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Citizen's Charter and its Implementation in Biratnagar Metro-Politian City

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Abstract

The citizen's charter is a document which is the dedication of the government toward its citizens for improving the quality of services, information, choice of service, accountability & transparency of service providers etc. This article aims to explore the people's knowledge of the citizen's charter and the quality of service provided by Biratnagar Metropolitan City. Purposive sampling was done for analysis using an interview with 10 service receivers. The deputy mayor and some officials of the metropolis were also interviewed as the service provider. The qualitative method is used in data analysis. Due to the lack of education and awareness of the citizens and the charter being traditional, not updated and not regularly kept in the office, most of the service receivers had little knowledge about the charter. Only a few respondents with good knowledge said that the citizen's charter was a source of information and commitment of the government to service delivery. Regarding service delivery, the receivers added that service quality by metropolis had slightly improved but not in the spirit of the citizen's charter and had become faster and easier after federalism and local election. The authority of the metropolis claimed that they were always responsible and accountable for providing quality service to local people. On the contrary, the city charter, which was supposed to be updated by the metropolis, has not been placed in the office premises within six months of the research duration and has raised questions about the service delivery. The receivers are still lacking knowledge about the concept of the citizen's charter, its importance, and the contents of the charter. The service quality of the metropolis is not met as per the norms of the charter. Local government should be responsible towards people to make its services people-oriented. The provisions mentioned in the citizen's charter should be followed literally by the state. The government must be accountable and transparent. The government should also create awareness about charter among the people. The charter's commitments should be translated into action to make it effective.

Keywords: citizen's charter, public service, accountability, responsibility

Introduction

The citizen's charter, as one of the strategies of good governance, aims at providing quality services within a particular timeframe. It, an effective tool of good governance, is a promise of government toward its citizen. The citizen's charter is defined as "a document which is the dedication of the

government toward service receiver in respect of improving quality of services, information, choice of service, accountability and transparency of service provider etc.” (CGG, 2008). It mentions the types of services available, the service fee, the responsible person providing the service, the service quality, the duration for providing the service, the terms and procedures of service delivery and the remedy if the service is not available etc. A citizen’s charter also signifies a commitment expressed by the government body in the context of a particular service for targeted service receivers. The concept of the citizen’s charter protects the trust between the service provider and the service receiver (CGG, 2008).

The concept of the citizen’s charter was first expressed and implemented by the then British Prime Minister John Major’s conservative government in 1991 as a national program with the simple aim of continuously improving the quality of public services for the people of the country so that these services respond to the needs and wishes of the users. The white paper called “The Citizen's Charter: Raising the Standard” was published in July 1991. The programme was re-launched in 1998 by the Labour government of Tony Blair which was known as "Service First" (Pollitt, 1994).

The citizen’s charter indeed is worthwhile to make administration accountable and citizen-friendly, to ensure transparency, to take measures to improve customer service, to adopt a stakeholder approach and to save the time of both the administration and the citizens (Civildaily, 2017).

The goal of the citizens’ charter is to empower the citizen concerning public service delivery. Similarly, the six principles of the citizens’ charter movement as originally framed are: improving the quality of services, choice wherever possible, specifying what to expect and how to act if standards are not met value for the taxpayers’ money and accountability of individuals and organisations.

In Nepal, the citizen’s charter is considered essential for the flow of services to the people in government offices. This is provided for in Clause 25, Good Governance Act 2064 BS and Rule 14, Good Governance Regulation 2065 BS. The law stipulates that in every government office, a citizen’s charter written in clear language should be kept in a visible place where everyone can see the office premises. Every service-providing body should provide clear information about the services and goods that are available to citizens. A citizen’s charter must include information about the documents to be presented, the division of service available, the time and fee for the service, the responsible officer for hearing complaints, and the steps to be fulfilled by a person to receive the services. If the concerned person is not able to get the service within the stipulated time, the staff of the concerned branch should compensate a fine of up to five thousand rupees to the said person. A service receiver must be able to see, read or hear and understand the Citizen charter. In Nepal, government organizations such as health, education, agriculture, forest, district administration and district police and the local bodies such as District Coordination Committees (DCCs), rural municipalities and urban municipalities must provide quality service as mentioned in the charter (Khadka & Bhattarai, 2012).

