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Women's leadership in local government in the Caribbean

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Kizzann Lee Sam

Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Caribbean Local Economic Development Project



Abstract

Women and men are traditionally cast in different roles, with males being leaders in the workplace, home and government. In contrast, communities promote women as caregivers who support male leaders and shape future generations as mothers, mentors and teachers. In recognition of this societal view of women that often led to inequality and inequity, the UNDP listed Gender Equality and empowering women as one of eight Millennium Development Goals. The post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in autumn 2015, also included gender equality and empowering women as Goal 5.

In its work in the Caribbean, the Caribbean Local Economic Development Project (CARILED) examined gender as it relates to micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) development in six Caribbean countries. The findings of this study showed gender gaps for both male and female entrepreneurs in different areas of development. Traditionally gendered roles for MSME sectors, access to financing and lack of adequate guidance or community support were some areas that affected men and women differently in the region.

The study outlines ways in which male and female leaders can address traditional gender roles by identifying priority areas for development, creating an enabling environment for start-ups and expansion, and fostering a policy and legislative base that facilitates ease of doing business. The recommendations further describe the public-private partnerships needed to successfully meet gender gaps, and the importance of both elected officials and technocrats in inter alia community engagement and advocacy towards local economic development.

The importance of gender equality among elected officials and technocrats, and the influence gender has on determining priority areas of focus within local government strategic plans for communities are also set out within this paper.

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Introduction

The Caribbean Local Economic Development Project (CARILED) is a six-year multilateral programme that contributes to sustainable economic growth in the Caribbean. CARILED supports growth through community specific local economic development programmes and approaches in partnership with local governments and local governance authorities in twenty-three¹ communities in seven countries (CARILED 2015).

CARILED defines local economic development as a process by which public sector, business and civil society work collectively to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation (CARILED 2015). This definition is similar to approaches adopted by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the World Bank, the United Nations and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. Successful local economic development (LED) initiatives are participatory and inclusive, guided by local leadership, and geared at job creation or expansion, enhanced community competitiveness and investments and increased economic growth that is also sustainable (CARILED 2015).

An evaluation of the adoption and adaptation of LED initiatives in Caribbean communities is currently underway within the CARILED programme. Further to the initial launch in 2012, CARILED partnered with ministries of local government, or those with responsibility for local government, local government associations, the private sector and civil society organisations, to introduce LED structures, planning approaches and programme implementation techniques within a results-based management framework. In undertaking this regional programme, CARILED incorporates gender as a cross-cutting theme, and in this context, led the review of gender related issues that affected the 'Ease of Doing Business'² for men and women in 22 communities of focus. The CARILED 2014 reviews of gender-related challenges affecting local government and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) paid particular attention to differences men and women face in two areas of business regulation: (i) starting a business; and (ii) getting credit (Anthony et al. 2014; Budhu et al. 2014a; Budhu et al. 2014b; Hesse-Bayne et al. 2014; Budhu and Sheerattan-Bisnauth 2014; Budhu and Watson-Williams 2014). The studies also examined the role of local government in supporting new and existing businesses in local economies.

¹ CARILED worked with 25 communities in 2014, but the programme no longer works in Belize River Valley, Belize. Carriacou and Petite Martinique in Grenada are categorised as one community under the programme.

² The 'Ease of Doing Business' index assigns rankings to 11 areas of business regulation with a rating between 1 and 189 for each indicator, with higher rankings having lower numbers (World Bank 2014).

CARILED's approach allowed it to work directly with six Caribbean countries³ and with a distribution of communities that varied from rural, sub-urban, urban and inner-city. This paper will present summary findings of six country studies⁴ undertaken by CARILED in 2014. The paper will examine gender definitions and statistics related to local government, and later determines the influence of male or female leaders on identifying priorities, encouraging community engagement and influencing business development in local communities.

Methodology

The methodology examined the results of findings emerging from the six gender and MSME country studies, related to: (i) local authorities and MSMEs; (ii) credit programmes and financial services; (iii) business development programmes and services; and (iv) community and family support. The gender and MSME studies incorporated literature reviews, focus groups and interviews with local government and LED stakeholders. The paper interprets the findings related to local authorities and MSMEs by introducing additional desk research and webinar based feedback from six country reports.

