

In Papers in Education and Development, University of Dar es Salaam, October 202

Elimu Haina mwisho: Mwalimu Nyerere's Vision of Adult Education

Abstract

1970 was solemnly declared by the government of Tanzania Adult Education Year, a national call for the mobilization of learning with, by and for all the people of Tanzania. The declaration of Adult Education Year was a product of the thinking of the late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, the independence leader and founding President of Tanzania. Nyerere's thoughts on development, African socialism and politics of the African independence are well known. Drawing from literature and my own experience of working with adult education sub-sector in Tanzania during the Nyerere era, this article documents Nyerere's visionary ideas about the role of adult and lifelong learning. The literature is chiefly anchored to documents from the formative years of 1970-1976. It is based on historical records as well as recollections by the author who worked at the Tanzanian Institute of Adult Education from 1970-1975.

Keywords: *adult education, community-based learning, elimu haina mwisho, Nyerere, social change,*

Introduction

The year 1970 was declared by the then governing political party of Tanzania, Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) to be Adult Education Year.¹ This was announced by President Nyerere in his New Year's speech to the nation found in the document *Elimu Haina Mwisho* (learning never ends). Mwalimu noted that, adult education has three objectives: 1) to shake ourselves out of a resignation to the kind of life Tanzanians have lived for centuries past; 2) to learn *how* to improve our lives; and 3) to understand our national policies of socialism and self-reliance. This article is a contribution to the celebration of 50 years since the declaration of Adult Education Year. It is largely historically based on documentation from those years augmented by insights from the author who was privileged to live and work in Tanzania during the years 1970-1975. While 50 years have passed and the author has worked in many settings both in Canada and around the world, the vision that Mwalimu Nyerere articulated during those years has continued to influence all his work. Mwalimu Nyerere's intellectual contribution to our

¹ The author took up a position as a Research Officer in the Institute of Adult Education in August of 1970, a post that he held for four years. This article is also based on the PhD thesis of the author published as *Adult Education and the Development of Socialism in Tanzania* by East African Literature Bureau, 1975

understanding of adult education while similar to that of the late Paulo Freire of Brazil, has never in the author's opinion been surpassed. It is appropriate that we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the *Elimu Haina Mwisho* declaration, that we re-read these documents and that we consider what the Mwalimu Nyerere vision of adult education and knowledge democracy means for the challenges that we face in Tanzania, in Africa and in the world today.

Elimu Haina Mwisho

In discussing the first objective of the adult education year speech, Nyerere emphasizes the fact that people must become aware of what as human beings can do for themselves. Adult education, says Nyerere, "Will make us recognise that we ourselves have the ability to obtain better houses, better tools and better health" (1971, p.3). It is significant that this objective has been put first. It is important, for it points out the consequences of the colonial education policies beforehand and the oppressiveness of the methods of education which undermine people's abilities in themselves to bring about change. The great emphasis on subservient values of the colonial period means that a new process of thinking has to be emphasized. The effects of colonial education, according to Nyerere, created problems which had to be overcome. The first is that of the adopted colonial habits of decision-making and leadership which place the educated few in positions of extreme power and importance. It brought about habits, "in which one person gives the orders and the rest just obey them" (TANU, 1971, p. 4).

The other side of this situation concerns the 'rest' who just obey. Freire (1970) and Fanon (1967) have dealt in depth with the concept of the colonized or oppressed mind. The culture of silence is that of the people who through habit or design feel outside of and alienated from the decisions of the state, their own state. The combination of education and colonial ways of thinking created these sides of a single problem. It is, therefore, the first objective of adult education to bring about liberation from resignation and *kasumba*, or colonial ways of thinking.

Nyerere's second objective is quite straightforward and logically follows the first. Skills are to be imparted to everyone who can benefit from them. The priority for skills development at that time was in the rural development sector. While Nyerere saw literacy as a tool for learning, in his view the imparting of practical rural skills such as improved food production, health and hygiene and furniture making were key and did not necessarily rely on literacy. In his New Year's speech

of 1971, however, the importance of literacy as a first step in the education process was emphasized. Literacy was seen to have significant political importance, particularly in the form of mass campaigns which are able to mobilize vast numbers of people. The act of mobilization itself was seen by Nyerere as a unifying factor.

