza, the guest speakers Mr. Brian Paul Mnyampi – Business Consultant and Technology Enthusiast, Ms. Catherinerose Barretto – Co-Founder, Binary Institute of Technology (BIT), Dr. Erasto Mlyuka – CEO, Dar Tecnohama Business Incubator (DTBI) and Mr. Nguvu Komando – Director of Digital Services, Vodacom Tanzania.

The forum has been made possible from the combined efforts of all the mentioned above plus efforts of the steering committee, advisors and Media Convergence team.

The Steering Committee
April. 2022



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A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

Opening the session, the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) Director General, Dr Amos Nungu shared that “continuing where we ended, we expect that stakeholders can work hand to hand with the government in facilitating and creating supportive environment for startups. What we want is that all these startups that hit the market today have to survive in the long run and have them grow into bigger companies”.

Dr. Nungu added that, “we have brought together innovation and technology stakeholders to this platform to exchange experiences, to discuss with start-ups how they are going to build an industrial economy, and each by their chance to contribute in the technology and innovation sector”.

DR. AMOS NUNGU

Director General – COSTECH



These discussions are healthy for the ecosystem, and we at COSTECH, are tasked in creating conducive environment, which will help into transforming innovators and help them grow into business owners



Introduction

The topic theme for the second Innovation and Tech forum was “Building a sustainable startup – what needs to be done?”. This thematic topic was drawn from the discussions from the first forum which has already been published in the report titled, “The birth and highlights of the First Innovation and Tech Forum”. All these discussions are building on enabling the environment for youth and women led Innovation ventures. The meeting was held December 3, 2021. It was attended by representatives from the government and private sectors and several startups from the ecosystem.

The discussions format was divided in two sections. Of the key experts, pioneers from the ecosystem represented by three guest speakers as presented through the report and the enablers of the ecosystem represented by UNDP’s Funguo Programme Manager and Vodacom’s Director of Digital Services. There are very interesting advices that which startup founders and business owners can benefit from. Some of these suggestions can easily be taken for granted but needs serious consideration for serious planning. One thing which has been of common opinion from all speakers was the need collaboration between players no matter how infant the stage towards enhancing these ventures.

The highlight of this meeting and one of the immediate outcomes is Vodacom’s commitment into finding ways to engage more startups in issued tenders to already well-established business and organizations. The meeting concluded with a question-and-answer session on how to catalyse actions and processes to help startup innovators in building sustainable innovative solutions.

About the Forum

The Tech and Innovation Forum is designed to establish a consistent platform for small time innovators and small-time tech champions to meet with the seasoned players of the ecosystem from the private sector, public sector, respective authorities and stakeholders so as to learn, share, network, publish and have access to available opportunities from the ecosystem. The forum will provide a venue for facilitating interaction, establishment of networks between start-up innovators with successful tech innovators, and multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to identify and examine ecosystem gaps for start-ups and harness the potentials of technology and innovation in the Tanzanian Community towards solving different them by applying technological powered innovations. Among identified needs from the players in the field, is a common aspiration to have a consistent platform to meet and network in a productive development-oriented approach and mutually acquire mutual opportunities in a variety of forms in one way or another.

Further details in regards to the forum on goals, vision, mission and aspirations of the forum can be found explained comprehensively in the first report of the Innovation and Tech Forum.

Part One: Discussion Highlights



From the left is the Steering Committee Member of the InnoTech Forum and facilitator of the second forum, Ms. Neema Magimba, Dr. Erasto Mlyuka the CEO, Dar Tecnohama Business Incubator (DTBI), Mr. Brian Paul Mnyampi a Business Consultant and Technology Enthusiast and Ms. Catherinerose Barretto the Co-Founder, Binary Institute of Technology (BIT).