The desk research references articles and studies across the Commonwealth and from various governmental and non-governmental organisations. Although CARILED has not yet conducted a similar study on gender, local government and MSMEs for the Commonwealth of Dominica, the paper does cite statistical information obtained from literary reviews.

Defining gender and the economy

Khosla and Barth (2008, p. 17) defines gender as an analytical concept related to "*social interpretations and values assigned to being a woman, a man, a boy or a girl ... not based on the sex of the individual.*" Perceived social interpretations cast men and women in different roles, as caregivers, breadwinners or leaders. In the Caribbean, traditional customs promote gender roles for children, with boys and young males being responsible for outdoor tasks (gardening, car maintenance, caring for animals), and girls and young females being given household tasks (cooking, cleaning, caring for siblings or the elderly). The multi-cultural background consisting of indigenous people, and European, Indian, African, Middle Eastern and Asian-Pacific immigrants did not take away from the perceived gender roles.

The global discussion on the role of male and female leaders intensified in the late 1980s and 1990s. By 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) passed a resolution recommending that

³ The six countries in the study were Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago.

⁴ The results of the studies were published in six reports "A review of gender-related challenges affecting local government and MSMEs in ..." in 2014.

governments should aim for a **target of 30% female leaders by 1995 and 50% female leaders by 2000**. The Fourth World Conference on the Beijing Declaration (1995) agreed that:

....eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centred sustainable development (United Nations 1995, p. 9).

In recognition of the societal view that women are often more inclined to share resources within families, the United Nations listed gender equality and empowering women as one of eight Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2013). The adoption of gender equality and empowering women as Goal 3 along with seven other anti-poverty goals at the 2010 United Nations Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) further reiterated the global and national commitments to gender equality as a key element in poverty alleviation. Goal 3 focused on reducing gaps in gender equality linked to employment, education and political representation. The increased share of women with access to additional resources was the primary objective of Goal 3.

The development lens across the globe shifted in 2008–2009 with the onset of the global financial crisis. As developed nations battled with increased unemployment, inflation and reduced disposable incomes, developing countries faced a new challenge. For the Caribbean, the external shocks led to dips in tourism numbers, and many stable jobs were lost in the private and public sector. The global economic shock created a ripple effect, and led to countries promoting MSME growth and development, alongside Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) as a foundation for innovation. Countries also recognised the need for more grassroots engagement, community-led economic growth and investment promotion.

The role of men and women in the shifting national focus on local development was not examined in detail by countries. However, in 2011, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) published a report on 'Men in Families and Family Policy in a Changing World' (United Nations 2011). The report highlighted several concerns facing families across the globe, as more communities saw increases in female-headed and often single-parent households. In the English-speaking Caribbean, female-headed households accounted for 37%–49% of homes (Alatorre 2002, cited in United Nations 2011, p. 17). The cause of this increase was a "*high rate of migration of men and by a matrifocal family structure*" with women emerging both as working professionals and care givers. As jobs became rarer in traditional communities, male migration peaked, leading to communities losing male role models within the home, and creating mentorship gaps among young males and boys. The United Nations report (2011) also found that **stable employment** was a societal requirement for young men to be recognised as adult men. While young women were viewed as adults after having

children or entering part-time or full employment, young men faced additional requirements related to job stability and asset accumulation as indicators of masculinity within the gender construct.

The examination of societal requirements for defining gender in the Caribbean was not examined at the local level by local government or local governing authorities.

Gender and government

The global statistics that track gender distributions among local government leadership is a newly emerging trend among countries. Several countries published their progress against the United Nations (UN) target of 50% female leaders by 2000.

The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) reported on the limited progress for the inclusion of women in decision-making or senior roles in either central or local government. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004, p.1) stated that *“in 2000 women represented 13.8% of all parliament members in the world, up from 9% in 1987”* but by 2015, the UCLG (2015, para 3) noted that *“just 16% of mayors of capital cities are women, and a mere 7.8% of government leadership positions are held by women”*. In the United Kingdom, by 2009, *“13% of local authority leaders in England were women”* with *“women most likely to lead unitary authorities (18%) or shire districts (15%), and least likely to lead metropolitan authorities (3%)”* (Centre for Women and Democracy 2009, p. 4). In the same year (2009), Australia reported less than *“10% of council CEO's were women, and only 20% of senior managers”* and by 2011, *“only 30% of elected representatives are women and only 20% of mayors”* (Australian Local Government Association 2011, p. 1).