Learning and discussion of the national policies of *Ujamaa na Kujitegemea* (Socialism and Self-Reliance) is the third objective put forward by Nyerere. He saw political education as providing the basic motivation for full participation in many of the changes that are necessary to move Ujamaa from theory to practical implementation. While rooted in traditional living patterns, ujamaa was a major break from the forms of capitalism developing in Tanzania. A thorough understanding of the new policies was seen as critical to the success of Ujamaa. Nyerere's vision needed to be translated into state structures for it to move forward. The Directorate of Adult Education was established within the Ministry of National Education and District Adult Education Officers were appointed throughout the country. The Directorate refined Nyerere's vision and outlined the objectives of adult education in Tanzania under the Ministry as follows:

1. To mobilise the rural and urban masses into a better understanding of our national policies of socialism and self-reliance.
2. To provide leadership training in various aspects of life at all levels.
3. To eradicate illiteracy.
4. To give knowledge and skills in agriculture and rural construction; health and home economics that will raise the people's productivity and standard of living.
5. To provide follow-up education for primary and secondary school-leavers with the view of settling them in Ujamaa villages.
6. To provide continuing education to professionals at various stages in the form of seminars, evening classes, in-service training programmes, correspondence courses and vocational training (Ministry of National Education, p. 15)

The nature of adult education

How do adults learn? What are the conducive conditions for effective adult education? Who are the adult educators? What considerations should guide adult education regarding the content?

Either explicitly or implicitly, these questions, among others, were dealt with in a formal manner by Nyerere himself or by the Ministry of National Education. We are reminded that the adult education framework falls within the then national educational policy as outlined in *Education for Self-Reliance*. Some of the points in that document are worth noting when reflecting on Nyerere's specific vision of adult education, for instance: 1) education must be integrated with community life; 2) education should prepare those educated for the realities of rural life; 3) education must encourage the growth of socialist values; and, 4) both content and structure of education ought to contribute significantly to the learning process.

Turning to other documents and speeches of that era what principles can be found about the nature of the adult learner and the conditions under which they learn best?

1. "As adults we can try to learn...if we wish; we do not have to do so" (Elimu Haina Mwisho, 1971, p. 3)

The adult has freedom to choose to learn when and how he or she wishes. Adults learn those things which are interesting or those things which will improve their lives. This means then that unlike childhood education which stresses the role of the teacher as the selector of knowledge and the teacher of knowledge, adult education necessarily begins from the needs of the adults. The local adult education committees set up in each of the districts had a primary goal of identifying local learning needs.

2. "With adults, even more than with children, learning must be seen to be problem solving, and the problems must be ones which they know and experience" (Kawawa, 1973, p.13)

Whether adult education takes place in classroom settings or elsewhere in more informal situations, the stress is on teaching through the solution of problems which farmers or workers recognize themselves. Of course, it is admitted that people may not be aware of certain situations on a conscious level. In cases such as these, a raising of consciousness is necessary, perhaps in a manner similar to that used by Freire in his literacy classes in Brazil, the process he called 'conscientization.' Political education is seen as an integral part of the adult education process, the first step in the motivation of adults for change.

3. "Adult educators should recognise that they can learn from the people they are teaching" (Kawawa, 1973, p. 15)

The teacher of adults is not encouraged to be an absolute authority on all knowledge. The tradition of depending on the teacher for knowledge is a very strong force in Tanzania where the use of the title Mwalimu (teacher) is often a lifetime title. This tendency is criticized and instead teachers are encouraged to participate in practical activities with the people, “and not to think of themselves as a separate kind of person” (Kawawa, 1973, p. 15). An agricultural teacher should work with the people in the field to improve the yield or quality of the crop. The health auxiliary can do much with the villagers in working towards improved health in the villages.

4. “If we are to make real progress in adult education, it is essential that we should stop trying to divide up life into sections—one for education, another for work” (Nyerere, 1971b, p. 32).