This session brought on board three guest speakers as identified by their names above. The session highlighted four matters related to sustainability of startups; the role of human capital, the sustainability of women in technology, the role of strategic partnership in creating sustainable startups, and the challenges that startups face towards being sustainable in the technology consigned world. The discussion explored thoroughly on how the four matters relate and how startups can benefit from each. Their focus and contributions to the topic focused on solution oriented approaches of recurring challenges facing the majority of startup founders and early established business ventures.

Leveraging on "Collaborations" for Startups

Choosing the right partners to work with versus paying for skills/talent

It was raised and emphasized on considering key qualities when choosing partners to work and collaborate with. The qualities have to be those which complements one's qualities in a way that combined-skills efforts would reap positive results. Catherinerose started by giving a practical example drawing from a football team, that for any coach or manager of a team usually focuses on the skills and performance of a particular player before including them in their so called "winning team" and that's what creates best teams. She further highlighted skills are necessary and important and that while one might not have money to bring in talents for their innovations and startups journey they should be creative and find ways and incentives which can compensate on the right required skills. She shared that bringing in talents doesn't mean having them full time but you may contact them for consultation roles where they can provide you with insights on how to operate and create a sustainable startup.

"If you flip around and think about it, you might find that you need a solid base and when you think about yourself as a founder you have to think of where your gaps are," said Catherinerose. She highlighted that a great challenge is that most Founders and Developers take on different hats like IT, Finance, HR and Legal manager etc. and the likes hence pilling duties on themselves. Instead, they should identify the gaps and see how they can find the talent to help in setting up a strong foundation of their innovation.

Speaking of creating the startup culture, she explained "you don't have to let your funders define what your startup culture is." As an innovator Catherinerose says you have to define your startup culture from which she believes when you define your vision and mission it gives you a chance to define which kind of talents you want in building and establishing a sustainable startup. And it is from this where you can bring in the people who believe the same thing as you and have a strong drive in building the sustainable startup that you pictured. She also, further shared that as a founder and that you look to work with people, analyze what is to be done and then put up a support structure by defining what roles are to be handled by who. From this try to hire people who are different from you in terms of skills and performance.



*Ms. Catherinerose Barretto
the Co-Founder, Binary Institute of
Technology (BIT)*



Mr. Brian Paul Mnyampi a Business Consultant and Technology Enthusiast

Leveraging on value for sustainability of a startup

It was explained that capital is vital for the sustainability of the startup, but capital is not the only key value compared to what the key partners and strategic collaborations can bring on board. Brian explained that Founders (innovators) need to define what skills are key and direly needed on aboard. Sustainability always dependent on understanding what the gap is and whom you want to fit in. And more so an innovator needs to keep it in mind that the search differs from looking for a partner to looking for an advisor or mentor. Identifying gaps, will help determine which category you wish to fit for a strategic collaborations.

Brian further exemplified by explaining that partnerships do not have to always be with successful targets or provide some immediate stakes or shares. Partnerships can simply be with those in early stages, sometimes of similar startups stages or colleagues/teammates with different attributes and capacity which complement each other to adding value of the startup. "The basics for any partnership should be about exchanging values otherwise that partnership will not last long as one must yield due lack of the targeted value," he elaborated.

Brian shared that a challenge to many startups is that they always think of getting help from outside and that they are to be supported; but in truth, asking for support every time downgrades your value. So, whether it is an idea or a startup already and you are sure that if you think this can actually work then you can bring it on the table for discussion; "In most cases, the majority of founders and young people are always eager to sit on a table and have discussion with someone who they think might offer value and leave out their peers or colleagues," he added.

Sighting from his experience, he further explained that he had when listening to a person who is pitching an idea, he usually is very impressed when a person pitching the idea talks about what impact they intend to bring to the community instead of what support or people they bring on board to make their idea work. Thinking of an impact nurtures in growth and sustainability of a startup while thinking of how you need to be supported, usually makes an idea dependent and easy to die. Brian shared that as a startup you should always think on how to bring value on the table and from it you will be able to draw in partnership whether they are in to bring monetary value or operational value.