Biratnagar, a hundred years old city called Gograha, is a newly defined metropolitan city, the capital city of Koshi Province and the fifth largest city of Nepal. Biratnagar has 2,42,548 population which is bordered in the south by Jogbani India, north by Budiganga rural municipality and Gramthan rural municipality east by Katahari rural municipality and Jahada rural municipality and west by Keshaliya river. Biratnagar has multi cultural society residing mainly Brahmin, Chhetri, Newar and other hill ethnic groups, Madhesi groups including Madhesi Brahmin, Chhetri, Madhesi Dalits like

Bantar, Paswan, Dum, Rishidev, Tarai Janajati such as Tharu, Muslim etc. Most of the people are Hindus, some are Muslims and some are Christians (Biratnagar Metropolitan City, 2076).

The functions of a metropolitan city are urban planning including town planning, regulation of land use and construction of the building, planning for economic and social development, roads and bridges, water supply, public health, sanitation, fire services, urban forestry, protection of environment and ecology, safeguarding the interest of weaker sections society including the handicapped and mentally retarded children, and upgrading, provision of urban facilities which include parks, gardens and playgrounds, promotion of cultural, educational and aesthetic aspects, cattle pounds, vital statistics including registration of births, deaths and marriage etc., public amenities including street lighting, parking lots, bus stops (Sharma, 2012). Disaster management, squatter settlement and judicial function have also become part of local governments like Biratnagar.

Statement of the Problem

The Government of Nepal has introduced the concept of good governance for the establishment of the welfare state which is to be implemented through local governments. Biratnagar Municipality as a local government must place a citizen's charter on its premises to provide quality services in line with the concept of good governance. The procedures of how services are provided by the metropolis have flowed in the charter. The concepts of citizen's charter in the context of many developing countries are still in their infancy. There is either lack of clearly written citizen's charters or weak implementations in many of the local-level government organizations. This study explores the level of awareness or knowledge of local people and the level of service quality in the Biratnagar metropolis.

The research questions of the study are as follows:

What is the awareness level of the people about the citizen's charter?

How is the Metropolitan city office responsible towards its citizen?

The objectives of the study are pointed out in the following ways:

To explore the awareness level of people about citizen's charter.

To identify the quality-of-service delivery of Biratnagar metropolitan city.

The limitations of the study are presented below:

This study cannot be generalised because it is limited to only Biratnagar metropolitan city office.

Only 10 in-depth interviews with service receivers and a few key informant interviews with service providers were taken as primary data.

The research design is descriptive.

The Rationale of the Study

The outcome of the study will serve as a source of reference material for academics, researchers and practitioners in the respective field. The outcome will bring out new ideas, recommendations and solutions which can be used to solve problems related to service delivery. It helps the local government to make future work plans and to deliver quality service according to the commitment in the citizen's charter to adopt good governance.

Literature Review

The literature review consists of some important journal articles and books related to citizen's charters focusing on the objectives of the study. Without a literature review, research is not possible.

Let us recall Mahatma Gandhi's quote on how important service recipients are to any government office "A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependent on us; we are dependent on him...." (Centre for Good Governance, 2008).

It is required on reducing the gap between the people and the government by increasing the ability of the government. Employees are expected to identify, understand and improve the quality-of-service delivery (Montalvo, 2009). But another study found that employees of the Revenue Department in Jammu and Kashmir, India, did not know the various standard operating procedures SOPs required for service delivery to the public. On the other hand, there is a lack of awareness among the people to get the service within the stipulated time from the government office (Rather et al., 2016).

A study conducted in India described that the citizen's charters had been displayed near the office entrances and lifts of various customs, central excise and service tax offices. The citizen's charter is taken as the commitment to provide good service to the people. Public administrations must be committed to the citizen's charter as they are involved in the formulation and implementation of the citizen's charter at all levels. Employees are guided by their higher officials and act accordingly. The higher-level official should train and sensitize the staff. Awareness campaigns to educate the people about the charters should be undertaken. The standards of the services to be provided and the time within which they are to be provided should not be unrealistic. A mechanism should be built for monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing the work of the charters. Social audits also need to carry out to make the Charters more effective and meaningful and public servants more responsible and accountable for their duties (Garg, 2006).