There is a continuing theme through official statements about the need for learning to be integrated in all working situations. All factories have been strongly urged to implement worker’s education programmes as an integral part of the working situation. The then Vice president Kawawa noted, “People must learn as they do and also do as they learn” (Kawawa, 1973, p. 13). Every adult in the country was to be understood as an engaged learner. The separation of living into segments, according to policy documents of the time, leads to an artificial situation in which that which is learned, or still more likely, that which is taught is not related to the actual conditions and the realistic challenges of the area. What can be learned is that which is written in books. Adult education in the earlier paradigms was seen largely as an area for adults to catch-up. Much of the fundamental education policies of the 1950s and 60s fell into this category. Nyerere and his colleagues were articulating a new vision for adult education, a vision that fits with the aspirations for a new transformative Tanzania.

5. “Adult education should be work-oriented the way our ancestors had it” (Ministry of Education, 1972, p. 9)

Traditional African education was not separated rigidly into childhood and adult education. Education was linked to one’s work. One learning that was socially and economically necessary as it was needed in a more continuous stream from childhood through old age. The dichotomy between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge has developed after

the importation of western concepts of education. There was no reward in earlier times for knowledge which could not be proved to be useful in the community.

To summarize, the Mwalimu Nyerere vision as articulated by Nyerere himself and by many of the adult educators of the times was seen as a broad area of learning activities with emphasis on the arousal or awakening of adults' awareness of their realities and the abilities to change their realities. Adult education is a key to socialist development. Further, it is viewed as a practical and problem-solving contribution. As much as possible adult education should be integrated into life and should not be considered as a separate segment of life. The education of adults in Tanzania was seen as an ideological, practical and flexibly integrated process; integrated into the lives of learners and in the reality of the emerging Tanzania.

From vision to implementation: adult education infrastructure in the early 1970s

After the Arusha Declaration in 1967, the planning team in the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development Planning set about modifying what they had already been working on so that when the second Five Year Plan came out it would be a socialist plan and not merely an extension of previous planning strategies. For adult education, the second Five Year Plan meant a great many changes. Increased emphasis was put on creating conditions in the rural areas that would lead to more rapid development. The most important organizational change, however, occurred when adult education was moved from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Administration to the Ministry of National Education.

This move was significant because it meant that adult education was to be raised in status to similar structural place in the government as primary and secondary education. The name of the Ministry was changed from Ministry of Education to the Ministry of National Education to signify its role in coordinating all education in the nation, both for young people and adults. The goals of the new organization were to:

1. mobilize rural and urban masses to political consciousness.
2. provide knowledge and skills to raise productivity.
3. eradicate illiteracy.
4. provide education for school leavers for Ujamaa living.

5. expand in-service and continuing education opportunities.
6. coordinate all adult education offerings. (Mhaiki, 1970,p. 1)

In order to carry out the very large tasks indicated, the first task of the new directorate was to select a field staff and train them. The first group of officers selected were 62 District Adult Education Officers. They were for the most part school teachers who had attended Kivukoni College, the TANU political education college. The 62 District Adult Education Officers were trained during an intensive six-week course conducted by the Institute of Adult Education, Kivukoni College and the Ministry of National Education jointly at Kivukoni College in Dar es Salaam. The next set of field staff added to the organization were the regional coordinators. These people were recruited from the ranks of the district officers. The next level of officers were the divisional supervisors, 387 women and men who were responsible for supporting adult education activities at the divisional level. In 1972 there were 475 field staff whose duties were solely concerned with the support of adult education and an additional 1,700 teachers who both taught in the community schools and facilitated adult education. The duties of the administrative and supervisory staff were:

1. To assist in opening and maintaining adult classes in their areas.
2. To recruit part-time teachers where necessary.
3. To be responsible for careful use of both finance and materials allocated to adult education.
4. To encourage, support and inspect adult classes.
5. To organize training seminars for adult classes.
6. To work in good cooperation with people in government departments, in TANU and private organisations.
7. To know all forms of adult education and all organizations carrying out adult education in their areas.
8. To work together with TANU party leaders in mobilizing the people in adult education, especially for Literacy Day, on September 8.
9. To publicize adult education activities by working together with the information officer but beware of empty propaganda.
10. To submit a report of adult education activities in their areas to both TANU and the district and regional offices of the Ministry of National Education.

11. To make sure that adult education committees are formed and are effective.
12. To give orientation to primary and secondary school teachers on how to teach adults before they begin such teaching (Mhaiki & Hall, 1972, section 3).