Equitable male/female distributions in leadership and decision-making positions affect the way that communities prioritise development activities. In a study of West Bengal, India, it was discovered that *“women leaders provide more public goods, of equal quality, at a lower effective price”* and that *“female leaders invest more in women-preferred goods”* (Beaman et al. 2009, p. 25). This finding feeds into the UCLG (2015) recommendation that encourages women to participate in local decision-making. While communities and local government leaders should be wary of a bias in favour of male or female dominated priorities, there should be an understanding that equality of voices in the decision making process will lead to better strategic planning, more sustainable, community led goals, and equitable prioritisation of activities to promote social stability and economic growth and investment.

Local government leaders should also understand that there is no causality linking national economic development with female leadership (Pande and Ford 2011). Pande and Ford (2011) found that there were no long term causal effects on economic performance as a result of meeting or not fulfilling

gender quotas among elected officials. Female leaders in developed countries often accounted for a smaller percentage of elected officials compared to ratios of male to female representatives in lower and upper houses of government in developing countries. One can compare the number of female representatives in the Lower or Single House in the United States of America (19.4%) to those in Rwanda (63%) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015, Table 1). The higher number of female representatives in Rwanda cannot be linked to a lower gross domestic product (GDP), with the 2014 GDP for Rwanda recorded at 7.89 billion USD against 17.42 trillion USD in the same year for the United States of America (World Bank 2015). Similarly, larger numbers of female elected officials did not equate poor macro-economic performance. An examination of developed country Sweden, shows a GDP of \$570.6 billion in 2014 (World Bank 2015) and a 43.6% female representation in the Lower House (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015; Table 1). In short, there is no evidence that gender quotas are linked to, or can impact, national economic performance.

Equitable representation among male and female elected officials influences local economic development. While Pande and Ford (2011) found no long term causal effect on national economic performance, gender quotas may influence short- to medium-term growth at the local level. This premise could be further explored by municipalities, national governments, and regional projects, such as the Caribbean Local Economic Development Project (CARILED). While countries in the Caribbean are making a more concerted effort to promote and adopt equitable gender systems at the national level, similar systems to promote engagement and equitable representation at the local level are not evident in the sample countries.

To begin an examination of the disparities at the local level, Table 1 shows the breakdown of female elected leaders in national government within CARILED's current scope of operations. Of the top three countries with high percentages of female representatives in government, only one, Trinidad and Tobago, has a functional local government structure with regular elections. Grenada does not have an existing elected local government structure (Commonwealth Local Government Forum 2013, p. 64) and Guyana last held local government elections in 1994 (Commonwealth Local Government Forum 2013, p. 65). The section of this paper on gender and the local government leader will examine the disaggregated data for Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago at the municipal level, given that these three countries have elected local government structures.

Table 1: Women in national parliaments

Rank	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	% W	Elections	Seats*	Women	% W
25	Grenada	2 2013	15	5	33.3%	3 2013	13	2	15.4%
30	Guyana	11 2011	67	21	31.3%	---	---	---	---
36	Trinidad and Tobago	5 2010	42	12	28.6%	6 2010	31	6	19.4%
61	Dominica	12 2014	32	7	21.9%	---	---	---	---
83	Saint Lucia	11 2011	18	3	16.7%	1 2012	11	3	27.3%
102	Jamaica	12 2011	63	8	12.7%	9 2007	21	6	28.6%
133	Belize	3 2012	32	1	3.1%	3 2012	13	5	38.5%

Source: Inter-parliamentary Union (2015)

The appearance of equitable decision-making by having male and female elected officials in government can influence citizens and improve aspirations. Pande and Ford (2011) described the influence of female leaders on the citizenry as the **role model effect**, wherein female leaders served as role models for other women. Role models reinforce the societal recognition of leadership in communities and can inspire individuals to become more active in politics or community work, pursue self-employment or enter the workforce. Pande and Ford (2011, p. 13) also found that female leadership in government and the private sector improved investments in women, as “*Women may underinvest in their own human capital if they believe leadership opportunities are unavailable*”. The role of an elected official, therefore, is not only to lead in decision-making regarding infrastructure, policies or planning, but to serve as a role model for men and women in the community under a shared community vision.