Indian study indicates that as public services are funded by citizens, the service provider must respect their rights of providing quality service. They must provide quality service at affordable prices. The Charter is to help change service providers to serve the people with the right sense of duty in an accessible way, not just using their power over the public. However, the Citizens Charter should not simply be a document of assurances or a formula which imposes a uniform pattern on every service. It is meant to be a tool kit of initiatives and ideas to raise the level of standards and service delivery and increase public participation, in the most appropriate way. The Charter should be an effective tool to ensure transparency and accountability and should help deliver good governance if implemented vigorously by the government departments. If successfully implemented, the charter Improves service delivery; Greater responsiveness of officials towards the public; and greater public satisfaction with services (GoI, n.d.).

Thus citizen's charter is not just a simple document. It is the best way to increase the expansion of government services through public participation. The most important clients are the service receivers. Citizen's charter makes staff more accountable and responsible to the people while they are important persons for the office rather than the service provider. The government is run by the taxes paid by the people who should be respected. To provide quality services to the people, government employees need to increase their capacity, have a good knowledge of the citizen's charter and be responsible toward people.

Conceptual Framework

The different aspects of knowledge of the citizen's charter are the comprehension of the citizen's charter, such as hearing about it, understanding it, information on its update etc. The different components

of service delivery are the implementation of the citizens' charter are transparency, accountability, responsibility, equality, the value of the tax, compensation etc.

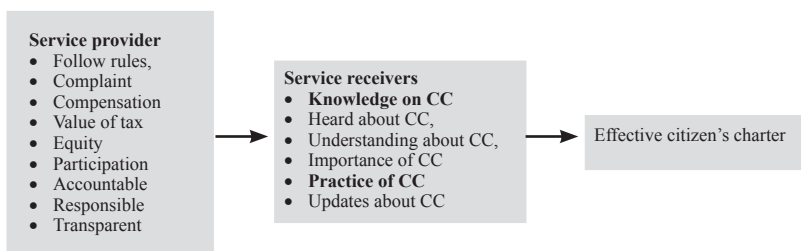


Figure 1: Quality Service Delivery Through Citizen's Charter

The figure indicates the key elements of the citizen's charter. To fulfil the norms of the citizen's charter metropolis should provide quality service to the people. The service provider should be accountable towards their duties and responsible towards the citizen. There is a need to maintain transparency in all the information and services in such institutions. Nepotism is being observed as a well-observed issue in Nepalese administration which needs immediate correction. All service recipients should be treated equally. The principle of equality must be applied. The value of the taxpayer should be respected by the service providers. The performance of the staff had to be effective and efficient. If the staff do not properly perform their duties on the prescribed fee and on time, the compensation system as per the law must be implemented effectively. It is very important to increase the people's knowledge and participation in the citizen's charter.

Research Gap

The Government of Nepal has adopted a good governance policy to form a welfare state. The citizen's charter is a tool for good governance policy implementation. The Government of Nepal, through its various line agencies and local governments, has expressed its commitment to providing quality services to the people. There is rare research on the knowledge of the citizen's charter and its implementation in Nepal. In the contest of the Biratnagar Metropolitan city office, there is no research in this field. The research has been done to find out the public knowledge about the citizen's charter and its effective implementation in Biratnagar Metropolitan City.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative method to explore the local people's knowledge of the citizen's charter and its implementation in the Biratnagar metropolis in the year February 2021. The descriptive research method has been adopted in this study. To accomplish these objectives, primary sources of information have been used. Primary were collected from an in-depth interview with the service receivers and service providers consisting of the deputy mayor, officers and other employees. The guiding questions were prepared and an attempt was made to find the answer to them. The qualitative data was analyzed manually. Thus, the service providers and the service receivers of the metropolis are included in the research framework of the study.

Results

The different concepts that come up during the research are explained and analysed below by qualitative method. The researcher sought to dig out the respondent's knowledge of the citizen's charter and the quality-of-service delivery.