Coordination of adult education activities was facilitated through the multi-level committee structure. The local adult education committees were the heart of the structural design. In many areas of the country local committees select their own teachers, persons that they believe will be able to teach a particular subject. As Mhaiki, one of the most influential adult education leaders who had been a Director in the Ministry, a Director of the Institute of Adult Education and Principal of Kivukoni College noted, "If members of the village of the class are given the responsibility to decide on what they want to learn and how they want it done, then there are all chances that such a scheme will be successful" (Mhaiki & Hall, 1972, section 3).

Within the Ministry of National Education, adult education operated with a much smaller budget than formal education. Adult education at the time operated on about 3% of the total education budget. That did not, however, indicate as small a contribution as the numbers first indicate. Adult education makes extensive use of the primary school facilities and even primary school teachers with over half of the then 22,000 primary school teachers also teaching adult education classes. In addition, village head teachers were most often the ward co-ordinators for adult education. The budget portrays the financial efficiency of offering adult education through the already widely distributed network of schools. *Education for Self-Reliance* called for the creation of community schools where children and adults would learn subjects to improve their lives. In 1973, no primary school in Tanzania operated that did not make its facilities available to adults in the afternoons after the pupils had finished. The schools served as centres for quite a number of adult education classes, some which took place in the schools, some in available spaces in the villages, some in the ten-house cell leader's home or sometimes in a TANU branch. Each class had a class committee responsible for attendance and provision of necessary study materials. In 1971 there were 1.2 million adults studying in organized adult education classes. By December of 1972 the figures were 2.4 million.

The subjects taught in the community schools varied from place to place depending on the interests of the people in the area, the availability of teachers and the development priorities for the region. In a survey of district adult education officers, 75% of the officers said literacy was the easiest subject to find teachers and agriculture the most difficult. The range of courses offered were nonetheless extensive. In 1971 courses were offered in political education, better farming methods, health, literacy, domestic science, typewriting, crafts, arithmetic, Kiswahili, history, English, Culture, Economics and Militia. The highest enrolments were in literacy, political education and Kiswahili. (Ministry of National Education, 1971). The 'Army of teachers' to whom the Ministry of National Education often referred included a variety of people. TANU officials, extension agricultural agents, rural development workers, health care workers, Co-operative educators, church leaders and standard seven school leavers who played a role as voluntary teachers. Primary school teachers were given a release time of two hours to teach adults in the afternoon. The voluntary teachers were sometimes paid an honorarium of \$4.25 per month when funds were available. This resulted in often uneven levels of commitment from these young people.

When the Ministry of National Education's Adult Education Directorate was created, it was decided that no additional teachers would be necessary, that existing teachers and extension officers would be sufficient to meet the needs of the adults in the rural areas. Primary school teachers would provide a large corps of teachers, but every civil servant could be called upon to teach that subject in which he/she is specialized. The agriculture agents could be called upon as part of their jobs to teach adult classes. Health officers would teach health and nutrition and rural development female teachers would teach various domestic science subjects. In practice, there was less cooperation between the various ministries than was expected. It proved unrealistic for all the agricultural extension workers to teach adult classes. The extension workers in other ministries did not see it as their main job to teach adult classes. With many of the teachers teaching adults for the first time, a great deal of training was needed. The District Adult Education Officers had the responsibility for

training. They trained adult teachers in seminars ranging from one day to one week depending on resources and time. The content of the training included the psychology of teaching adults, methods of teaching and literacy teaching methods. Support for training was provided by the Institute of Adult Education and the Mwanza -based Work Oriented Functional Literacy Pilot Project. In addition, training in adult education methods was introduced in all of the teacher training colleges of the day. In 1971, the teachers in the adult education centres were as follows: voluntary teachers (68%), primary and secondary school teachers (22%), students (5%), TANU leaders (2%) several hundred each of agricultural agents, rural development agents, cooperative personnel and religious leaders.

