

## A Critical Examination of the Challenges of Africa's Development

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### Abstract

Africa, over time, has been confronted with a complex web of development issues, and these problems have proven insurmountable. Thus, we prefer to refer to it as the African development predicament. The term "predicament" implies difficulty, quandary, jam, mess, or dilemma. It is therefore logical to say that Africa's development challenges have plunged the continent into difficulties and dilemmas. This study seeks to interrogate these persistent issues that have bewitched Africa, with a view to proposing substantial solutions. To achieve this, we will employ the Development Simulator Model as a theoretical framework to unmask the illusion of a functional development model in Africa. Using critical analysis, the study argues that African development challenges persist because African nations promote principles and ideals they do not genuinely possess. Thus, their efforts appear largely performative. The study finds that for a nation to free itself from the illusion of development, it must first confront the truth. Nations must rediscover for themselves the ultimate reality, human nature, the good life, and how to achieve it. The study concludes with a regenerative hope that Africa can retrace her steps toward tangible development ideals. It recommends that African nations must embark on an inward-looking developmental renaissance, anchored on authentic self-knowledge, indigenous values, and pragmatic leadership committed to truth, human dignity, and sustainable progress. The study is significant for its illuminating insights into African issues and potential solutions.

**Keywords:** African Development, Development Predicament, Development Simulator Model, Performative Development, Developmental Renaissance, Authentic Self-Knowledge

### 1. Introduction

The term *development* is derived from the Latin word *developare*, which means to unfold or unwrap. By implication, to develop is to bring forth what is latent — to move from potentiality to actuality and to achieve fuller realization. In many discussions, development appears synonymous with modernity, but it transcends mere technological advancement or industrial sophistication. It encompasses a holistic transformation of human potential, society, and conditions of life. For Frantz Fanon, development is the restoration of a people's self-worth and creative agency following the traumatic disfigurements of colonialism; it is both material and psychological liberation [1].

Walter Rodney, on his part, insisted that development means the ability of a society to harness its environment to meet the needs of its people and to build systems that foster collective prosperity

[2]. Kwame Nkrumah suggested that true development lies in the economic independence and self-reliance of a people, inseparable from political liberation [3]. Kwame Gyekye viewed development through the cultural lens, emphasizing that it must be rooted in indigenous values that affirm human dignity and social harmony [4]. Amartya Sen notably framed development as freedom — the expansion of human capabilities and agency to pursue valued ways of living [5]. Among these rich perspectives, J. C. A. Agbakoba stands out for redefining development as self-realization and discovery.

When a person discovers their authentic nature, intrinsic capabilities, and unique path to fulfilment, they take a decisive step toward true development [6,7]. This can be likened to a seed recognizing and growing into its destined tree, rather than striving to mimic another species. Similarly, a society that authentically

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knows and accepts itself lays the necessary foundation for genuine, sustainable development. However, the challenges of African development today largely stem from a profound crisis of self-realization. Instead of charting a path anchored on indigenous strengths and realities, many African scholars and leaders, under the influence of the decolonial wave, now pursue academic prestige and ideological clout over pragmatic, tangible development trajectories.

In other words, rhetorical decolonization has often displaced effective action. Thus, Ali Mazrui and Obi Oguejiofor fittingly described Africa's situation as the "African paradoxes" and "African development predicaments," respectively [8,9]. It is a condition where numerous efforts at development paradoxically yield stagnation, dependency, and disillusionment. Africa finds herself entrapped in a labyrinth of developmental illusions — fronting ideals and principles that are not internally grounded or sustainably achievable. This study, therefore, seeks to interrogate the deeper issues behind Africa's development predicament. It aims to critically examine why, despite decades of interventions, Africa remains beleaguered by underdevelopment and to propose substantive pathways out of this impasse. This paper is guided by the following three questions: (a) What are the root causes of Africa's development predicament? (b) Why do African development efforts often appear performative rather than transformative? and (c) How can Africa rediscover authentic principles of development suited to her context? The significance of this study lies in its attempt to illuminate African development challenges beyond surface analyses, offering critical insights into the underlying philosophical, cultural, and psychological dimensions. It seeks not only to diagnose but also to regenerate hope by proposing self-realization as a fundamental pivot for African progress. Methodologically, the study employs a critical-analytical approach, drawing insights from philosophical discourse, historical analysis, and contemporary African scholarship. It adopts the Development Simulator Model as its theoretical framework, which helps expose the illusions of development by simulating scenarios that reveal the gaps between professed ideals and operational realities [10].