The role of Technology for a startup sustainability

In positioning the role of technology for a startup sustainability, a wealth of insights was shared by Dr. Erasto Mlyuka. He opened the session by saying that, Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) through Buni Innovation Hub are there to provide a nurturing environment to innovations and startups where they help them to develop prototypes; and when they have a prototype then they can join the Dar Teknohama Business Incubator (DTBI) program. This incubation process of these ideas and innovations provides them with office spaces and helping them list a physical address which is necessary in the process of business registration and formalisation. These all process instilling in a process of sustainability for a start up.

Further expanding on the matter, Dr. Mlyuka said, "talking about sustainability in technology, we refer to all aspects that considers challenge addressed, how it adds to the national development and viability of the innovation; most importantly also consider the ownership of the technology - which is all about the intellectual property." He went on to explain that there are two levels involved; First is the structured startups of whom can be patentable and the other one is the unstructured which consists of businesses that deal with trademarks and from all those it means if you are able to own that means you can sell it to anyone.

He also shared that a challenge that many innovators face is that they take an innovative idea to the market as if it is like any other product. Instead, of making sure that they own that technology. He explained that, "If one is sure that they own that technology, then they are free to commercialize it and they can also choose to license their innovation. He also highlighted that from experience most of the successful companies in the world are selling intellectual property of their products.

An an authority, Dr. Mlyuka shared that they are now establishing Technology and Innovation Support Centers in Research institutes and Higher learning institutions and asked startups to join and be part of these centers as he believes through these centers it can help them to interact with the Africa Regional Intellectual Property Organization (ARIPO) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) where they can learn more on owning their innovative ideas.

*Dr. Erasto Mlyuka the CEO, Dar Tecnohama
Business Incubator (DTBI),*



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Dr. Mlyuka went on to explain that the government through COSTECH have three important sections. The first section is responsible for supervising technology and innovation ownership. "If you have a patent over something or ownership over a certain innovative idea then you can own it for the next twenty years or even for the lifetime and even when you die you can own it for the next many more years to come." He explained. The second is the Innovative section that helps into modeling and designing new innovations and the Last one is the Technology transfer section which supervises and regulates transfer of innovation ownership as per agreement between the two sides involved.

Identifying levels of startups growth

One of the challenges has been to identify start-ups, not only defining them, but also telling the lifetime circle of growth. What entails a startup, what stage should it be identified as matured and when should it be considered to have completed its growth has been an interesting discussion to understand. Talking of challenges in identifying startups levels, Dr. Mlyuka shared that there is a need of having a defined startup lifecycle which will be used to define how the startup will grow.

So far, DTBI has defined three levels which they use to define a startup before it is allowed to fully govern itself. The first level is reviewing their marketing strategies; the second level is reviewing their financial plan and what they aim to earn in a month; and the third level is the network that they have in operations of which is a level of maturity and growth into becoming a company. He further explained, "As a government agency, we are working on establishing *regulatory sandboxes* with different regulatory authorities. These will help those with new products, they can take them to the market for testing and have exemptions on some important areas. We believe by doing so we will learn more about what the challenge is and come up with relative policies to tackle them." Explained Dr. Mlyuka

He highlighted that he acknowledges that there are challenges that he believes most startups face during compliance with/and regulatory authorities because of a lack of environment which considers startups different from already established businesses. Most innovations and startups has no regulations governing their solutions to ensure thriving and sustainability.

Dr. Mlyuka concluded by sharing that as a government agency they try as hard to help these startups grow by providing them with the necessary support from registration processes, legal processes, financial needs and operational requirements before they can allow them to operate on their own.

Connecting with "Strategic Partners" for a Startup

It was highlighted and emphasized that in most times for startups it is expensive to bring someone with the skills that are required onboard of a startup operations. "One of the ways to minimize the expense is by not having them directly involved rather you can choose to bring them onboard as advisors to the management and have a specific time of when you can directly contact them", explained Catherine Rose. That is why it is important for an innovator or startup founder to identify what they want from a partner. For instance, when you have a mentor on board, it is also easy to ask them to reach out to their networks in matters within their capacity of a referral or support one has identified. It is important to have a mentor, and to carefully choose one who compliments the growth of a venture in one way or another. "After all it is all about asking someone to see whether they're available or not and through that you might not know who will offer you the skills that you need for your startup growth or else you can ask those who have said no to point out someone who they think might be able to help you." She further concluded.