The declaration of Dar es Salaam

The International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) was created at the UNESCO Conference on Adult Education that took place in Tokyo in 1972. J. Roby Kidd of Canada was chosen as the Secretary General and Paul J. Mhaiki, the then Director of the Tanzania Institute of Adult Education was elected as the Vice President for Africa. A decision was taken at the 1974 meeting of the Executive Committee of the ICAE to hold the first World Assembly of Adult Education in Tanzania in 1976 with the theme: *Adult Education and Development*. There were over 500 participants from 82 countries. Paul Mhaiki was the conference host and Budd Hall, by then working for the ICAE in Canada, was the conference secretary. The keynote address for the conference was made by President Julius K. Nyerere. His keynote address contained the fullest elaboration of his vision of adult education that was ever written (Hall & Kidd, 1978). His address was adopted as the *Declaration of Dar es Salaam*, and was spread throughout the world. Mwalimu Nyerere was also chosen as the first Honorary President of the ICAE. Let us review some of the key elements in his vision².

The purpose of development

Development has a purpose. That purpose is the liberation of humanity. It is true that in the Third World we talk a great deal about economic development—about expanding the number

² All excerpts from Mwalimu Nyerere's speech have been sourced from Hall and Kidd (1978). In the interest of rendering his language more inclusive, the author has replaced 'man' and 'men' with more inclusive words such as humanity, women and men, people and so forth.

of goods and services and the capacity to produce them. But the goods are needed to serve people; services are required to make the lives of women and men more easeful as well as more fruitful. Political, social and economic organization is needed to enlarge the freedom and dignity of all people. Always we come back to people—to liberated people—as the purpose of activity, the purpose of development.

But human beings can only liberate themselves or develop themselves. They cannot be liberated or developed by another. For human beings make themselves. It is their ability to act deliberately, for a self-determined purpose which distinguishes them from other animals. The same is true of education whose purpose is the liberation of women and men from the restraints and limitations of lack of knowledge and dependency. Education has to increase people's control over themselves, their own lives and the environment in which they live. These ideas imparted by education, or released in the mind through education, should therefore, be liberating ideas; and the skills acquired by education should be liberating skills. Nothing else can be properly called education. Teaching which induces a slave mentality or a sense of impotence is not education at all, but rather it is an attack on the minds of us all.

The functions of adult education

The first stage of adult education is to inspire both a desire for change and an understanding that change is possible. For a belief that poverty or suffering is the 'will of God' and that our only task as human beings is endure, is the most fundamental of all the enemies of freedom. Yet dissatisfaction with what is must be combined with a conviction that it can be changed; otherwise it is simply destructive. People living in poverty or sickness or under tyranny or exploitation must be empowered to recognize both that the life they lead is miserable, and that they can change it by their own actions, either individually or in cooperation with others.

The second stage of adult education is helping people to work out what kind of change they want, and how to create it. For example, it is not enough that the people in a village should come to recognize that something can be done about their endemic malaria—that, it is not an evil which has to be endured. They also have to learn that malaria can be treated with drugs,

or prevented by controlling mosquitoes, or that malaria can be dealt with by a combination of curative and preventative measures. And all this must be followed up with action. Thus, we have a whole series of educational activities all of which involve a learning process which is an expansion of consciousness. The role of an educator is imperative to affect these processes.

Adult education thus incorporates anything which enlarges people's understanding, activates them, helps them to make their own decisions, and to implement those decisions for themselves. It includes training, but it is much more than training. It may involve what is generally called 'agitation' but it is much more than that. It includes organization and mobilizations, but it goes beyond them to make them purposeful. Thinking of adult education from the point of view of the educators, one can say that there are two types of educators—each of whom needs the other. The first are what one might call the generalists. They are the political activists and educators whether or not they are members of, an organized political party or whether they are community development workers or religious teachers. By the nature of what they are doing, such people cannot be politically neutral. For what they are doing will affect how people look at the society in which they live, and how they seek to use it or change it. Adult education is thus a highly political activity.

It is at the level of the specialist adult education that the division into health, agriculture, childcare, managements, literacy and other branches of education, can make sense. But none of these branches can be self-contained; their work must be coordinated and linked. The work of the agricultural specialist must be linked with that of the nutritionist and that of people who train villagers to be more effective in selling or buying. Adult education, in fact, must be like a spider's web, the different strands of which knot together, each strengthening the other and each connected to the others to make a coherent whole.