## 2. Conceptual Clarifications

To effectively analyse Africa's development challenges, it is crucial to first clarify key concepts that shape this discourse. Understanding the meaning of terms like "development," "predicament," and "performative development" helps ground the discussion in a shared framework. These definitions will guide our exploration of Africa's unique developmental context and its complex obstacles.

### 2.1. Meaning of "Development"

For the purpose of this paper, we will rely heavily on Agbakoba's notion of development. He views development as a process of self-realization and self-actualization, achieved through social interactions. He distinguishes between two dimensions: the universal and the particular [6,7]. The universal dimension encompasses essential needs like food, shelter, health, security, and education, which are crucial for survival and human dignity. The particular dimension, however, is shaped by human

creativity, freedom, and cultural expression, reflecting the unique circumstances of individuals and societies. This distinction underscores that development is not a one-size-fits-all model but a dynamic, lived experience rooted in specific societal needs and contexts, ensuring both universal and particular aspirations are met.

### 2.2. Meaning of "Predicament"

"Predicament" refers to a difficult, challenging, or undesirable situation that seems hard to resolve. It implies a state of being caught in a complex, often paradoxical situation with no clear or easy way out. In the African context, development challenges have created a "predicament" that seems inescapable. This predicament is not just about a lack of resources, but also about identity, governance, and social cohesion. Africa's ongoing struggle with poverty, political instability, and external manipulation places it in a continuous state of predicament, where its development efforts seem doomed by historical baggage and external influences [1, 8].

### 2.3. Meaning of Performative Development

The term "performative development" is a concept I have coined to describe a situation where development is performed or demonstrated without genuine progress. This refers to the outward show of development efforts, such as constructing buildings, implementing policies, or making speeches, without translating these actions into tangible improvements in people's lives. In this context, African governments and institutions often engage in performative development by mimicking development models from the West, rather than developing homegrown, contextually relevant solutions [11]. This performative approach undermines the genuine goals of development and keeps the continent in a perpetual cycle of unfulfilled promises.

### 2.4. Development Predicament in Africa

The "Development Predicament" in Africa refers to the complex challenges that hinder the continent's progress, often leading to situations where development goals remain elusive. As Ali Mazrui argues in *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis*, Africa's development struggles are defined by six paradoxes that reflect the continent's contradictions. These paradoxes include the Paradox of habitation, Paradox of humiliation, Paradox of acculturation, Paradox of poverty amidst plenty, Paradox of fragmentation, and Paradox of marginalization, [8].

For example, the "poverty amidst plenty" paradox, which sees Africa endowed with vast natural resources yet struggling with poverty, and the paradox of political marginalization despite Africa's central geographical and cultural position. On the "triple heritage" framework sheds light on the complexity of Africa's development by considering the intersecting impacts of colonialism, Islam, and indigenous African traditions, all of which create a fragmented development trajectory [12]. Furthermore, offers a more holistic view, identifying six interconnected dimensions that contribute to Africa's development stagnation: the scars of the slave trade, cycles of political instability, economic crises, cultural alienation, religious conflicts, and the lingering effects of psychological trauma

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[9]. These factors create a vicious cycle that impedes sustainable development. The African development predicament is also deeply rooted in the lack of a collective, self-realized vision for progress. As this paper argues, Africa's development must be redefined to reflect its unique heritage, resources, and aspirations, moving away from external models that do not address the continent's true needs. Hence, a focus on "self-realization" in development is key for Africa to redefine its identity and forge a development path that is both meaningful and sustainable [6,7,10].