Basic Characteristics of Respondents

The age, sex and caste ethnicity of the various service receivers and some basic indicators of service delivery are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Respondents and Major Responses

Respondent	Age	Sex	Caste ethnicity	Heard about citizen's charter	Service satisfaction	Required service
R1	45	Male	Brahmin	Yes	Highly satisfied	Recommendation
R2	64	Female	Janajati	No	Satisfied	Social security
R3	39	Male	Janajati	Yes	Satisfied	Project agreement
R4	46	Male	Chhetri	Yes	Dissatisfied	Fund release
R5	40	Female	Madhesi	No	Satisfied	Judicial work
R6	56	Male	Dalit	No	Dissatisfied	Disaster Relief
R7	58	Male	Janajati	No	Dissatisfied	Sanitation
R8	34	Male	Janajati	Yes	Dissatisfied	Construction
R9	36	Female	Brahmin	Yes	Dissatisfied	Public health
R10	32	Male	Madhesi	No	Satisfied	Cooperative

Source: In-depth Interview, 2020

Note: R1 to R10 represent the 10 selected respondents for maintaining their secrecy.

The table, reveals that the age of the service receivers ranges from 32 years to 64 years. Service receivers were both males and females but the number of females was a few. The service receivers consist of all kinds of caste ethnicity such as Brahmin/Chhetri, Indigenous groups, Madhesi and Dalit. The service receivers either heard about the citizen's charter or not heard were incorporated in the research. The level of service satisfaction was obtained from respondents ranging from excellent, satisfactory, to not satisfactory. Service receivers had come to the municipality for various works such as recommendation letters, social security, project agreement, fund release for the project, judicial work, disaster relief, sanitation, construction, public health and cooperatives.

Knowledge of the Citizen's Charter

The researcher found the diverse knowledge of respondents about the citizen's charter. The respondents who had different levels of knowledge of the citizen's charter were three types of service receivers regarding knowledge of the citizen's charter: those who did not know about the citizen's charter, those who had little knowledge of it and those who had sound knowledge of it. Before the metropolitan city, the respondents got knowledge about citizen's charters from other government offices as well. The respondents who had sound knowledge of the citizen's charter perceived it as a source of information.

The theme of the knowledge of the citizen's charter from some of the respondents was that Citizen's charter is a commitment made by the government for quality service delivery. It provides information on how the metropolis provides services to the people. It is the process of getting prompt

service. Citizen's charter mentions the branch to receive the service and has a complaint system. It also indicates the documentation required to receive the service. It is the most important means for receiving easy services without any problem.

Citizen's charter was taken as a tool to receive all kinds of service promptly by government agencies. In support of the respondents who did not know about the citizen's charter, the service recipient R4 said, "The people could not know about the citizen's charter without placing it in the office premises".

The respondent R8 who has sound knowledge about charter said, "Citizen's Charter is an important tool that makes it easy for the client to work by providing complete information about the office. Its proper implementation reduces corruption and maintains good governance". To guarantee good governance, the office has to implement the citizen's charter properly. The people also had to take interest in it and create pressure for implementation.

One of the illiterate women R5 said, "I am an illiterate Madhesi woman and don't know anything about the citizen's charter. Nothing is told and taught me about it". This indicates that the citizen's charter does not seem to be effective for all service receivers, especially for illiterate people.

Language of Citizen's Charter

When asked about the language written in the Citizen's Charter of the metropolis, everyone who could read and write could understand the language of the charter. Those who had seen the city's charter and could read and write, understand the charter written in the Nepali language. However, they had to take information from other people to get the service as there was no charter on the premises. People added that the city charter should be kept immediately in the office and visible to everybody.

Updates about Citizen's Charter

Among the service receiver who knew said that the office had not updated the citizen's charter. Moreover, people who had little knowledge said that they did not know whether the office had updated the citizen's charter or not. But the officials said that the citizen's charter was withdrawn from the office premises to update it. It is essential to involve people as a stakeholder to update the citizen's charter.

Service Delivery of Metropolitan City

Regarding the promptness of service delivery, all types of responses-very fast, on time and even late service-were received from the respondents. The service would be quick or late depending on its nature. The services like vital registration, recommendation of respective wards, and emergency services have been provided soon. But tax and customs-related work, four fortress recommendations, social security allowance, and project approval, agreement and payment would take up to 1-7 days. Some of the tasks including sanitation, disaster management, road maintenance etc. are not performed at all even when complaining. It was the common statement of the respondents that the metropolis should provide all services to the people as soon as possible.