Gender and local government leadership

The changing role of local government as leaders, role models and enablers of local economic development is core to the mandate of CARILED. Since 2012, CARILED supported local economic development initiatives to support the changing role of local government, in the promotion of improved livelihoods, local economic growth, investments, and specifically, the start-up and expansion of MSMEs.

The CARILED 2014 *Reviews of Gender Related Challenges affecting Local Government and MSMEs* (Anthony et al. 2014; Budhu et al. 2014a; Budhu et al 2014b; Hesse-Bayne et al. 2014; Budhu and Sheerattan-Bisnauth 2014; Budhu and Watson-Williams 2014) examined the differences that male and female entrepreneurs faced in starting or expanding a business, as well as accessing support from local leaders. Each country study also explored the extent to which women's economic empowerment is affected by a) the proportion of women in decision-making roles in local government and/or b) the extent to which local authorities adopt an active role in the socio-economic advancement of women.

The methodology applied for each country study incorporated desk and field research, including interviews and focus group sessions with local government officials and staff, business owners, civil society organisations and business support organisations. The sample of interviewees was limited to individuals and businesses working within the 22 CARILED partner communities.⁵ Each research team was made up of a Canadian researcher, a regional (Caribbean) researcher and a country specific researcher. The final reports were edited in collaboration with CARILED staff.

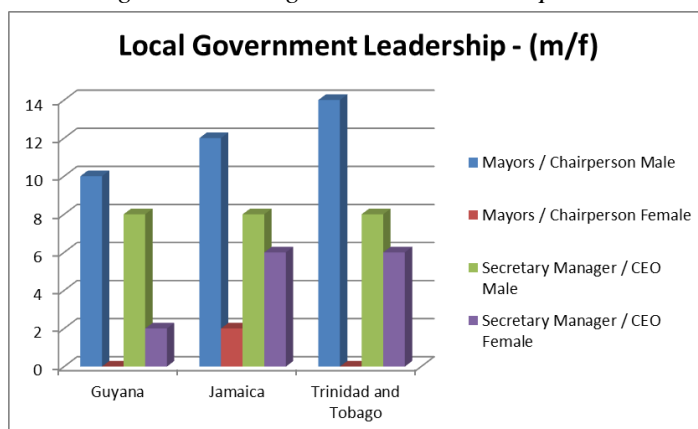
The findings of the CARILED study do show some correlation between the composition of men and women in local government and the success of local economic interventions. The concern about patriarchal dominance, reduced female empowerment for self-improvement, and gender-based power relations can be examined under the role model effect (Pande and Ford 2011). Women in local government serve as an inspiration to other women, both in and out of the political sphere. Female leaders appear to have a domino effect in overall empowerment of women. In contrast, societal restrictions tied to *stable employment* as an indicator of adulthood in males, the growing competition from females in administrative and technical positions, and the social risks attached to business start-up and possible business failure may be contributing to the growing marginalisation of young males, seen in findings from the Belize (Budhu et al. 2014b) and Jamaica (Budhu and Watson-Williams 2014) studies.

To further understand the dichotomy facing men and women in Caribbean communities, one can examine the distribution of males and females among local government. The literary review of this paper contrasted national statistics of elected local government officials from Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago (Figure 1). These three Caribbean countries have local government structures, and represent three types of States:

- Guyana – low income small island developing state with small population (including indigenous population) and land and sea borders in Caribbean;
- Jamaica – lower middle income small island developing state with large population and sea borders in Caribbean;
- Trinidad and Tobago – twin island middle income small island developing state with medium population and sea borders in Caribbean.