### 3. Theoretical Framework: Development Simulator Model

In an attempt to describe the issue of corruption within anti-corruption agencies in Africa and their illusive tendencies, I developed what I call the Development Simulator Model. To simulate, simply put, is to give or assume the appearance or effect of something, often with the intent to deceive. The word *simulate* is borrowed from the Latin *simulatus*, meaning "to pretend" or "to assume the appearance of by one's conduct." Thus, this model lays bare the grim philosophical observation that appearance is different from reality — a point also echoed in Eboh's critique of ethical hypocrisy in governance [13]. What a thing appears to be may not be what it really is.

In the case of Africa's development discourse, many of the activities and programs we call "development" are, upon deeper inspection, largely performative and not transformative. Performative development in this sense refers to the act of feigning what is not actually present. It is the practice of creating an illusion of progress or reform while the fundamental structures necessary for real development remain weak or absent.

For example, a government might pretend to champion education reforms, while in reality, it refuses to adequately fund the educational sector.

Leaders know very well that public schools are underfunded, teachers are underpaid, and basic infrastructures like libraries and laboratories are nonexistent — yet they roll out grand policies compelling every citizen to acquire formal education. What results is a mass production of graduates who are ill-equipped for the demands of the modern economy, further deepening unemployment and social frustration [14]. A telling instance can be found in Nigeria, where successive governments have declared free and compulsory basic education, yet schools, especially in rural areas, lack roofs, chairs, teaching materials, and qualified teachers.

Another example is found in Kenya, where massive investments were announced in the healthcare sector under the Managed Equipment Scheme (MES), yet many hospitals received expensive machines they could not even operate due to a lack of trained personnel and electricity. Similarly, Zimbabwe has adopted various Western-style democratic reforms, but elections remain marred by violence, voter intimidation, and systemic corruption. One can also consider the African "war" on corruption.

Many African countries have established anti-corruption commissions — Nigeria's EFCC, South Africa's Public Protector, Kenya's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC), to mention a few. Yet, these agencies often exist more for public relations purposes than for serious prosecution of corrupt elites. In some cases, they are even used as tools to harass political opponents while shielding those loyal to the ruling party [12]. Thus, the agencies simulate the appearance of fighting corruption without tackling its roots. In politics, Africa is rife with examples of performative democracy. After the wave of democratization in the 1990s, many African states quickly adopted multi-party systems and held regular elections.

However, beneath the surface, elections are often neither free nor fair. Incumbents manipulate electoral commissions, security forces intimidate opposition members, and courts are co-opted to validate flawed processes. Uganda under President Yoweri Museveni presents a classic example. Although elections are held regularly, the political environment is heavily skewed in favour of the ruling party. Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and even Rwanda exhibit similar trends where democratic forms exist, but the spirit of democracy — participation, accountability, rule of law — is largely absent.

The Development Simulator Model brings attention to this critical gap between appearance and reality in African development efforts. It suggests that much of what we celebrate as progress is largely symbolic, aesthetic, and meant for external validation rather than rooted in concrete transformation. Many African states simulate development by erecting glamorous infrastructures in capital cities to impress international visitors while rural areas languish in neglect [7].

They establish commissions, pass laws, sign treaties, and attend global conferences, all in a bid to simulate commitment to human rights, democracy, and good governance, even when actual practices on the ground betray these ideals. This performative approach to development mirrors the existential tension between being and seeming — something describes as the crisis of ethical self-deception [15]. Africa's developmental landscape is thus dominated by a "culture of simulation" — a culture where the metrics of development (GDP growth rates, election cycles, international awards) are prioritised over the actual lived experiences of the citizens [5]. One needs not wonder why poverty rates remain stubbornly high despite decades of international aid and policy interventions or why infrastructure projects collapse after a few years because they were poorly executed for the sake of photo-ops. This is why literacy rates may rise statistically while critical thinking and creativity decline in reality. The beauty of the Development Simulator Model is that it draws attention to the deeper philosophical problem at play: a confusion between substance and spectacle. African countries have often sought to adopt Western models of governance, development, and economy without attending to the underlying preconditions that made those models work in their original contexts.

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Western democracy, for instance, was built over centuries of evolving institutions — free press, strong judiciary, vibrant civil society — whereas many African states attempt to transplant the form without cultivating the spirit [3]. Take Ghana, often hailed as a model of African democracy. Despite peaceful elections and alternations of power, the deep-seated issues of unemployment, inequality, and corruption persist. Similarly, South Africa, post-apartheid, boasts one of the most liberal constitutions in the world, yet inequality remains among the highest globally.