The constitution of Nepal-2072 has given a lot of power to the local government (GON, 2015). After a long time, local government elections have also taken place. When asked about the changes in service delivery, one respondent said.

When asked about the changes in service delivery, one R1 said, "After the arrival of the people's representatives, there has been a lot of clarity in the work and the service has started to be available quickly at the mentioned charge. "But respondents complained that the tax has been increased heavily.

Respondents also complained that the citizen's charter has not been kept on office premises for a few months.

Complains against Staff

There is a provision that the concerned employee has to give compensation of up to five thousand rupees to the service recipient if they do not work on time and a fixed fee. The complaints were carried out by the authorities when the staff did not perform their duties properly in the stipulated time and fee. Further added that the mayors and deputy mayors were always busy with social programs and it was difficult to meet them to complain about the lack of work on time. So the people's representatives should monitor and listen to the complaints about whether the work has been done within the stipulated time and fee or not.

Relevance of the Citizen's Charter

The public has spoken about the relevance of the citizen's charter and that if there is a charter, the service can be obtained easily without asking anyone. It eliminates dilemmas such as what documents are required for a job, fees and time required. It would provide clear information about the overall service and process of the office. When asked how much they use Citizen's charter, the service recipients said that they could not use it because there was no Citizen's charter in office Promises at present. Instead of a city charter, the metropolis had written information about only the room number of the related service on the office wall. Citizen's charter is important for the client so the office should keep it as far as soon.

Implementation of the Charter

This section seeks to analyse the multiple perspectives on the implementation of the citizen's charter in the municipality of Biratnagar.

According to the administrative officer, Biratnagar Metropolitan City currently has 323 employees in which there is a shortage of technical staff even though the administrative staffs are full. Though the metropolis has had a Citizen's Charter for the past 21 years, it was withdrawn for updating. Now, this information is also posted on the website of the office. The authority claimed that in all 19 wards of the metropolis, information has been provided to the service recipients through citizen's charters.

Understanding of Charter

Regarding the understanding of the citizens' charter, the information officer told that the citizens' charter is the information system of the office as the right of the people which provides the details of service procedure of the office such as required documents, fees and time, responsible person, grievance body etc. He added the municipality is trying to provide services to the people according to the charter.

The citizens' charter of the metropolis was not on the office premises. It was in the process of updating, construction and printing which would be placed soon. According to the deputy Mayor, the citizen's charter was in the process of reprinting and updating as the responsibilities of the municipality are added (Bhim Parajuli, Personal communication, February 12, 2021). The citizen's charter provides information about the services of the metropolis through the website also. The information officer as a focal person is responsible for the flow of information. Even though the office is required to have a citizen's charter and an information officer, the public lacks knowledge about the citizen's charter and is unable to use it. It was found that the metropolis failed to educate the public about the citizen's charter and to keep them updated charter in the promises.

Responsibility

Metropolis authority said that they were morally and ethically responsible to the people and accountable for their duty. They were trying to resolve the public complaint. Being a representative of the people, the deputy mayor said, "we are trying to enhance the overall service quality by applying transparency, accountability and responsibility and solve the issues and problems of the local people" (Indira Karki, Personal communication, February 13, 2021). The information officer added that "If the people come with complete documents, the work will be done quickly. But the work is delayed because people do not complete the documents" (Nanda Kishor Bhandari, Personal communication, February 15, 2021). Employees said that there was a gradual improvement in service to the people. Further, people needed to come with the necessary documents as stated in the citizen's charter.

It was found that the metropolis had to provide an updated citizen's charter to inform the service recipients about the documents required for the service and if not, the information officer should inform them about it. Due to this, it was found that the service recipient had to come repeatedly to the office for the same task due to insufficient documents.

Service Delivery

The officials claimed that the people's problems were solved by the branch. If the service was not related to the branch, the recipient was requested to go to the relevant branch. Complaints were heard and resolved through public hearings and social auditing. After hearing the public complaint, if the issue could not be resolved, it was sent to a higher body. They further added that their responsibilities were fulfilled under the law. Some branch officials said that they did not allow the public to lodge complaints. People complained when the work was not done quickly but the main reason for complaining was that the service receivers came without completing the document. They claimed that they had done their best to make service complaints free from the public.