The methods of adult education

One fundamental fact must underlie the choice of adult education methods. A mother does not 'give' walking or talking to her child because walking and talking are not things which she 'has' and of which she gives a portion to the child. Rather the mother helps the child to develop its own potential ability to walk and talk. The adult educators are in the same position as they are not giving something they possess. They are merely helping learners to develop their own potentials and capacities. This means that the adult educator must involve learners in their own education, and in practice from the very beginning. It does not matter what form this involvement takes. It may be a contribution to a discussion, reading out loud, or writing, or making a furrow of the required depth and width. What is important is that the adult learner should be learning by doing.

There is a second very fundamental determinant of adult education methods. It is that every adult knows something about the subject they are interested in, even if they are not aware. They may indeed know something which their teacher does not know. It is on the basis of this knowledge that greater understanding must be built. For by drawing out the things the learner already knows, and showing the relevance to the new thing that has to be learnt, the teacher has done three things: The teacher has built the self-confidence of the learner; demonstrated the relevance of experience and observation as a method of learning when combined with thought and analysis and; has shown what I might call the mutuality of learning, that by sharing our knowledge we extend the totality of our understanding and control over our lives.

All this means that adult education has to be given a priority with the overall development and recurrent revenue allocations of governments and other institutions. In most cases, what priority it obtains is perhaps one of the most political decisions a government will take. For if adult education is properly carried out, and therefore made effective, it is the most potent force there can be for developing free people who will insist upon determining their own future.

Reflections on Mwalimu Nyerere's vision of adult education

The act of naming 1970 Adult Education Year for the entire nation of Tanzania attracted global attention. In an era when investment in primary schooling was seen as the generalized first step in development investment, the argument that nations such as Tanzania could not wait for the children to complete their education for change to occur was a dramatic challenge to developmental orthodoxies of the time. In prioritizing a mass process of learning by doing for those adult women and men who were in a position to take political action to improve their lives, Nyerere was adding to his earlier ideological departures from the dominant development theories of the day, *Ujamaa and Kujitegemea* (Socialism and Self-Reliance) and *Elimu ya Kujitegemea* (Education for Self-Reliance), his prescriptions for all schooling. The attention to adult education attracted a number of important international partnerships. Sweden is a nation which often describes itself as a ‘study circle democracy’, a nation which historically grew based on a belief in the power of adults to learn what they need to make the changes that they wish for. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) supported a significant partnership between the Swedish adult education movements of the 1970s which continued for many years. Leaders from the Swedish Folk High schools were among the early contributors, with many of them attached to the Institute of Adult Education where this author was working.

In 1972, UNESCO held their world conference on adult education in Tokyo. Paul Mhaiki, the Director of the Institute of Adult Education was the head of the Tanzania delegation to the Tokyo conference. Mhaiki presented the Nyerere vision to delegates from some 140 countries (Mhaiki, 1972). Mhaiki and the Chama Cha Elimu ya Watu Wazima of Tanzania became a founding member of the International Council for Adult Education. Nyerere’s New Year Speech of 1971, *Elimu Haina Mwisho*, was published in the leading international journal of the time, *Convergence*, which allowed for further dissemination of these ideas.

The ideas underlining Nyerere’s vision of adult education which included raising consciousness, drawing on the lived experiences of ordinary women and men and being focused on action also found their way into the emerging thinking about new ways of doing research. The dominant research paradigm of the day, sometimes referred to in University of Dar es Salaam circles at the time as colonial research methods was strongly positivist,

abstract and statistically driven. Research was something that scholars engaged in as part of a conversation with other scholars. But for many young Tanzanian and expatriate researchers of the time, the contradictions between the assumptions that underlined dominant research methods that privileged the knowledge of the researcher over the knowledge of the people needed to be challenged.

This movement for reimagining research as a process much more in line with Mwalimu Nyerere's thinking about the capacities of ordinary people became known as participatory research. (Hall & Tandon, 2017). Those underlying principles are being taught today in many universities around the world. The author of this article and his colleague Dr. Rajesh Tandon of India currently hold a UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Participatory Research. They are supporting the Knowledge for Change Global Consortium for Training in Community Based Participatory Research, a strategy for training thousands of young students and activists in many parts of the world. Mwalimu's thoughts on adult education and development as they apply to knowledge creation remain along with the ideas of Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda and Gandhi-ji as foundations of contemporary thinking about learning, knowledge creation, transformation and hope.

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