The problem is not the absence of institutions but the simulation of institutions — institutions that exist on paper but are hollow in practice. Thus, applying the Development Simulator Model to Africa's development situation reveals a continent trapped between aspiration and reality. African leaders, often pressured by external donors, international organizations, and the expectations of globalization, are compelled to appear modern, democratic, and progressive. However, the internal structures — political culture, institutional integrity, civic education, social trust — necessary to sustain true development are weak or non-existent. The tragedy is that the longer this simulation persists, the harder it becomes to transition to genuine transformation because people begin to mistake appearance for achievement.

The model also offers a sobering warning: development cannot be faked indefinitely. Sooner or later, the simulated façade crumbles under the weight of reality. Corrupt anti-corruption agencies lose credibility. Unfunded education reforms produce unemployable graduates. Cosmetic elections breed disillusioned citizens. Infrastructural showpieces collapse, both literally and metaphorically. Therefore, the Development Simulator Model challenges African policymakers, intellectuals, and citizens to rethink their approach. Development must be rooted in self-realization, as insists, not in borrowed appearances [6].

It must emerge from authentic engagement with local realities, building from strength to strength, rather than mimicking external models superficially. This also resonates with Eboh's conviction that national progress requires the moral reconstruction of the human person and society [16]. Thus, this model reveals that Africa's primary challenge is not the absence of developmental ideas but the pervasive simulation of development without its substance. To overcome this, there must be a philosophical shift towards genuine self-discovery, internal creativity, responsible governance, and a conscious dismantling of the structures of pretense that currently dominate the continent's public life.

#### 4. Critical Examination of African Development Challenges

The crisis of African development did not start today; it has deep historical roots. Colonialism laid the initial foundation of underdevelopment, as European powers partitioned Africa to serve their interests rather than to advance African peoples [2,1]. They built infrastructure primarily to extract raw materials, disrupted indigenous political systems, destroyed economic structures, and

introduced new social formations that weakened traditional bonds. According to , colonialism produced a predicament that Africa has not yet fully overcome [9].

Neocolonialism continued this trajectory. Even after independence, African states remained economically and politically tied to their former colonizers. Postcolonial elites often inherited and reinforced exploitative institutions, merely replacing white rulers with Black elites without transforming the underlying structures [3,6]. describes this condition as a “triple heritage” in which Africa is caught between indigenous values, Islamic influences, and Western impositions — a tension that fuels many of the continent's leadership and governance crises [8,12].

Governance has remained a major stumbling block. Many leaders perceive political power as a personal estate, manipulating elections, suppressing opposition, and converting the state into a tool for personal enrichment [17]. Institutions are weakened to serve individuals, and corruption becomes systemic. Power is exercised without a genuine social contract, reducing democracy to periodic elections devoid of accountability. This reflects what calls simulated or performative structures — governments that simulate democracy while practicing dictatorship in substance [7].

Socio-economic barriers worsen the crisis. Poverty remains widespread; basic needs such as food, healthcare, education, and housing go unmet for millions [5]. Extreme inequality divides society, with a few wealthy elites coexisting alongside impoverished majorities. Corruption siphons public funds meant for development into private pockets. As a result, citizens lose trust in leadership, social cohesion deteriorates, and violence and criminality thrive. External influences have compounded these issues. Africa is locked into a global economic order that often exploits it through policies imposed by institutions like the IMF and World Bank, which promote structural adjustment programs that cut social spending and deepen inequality [2,1].

Another serious challenge is cultural and ideological dissonance. African countries frequently adopt Western models of governance and education without adapting them to their contexts, leading to alienated institutions that exist in form but not in function [4,10]. As a result, states perform democracy without substance, claim to value education while underfunding schools, and simulate strong institutions while personalizing power. This alienation has produced societies where appearance prevails over reality. Thus, the development crisis in Africa is not accidental; it is a complex interplay of historical injustices, internal misgovernance, and external pressures.