Regarding the change in Service Delivery after the Restoration of federalism in the country, the judicial committee official said "Article 217 of the federal constitution has made a provision of the judicial right to the Local government. We are performing our judicial works based on the norms of federalism. Therefore, we felt changes in work". But staff of other section did not feel any major changes of their duty.

Relevance

The deputy mayor and staff of different branches such as personnel administration, information, social security, cooperatives and planning were interviewed about the effectiveness of the citizen's charter in the metropolis. In terms of the relevance of the citizen's charter, the officials claimed that the citizen's charter was partially effective in our context as it was used only for those who could read it. It is an important tool to remove the dilemma of the flow of information to the service recipients. Explaining the justification of the citizen's charter, the deputy mayor said "Citizen's charter is essential for making us accountable and responsible and our service transparent. It can guarantee good governance for the organization. We are now going to update it and will try to digitize it in future." As it was in the process of construction by updating the citizen's charter of Biratnagar metropolis, it was not on the premises at present. They claimed that in all 19 wards of the metropolis, the citizen's charter was placed.

Findings

Here is a brief overview of the key findings of the research conducted by the author on the knowledge of people on citizen's charter and the implementation of the service delivery of the metropolis.

The citizen's charter gives official information about the services to the public, the required documents, the officer concerned, the specified time and fee and the arrangement of compensation in case of non-receipt of service at the specified time and fee. Correct implementation of the citizen's charter will reduce corruption; the public will be able to access services without any problems, will not have to go to the same job over and over again, will not be able to cheat the service recipients and will reduce nepotism. The office can guarantee good governance by providing quality services as directed by the citizen's charter.

Despite the provision of citizen's charter in Biratnagar metropolis for the past 21 years, there was no citizen's charter in the office premises during research. The metropolis had ignored even the most mandatory provision of the citizen's charter. Despite repeated requests to keep the citizen's charter, it was found that the office did not place the citizen's charter even during the six months of investigation. The metropolitan city did not seem to assure the concept of good governance. Since there is no citizen's charter on the office premises, it is natural for the public to have little or no knowledge about the citizen's charter. The service receivers who had sound knowledge got information on the citizen's charter from other offices.

Although the officials claimed that they are responsible to the people, it seemed that the basic needs of the office had not been fulfilled till now. The information officer wasn't able to provide the necessary information to the public about the citizen's charter.

In terms of service delivery, the author found that only a few works such as recommendations, social security etc. were performed on time. People should repeatedly come for project agreements, project payments and other works. The rescue work in disasters such as a flood and fire were not taken seriously. The cleaning of the drains during the rainy season was also not satisfactory. Even after the local elections, the people had not been able to feel any major changes. People did not seem to be able to feel much belonging even with the arrival of people's representatives in the doorstep government. Overall, the quality of service was not as expected in the norms of good governance. Even though a government runs on people's taxes, it did not give the people a chance to feel great belonging.

Conclusions

The citizen's charter is one of the quality assurance strategies in the public sector put forward by New Public Management theorists. It is implemented in Nepal to improve the quality of governmental service delivery, increase the level of public satisfaction and enhance the efficiency of local-level bureaucracy. Democracy with good governance can be built only if the political leaders and administration become responsible for their duty. Although Biratnagar metropolitan city had a citizen's charter for the past 21 years in the spirit of good governance, it seems that its services have not been made people-oriented. This has raised questions about its performance. Service receivers do not have adequate knowledge of the citizen's charter and the provider also has not been able to deliver its services effectively and efficiently as per the norms and commitments of the citizen's charter. The digital citizen's charter should be kept on the office premises so that the service receiver can see it. Organizations should be provided awareness to the service receiver, it should be given wide publicity through pamphlets,

websites, SMS, Facebook, radio, TV, newspapers, telephone, and toll-free numbers. It should be made available in Nepali as well as in other local languages. To make the charter effective, service providers should also be given training and orientation. Additionally, the help desk should inform and encourage service users to use the citizen's charter. To implement the concept of good governance, people-oriented service should be provided. The importance of the citizen's charter is because, it is a concrete strategy to raise the fineness, effectiveness, and efficiency of delivering municipal services, not an illusion for enhancing local service quality.

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