Sharing his insights Brian said it is always about understanding what the gap is and whom you want to fit in as the search differs from looking for a partner to looking for an advisor or mentor. "I can tell from experience that most of the time we ask for help on problems that at times we could have handled ourselves and to me I like it when someone evaluates themselves and asks for something specific after thoroughly evaluating not only themselves but also the business that they are into," he explained.

Brian emphasised that, the first step for the founder/innovator is to understand their weaknesses first; "for instance, If you want to bring in a co-founder you should evaluate what are the things that you will not be able to do and find someone who will be able to offer those skills," he said. The second important thing that he shared was to try focusing on short term commitments rather than long term commitments as he believes through this you will be giving yourself room to grow and will help you into understanding that what you actually get now might not be there in the near future and thus you will challenge yourself into performing more.

Drawing on from the role of COSTECH and how they can be used as strategic partners, Dr. Mlyuka focused on the term "connection" by explaining that it was important for founders and innovators to know the innovation intermediaries who are in a position to help them find a way to bring the idea to life and how to market it. And when it matures and have identified its potential in its all levels, then growth is certain and such a startup would not even need to go for the DTBi incubation. He further explained that most of the incubatees that they receive were those who had an idea which addresses a certain community challenge but they know nothing related to a business model. "So, it is these types of innovators whom we sit with and discuss on what's to be done for that idea to become a product from design to packaging and perform well in the market". He also explained that as incubates those with ideas have full protection from the hub when it comes to operations costs before they can be allowed to take full responsibility of their operations.

Women in Technology

"Scarcity & Challenges"

Innovations and Technological solutions require a lot of networking, collaborations and a grasp of what is happening in the ecosystem. All speakers on the matter when asked what could help for women with innovations and those working in technology; one thing in common from their responses was that – there was a need for them to be more out there, showcase what they do and interact with other players in the ecosystem.

Sharing her experience, Catherine Rose shared that she remembered how ‘small’ she felt when she had to sit at a table with experienced tech enthusiasts back in the days when she started in the field. With determination she had decided it was not going to be a drawback, as she promised herself that she is going to change that scenario; be part of the change of bringing more women to have seats on the table. One of her areas of focus in her work is to help other women who have ideas or have established startups meet with those who have been in the industry for some time to see how they can benefit from them, “usually when I’m invited at a cocktail party or networking event, I find one lady in my network who has an idea, we work together on her business cards then I find her three people whom I believe they can be of help and then let her meet them.” She spoke.

It was further realised that most of the challenges of Women in Technology or with Innovations face derives from not wanting to get involved, interact and network with others in the space. In this diverse world of technology a woman needs to understand that they have to first believe, define, and understand themselves over what they can do best and then communicate it. Building a network is not an option and there is a need for leveraging on that newly created network. It is this network that will help you get exposed to opportunities that you may not have a chance to and that will be your breakthrough. The network also helps identify opportunities and partners who could fill in gaps that they lack. "With the right network, navigating the innovation and technology space is easier", said Brian.

Catherine added, “I think what has helped me is to ask myself what’s that which I don’t have to not belong on that table and how can I be a fit.” She believes that it’s all about asking questions and building relationships that has helped her be where she is and she is using the same to help other women grow in the technology sector as always when you are up you have to help lift others. She concluded by sharing that when you do not ask you might not know if that is a yes or a no and rather you have to ask and create a network which will help you navigate through the technology and innovation space.

It was raised that the other powerful tool is self-initiated thematic networks aimed at mutual participation and benefits. Most of the time is wasted on things that could easily be solved by the network whether of women and youth because of a lack of strategic partnerships. And these strategic partnerships are born from networks which not only create opportunities, but breakthroughs of innovations in the ecosystem.