Colonialism planted the seed, neocolonialism and imperialism watered it, and poor leadership and corruption allowed it to flourish [9,18]. To break free, Africa must confront these realities honestly. It must end the blind adoption of foreign models, invest in institutions that serve the people, and empower citizens, especially the youth, for active participation in governance [19].

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Development must be rooted in African realities, creativity, and priorities. Otherwise, Africa will continue to simulate development without achieving it. The journey toward authentic development is difficult but not impossible. It requires truthfulness, courage, and a collective will to abandon appearances and embrace substance.

### 5. An Analysis of Why African Development Efforts Appear Performative

African development often appears vibrant on the surface: roads are built, elections are organized, and new policies are announced. Yet underneath, little changes, and many of these efforts feel performative because they lack authentic grounding. The first problem is the absence of genuine ideals rooted in African contexts. Many African countries did not craft their development path based on indigenous values and needs; instead, they imported foreign models created in entirely different socio-cultural contexts [6,4]. Consequently, political leaders pursue external validation—appeasing donors and global institutions—rather than cultivating internal transformation.

refers to this as Africa's persistent tension between foreign influence and internal aspirations. Without ideals rooted in African realities, development becomes a hollow display of form without substance. Second, there is a profound disconnect between aspirations and lived realities [8,12]. Governments formulate ambitious visions such as "Vision 2020," "Agenda 2063," and "Operation Feed the Nation," but on the ground, basic needs remain unmet and institutional capacity remains weak. This widening gap between rhetoric and implementation creates a continuous cycle of projection without performance. According to, Africa frequently struggles to translate philosophical ideals into lived social reality [9].

This disconnect makes development efforts appear theatrical—an endless performance rather than genuine progress. Third, there is the illusion of progress versus actual development. Some governments equate infrastructural symbols [like skyscrapers or highways] with development. However, building skyscrapers does not eradicate rural poverty, nor does holding elections guarantee democracy [5]. Passing educational policies does not mean learning outcomes have improved. This obsession with symbols of progress over substance produces a form of development that is glossy at a distance but weak on close inspection. Institutions exist, but they are fragile; policies exist, but they remain unimplemented; laws exist, but they are unenforced [7].

In truth, Africa's development crisis endures partly because of this **addiction to simulation**. Structures are copied, but the spirit necessary for transformation is absent. Performative development creates a dangerous illusion—it masks urgent problems and delays meaningful change. It may satisfy external observers, yet it frustrates local populations who see little improvement in their daily lives. Until African nations ground development in authentic ideals, reconcile aspirations with reality, and choose substance over spectacle, genuine transformation will remain elusive. Africa must stop acting development—it must begin to live it [19].

### 6. Toward a Regenerative Hope and Rediscovering Developmental Truths

Africa needs a new beginning, not another borrowed model or slogan, but a return to truth. To regenerate hope, the continent must begin with self-truth and self-discovery. Development that is not rooted in truth is bound to fail. insists that true development is both universal and particular [6]. The universal entails what all human beings require [food, shelter, education, health] while the particular is shaped by a people's culture, creativity, and identity. Africa has long ignored this second aspect., in his reflections on the critique of social praxis, similarly argues that without rooting development in cultural truth and ethical values, no lasting progress is possible [20]. It is time to recover this dimension.

Self-truth begins with asking: Who are we? What do we want? Why have we failed to become who we could be? These questions are not abstract; they help us reassess human nature and destiny. maintains that the good life is not merely the pursuit of material wealth but rests on ethical values and solidarity, the "golden rule" as a foundation of universal ethics [21]. Are we merely consumers of Western goods, or creators of new realities? These questions also challenge our understanding of ultimate reality: Is development only about material growth, or also about spiritual, moral, and communal flourishing? The good life, therefore, is not just wealth—it is harmony, justice, and shared well-being [22]. This calls for a deep philosophical reawakening.

Africa must stop copying and start thinking. We need to formulate ideals that reflect our conditions, values, and historical experience. argues that genuine development must emerge from within, built on an African worldview that honours both reason and lived experience [9]. In his critique of cultural alienation, similarly emphasizes that African philosophy must contribute its unique insights to global thought, beginning with a return to its own roots and ethical frameworks [15]. We cannot continue to apply external ideals without internal conviction—it is like forcing a tree to grow in soil that does not nourish it [23]. Authentic development is sustainable, respects time, grows gradually, includes people, and builds systems.