Part Two:

Discussion Highlights



Mr. Joseph Manirakiza, Project Manager United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Funguo Innovation Program left and Mr. Nguvu Kamando, Director of Digital Services, Vodacom Tanzania

The second discussion session brought two experienced individuals who have hands-on practicum on programs and projects that aim at empowering and equipping startups. The discussion highlighted three things; what startups are doing right or wrong, the challenges in the policies, and what are the major changes that startups go through after being incubated in these programs. Speaking of what startups do right or wrong, the discussion emitted that the matter is not about what they do wrong or right and rather about whether the technology and innovation ecosystem exposes these startups in the right or wrong environment to enable them to grow. This session brought out a hopeful insight, that there is an increase of startups that show very positive change in terms of operations whilst being able to maintain their culture in terms of their vision, mission and their objectives toward tackling their stated problem.

"Opportunities" for Startups

Choosing the right partners to work with versus paying for skills/talent

Addressing at what the startups are doing right or wrong in accessing opportunities, Joseph explained that, "I do not think that startups are doing wrong or right but it's the environment that the ecosystem exposes them into that defines what is right or wrong. And that is where I would like to start explaining and see what is missing." He further went on by highlighting that the ecosystem includes innovators, funders, stakeholders and policy makers wherein everyone is responsible for startups growth. "On the other hand, we have to define what a startup is and once we are clear with that then we can now define the ways of which we can help these startups to learn what needs to be done and what needs not to be done in the technology and innovation space." He stated.

Joseph expressed in reference to other discussions that he had with some of his colleagues from the ecosystem in regards to a calling and need for a Tanzania startup policy. The policy will help to define who or what is a startup is, it was important that this policy is holistic and looks not only at the startup policy but the SME policy as well, so that it caters across. On their part, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Funguo Innovation Program and other stakeholders do in the Innovation ecosystem is trying to create a sustainable environment that will help these startups to thrive and grow this includes everything from funding, support and the environment itself and draft out what can actually be helpful to different number of startups that we have in our portfolio. He emphasized that creating an environment alone was not a solution, the startups also need to play a part to make sure that they are creating solutions and innovations which address identified challenges.



*Mr. Joseph Manirakiza, Project Manager
United Nations Development Programme
(UNDP)'s Funguo Innovation Program*

Joseph shared that there was a dire need for a policy to govern the space and emphasizing that any stakeholder, Investor or interested funde ask themselves a lot of questions in which most would be answered by a guiding policy. If these groups are to effectively support startups a guide should be there. The policies also help on knowing what and how incorporate agreements and benefits; for instance in the tendering process; he gave an example of Kenya where any government procurement tender has to offer 30% of its tenders to youth led businesses. He also shared that for big corporations they should look at CSR as not only about providing money back but also giving business or tender opportunities to startups from which can help these startups grow and complement the efforts by stakeholders.

He further advised that the startups need also to evaluate the market that they are planning to operate in so that they can create and establish the muscles to compete and have a strategic advantage in the market.

He concluded by sharing that there is a need for clarifying what startups are, what are the needs for startup sustainability and the levels of support that either might need by considering the size and the sector that they are operating into.

Relevancy versus Scalability

Drawing from the experience of the Vodacom Accelerator Program, Nguvu highlighted that the first phase of the Vodacom Accelerator Program aimed at working with startups that had a closer alignment to their strategic plan as Vodacom. This phase was a great learning phase and they were happy that most startups showed a great progressive aptitude. He emphasized that the main focus for the accelerator was to enhance the ability of the start-ups to continue with their development without any setbacks caused by either lack of funding or resources. "I remember during the demo day of the Vodacom Accelerator program, I shared with innovators that they have to define their problem statement in a way that anyone who has hands on it can understand exactly what they are going to solve." Explained Nguvu.

He further shared that it is always challenging for companies to work with a person/startup that they have never heard of, seen their work or/and results; by understanding this, they help startups set up all the necessary operation processes and then observe to see how they are operating on their own. If those that works out very well they then, can provide them with tenders. Vodacom is committed at helping any start-up with a minimum viable product that can be taken into the market and breakthrough in financial terms.

He went on to explain the two things that they consider critical to them; Relevance and Scalability. "In relevance we measure whether you are trying to solve a problem that is in a Tanzanian community or else is it a westernized problem." In scalability, he insisted on defining a problem in a way that it can be scaled because that also determines growth. As Vodacom Tanzania Plc, they are trying to work with startups which can be scalable and their level of impact and how long they can run without requesting for financial assistance.

Addressing to the questions, what would he advise startups and how would vodacom address the challenge of working with startups in the ecosystem so as to support them, Nguvu had the following to say.

An idea is just one of the components of a startup. The challenge its addressing is what ensures of the sustainability of a startup. When an innovator has an idea, which addresses a certain challenge from the community and incorporate it with an entrepreneurship spirit, then that startup will eventually grow into a company level. He further added that not all ideas are meant to become companies that generate revenue as some might be solving a social problem so it's better for an innovator to work out to see where the idea fits and then it is easy to approach the right stakeholders. Nguvu, shared that at times they receive ideas that do not meet the requirements but are viable and thus they do not turn them away and rather they welcome all ideas and they have a special program to work with innovators to make their ideas viable and fit the criteria that they have set.

Vodacom's commitment to startups in the Ecosystem

Addressing a request from one of the startup founders from the audience, Nguvu committed to tabling the proposal back to his team on the best way they could support startups which are not well established but has potential to work and deliver goods and services at the required quality so as to enhance youth led ventures in the ecosystem.

He shared that they would find ways in which they would make their agreement with vendors put in a mandatory section which will require all business partners/vendors working with Vodacom to allocate a certain percentage of that funds to the startups in the ecosystem which do not have the muscle to compete with the big players when working with big corporate companies such as vodacom. This item was submitted to vodacom and promised feedback on the matter six months after submission of the letter in March 2022.



Mr. Nguvu Kamando, Director of Digital Services, Vodacom Tanzania

Part Three: Moments in Pictures



A group picture of all participants on the second Innovation and Tech Forum on the 3rd of December 2021 at the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) in Dar es Salaam

A total of thirty seven (37) participants participated the #InnoTechForum. There was a decrease of the number of participation from fifty two (52) participants in the first forum. This was imposed by the one hour delay of the meeting as explained in the introduction of the report. There was a change however in the gender representation. While the first forum had 59.62% of male participants and 40.38% of female participants, this time around there was a representation of 62.2% female and only 37.8% male.











Conclusion

These reports are meant to be produced ever after each events. These meetings have been supported by the enablers (COSTECH and UNDP's Funguo Innovative Program) as a pilot study and thus the flexibility in producing the reports with slight delays. This discussion of the second Innovation and Tech Forum was built on from the last forum, and thus from defining what a start up is and what entails a startup to exploring sustainability at an early stage. While the operating environment seems to be a very important aspect for the growth and sustainability of startups, the spirit behind innovators and founders have been addressed as equally important. This spirit needs to be strong and believe that the challenge they are solving is indeed solving needs of the target consumers and that while it needs a boost with support from the ecosystem and investors, the most important ingredient is the determination at driving towards independence of the solution. We hope that these conversations from the platforms will be a learning point for the majority of startups while we also fill in gaps within capacity. One of the achievements from the forums is Vodacom's willingness and commitment into ensuring that they will work on ways which will enable startups to be part all tenders that are won by the big organisations to work with Vodacom.

Media Convergency is a Multidisciplinary ICT organisation that appraises Information and applies Technological Innovations and Applications that provide impactful Digital Solutions. Services include Consultancies, Capacity Building, Research, Project Cycle Management, Digital System Audits plus Management of Information and Data.

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