It is not about performance or image, but about roots and fruits. Without authenticity, there will be no sustainability, and without sustainability, no future. Africa's hope lies in returning to itself in rediscovering what it means to be human. As states, true nationalism is sustainable only when grounded in moral renewal and community spirit [16]. Africa must learn from the past, not deny it. This is not merely economic, but moral, spiritual, and philosophical. The time has come for Africa to rise, not by simulation, but by regeneration.

### 7. Reconstructing African Development Beyond Simulation: Implications and Policy Directions

The Development Simulator Model does not merely expose the illusion of progress; it calls for a fundamental rethinking of how African societies approach development. If simulation is at the

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heart of many African development efforts, then authenticity must be the core of any corrective framework. The continent can no longer afford to pretend to build while hollowing out its institutions, resources, and people [17]. The question becomes: What does real development look like beyond appearances?

First, it begins with institutional sincerity. Institutions must cease to be window dressing for donor confidence or international optics. For example, anti-corruption agencies should be made independent, transparent, and publicly accountable. They must be empowered not only with constitutional backing but with a culture of meritocracy, professionalism, and civic engagement [24,25]. Governments must stop appointing political loyalists to head them. The public must also be educated to expect accountability and participate in democratic oversight [26].

Second, development priorities must be indigenous and people-centered. Rather than copying Western development blueprints, Africa must identify its own developmental trajectories, emphasizes that particular development is rooted in creativity, context, and cultural identity [6,7]. For instance, instead of enforcing Western-style education systems that promote rote learning, African countries can integrate vocational and community-based education models that build real-life skills and cultural awareness [11]. Democracy must be desimulated: elections without participation, transparency, or accountability are political performances. African democracies must transcend ballot-box formalism and cultivate civic cultures that respect dissent, protect minority rights, and decentralize power.

Rwanda's localized governance model [despite legitimate concerns] illustrates how traditional institutions can be modernized thoughtfully rather than blindly replicated [22]. Furthermore, funding priorities must align with national values and long-term goals. A country that claims education is key to development must reflect that in its budgetary allocation. Many African states still spend more on government overheads and military than on education or healthcare. Hard fiscal choices in favor of the common good mark the end of simulation [29,5]. Culturally, the simulator model calls for a revival of the African conscience. Development is not only political or economic, it is moral. A society that tolerates fraud, celebrates wealth without source, and devalues intellectualism will continue to breed simulators.

Ethics must be taught, lived, and institutionalized. Traditional African values of communalism, truthfulness, and responsibility must be reinterpreted to address contemporary challenges [13,4]. Finally, civil society, intellectuals, and youth must take centre stage. The end of the simulation requires truth-telling. African philosophers, scholars, and social critics must stop romanticizing failure or merely critiquing from the sidelines. As the model demonstrates, the purpose of theory is to pierce the veil of illusion and return society to truth, functionality, and justice [14,19].

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

I would like to conclude with a regenerative warning and hope

for Africa. Africa must look inward. Development cannot be imported. It must grow from within. The time has come for a new beginning—a developmental renaissance. But this renaissance must be honest. It must begin with authentic self-knowledge. Africa must know herself, her values, people, and potentials. This inward turn must rediscover indigenous values. Values like community, respect, dignity, and harmony are not weak ideas but are, in fact, the foundation for strength. They must guide our plans and actions. Leadership is key; however, it is not loud leaders, but truthful ones. Leaders who serve, not rule, uphold human dignity, build systems that last, and place people before power. Without such leadership, progress remains a dream. This paper has shown that Africa's development is often performative. There is a clear gap between aspiration and action. Institutions are weak. Foreign models are copied without context. Poverty, inequality, and corruption persist. Dependency on the West continues. And ideals often lack roots in our reality. But we have also shown that hope is not lost. A regenerative hope is possible. One rooted in truth. One that begins with rediscovery of the self, of values, of purpose. Development must be real. Not just roads and buildings. But people, systems, and values grow together. The path forward must be clear. Let us stop pretending, performing, and start building truthfully, slowly, and sustainably. The future of Africa depends on it.

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