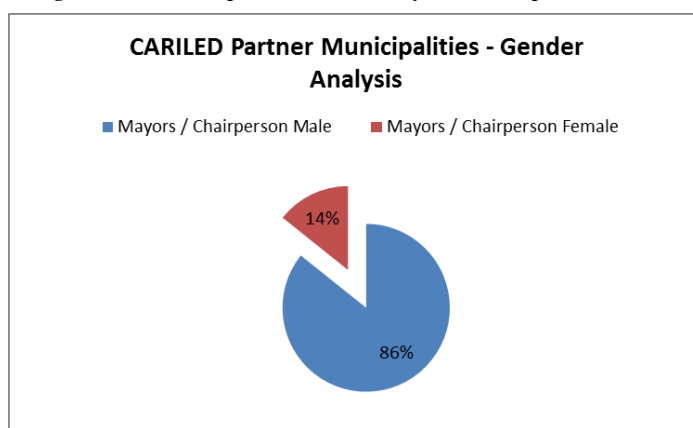
⁵ The gender studies did not include data from Belize River Valley, Belize, and two communities (Soufriere-Scotts Head-Gallion, and Woodford Hill) in Dominica.

Figure 1: Local government leadership



The analysis shows that women were more likely to be Administrators (Secretary Managers/Chief Executive Officers) than elected leaders (Mayors or Chairpersons). A further breakdown of data from 24 CARILED partner municipalities in seven countries,⁶ shows that 86% of the Mayors/Chairpersons were male, and 14% were female (Figure 2). Disaggregated data for councillors was not readily available for this paper, but it is recommended that an analysis should be done towards furthering understanding of gender distributions.

Figure 2: Municipal leaders (mayors/chairpersons)



The existence of female leaders, either as elected officials or senior municipal staff, can play a major role in the development of local economic strategic plans, priorities and support structures. Although the Caribbean has a high percentage of senior female municipal staff, the number of female elected officials could become a deterrent to women entrepreneurs seeking guidance from local municipal leaders.

⁶ Number of communities listed excludes the community of Belize River Valley in Belize.

Table 2: Gender distribution local government – CARILED Partner Municipalities

Country	Mayor/ Chairperson		Secretary Manager/CEO	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Belize	3	0	1	2
Dominica	2	0	-	-
Guyana	4	0	4	0
Grenada	-	-	0	1
Jamaica	4	2	5	1
Saint Lucia	1	1	-	-
Trinidad and Tobago	4	0	3	1
Total	18	3	13	5

Notes: No elected officials in Grenada. No Secretary Managers in Dominica and Saint Lucia. Belize data does not include Belize River Valley.

The need for gender quotas at the local level should be discussed by local and national governments seeking to move forward and stimulate economic growth through MSME development.

Findings of the CARILED Gender and MSME Study

Local authorities are “ideally positioned to play significant roles in addressing gender constraints to socio-economic advancement” (Budhu 2014, p. 4). This is the primary universal finding of the CARILED Gender and MSME 2014 studies.⁷ The findings saw a predominance of ‘gender neutral’ services, and attributed constraints in mandate, financial and human capacity and, in some instances, legitimacy of local government, as significant barriers to local authorities seeking to enable local economic development through MSME support. The studies also saw an “absence of gender policy or guidelines, adequate programmes and services, and inadequate gender sensitisation” (Budhu 2014, p. 4) at the local level as further barriers that prohibited gender sensitive approaches to MSME support. It was argued that the gender disparities in leadership and decision-making roles within local authorities were resulting in patriarchal biases in decision-making, priorities, and services for Caribbean communities (Budhu 2014).

The studies noted that local authorities were unaware of the shifting role of women and men in communities. The diminishing role of men as primary earners did not result in an increase in shared responsibility for household or child care. As a consequence, women adopted a triple burden as caregivers, home managers and salaried or self-employed workers. Local authorities were not meeting the needs of the changing economic landscape. One area, affordable childcare, was viewed as “essential to women’s ability to alleviate the heavy burdens placed on them, and limiting their

⁷ The studies were undertaken in six countries: Belize (Budhu et al. 2014b), Grenada (Budhu et al. 2014a), Guyana (Budhu and Sheerattan-Bisnauth 2014), Jamaica, (Budhu and Watson-Williams 2014), Saint Lucia (Anthony et al. 2014) and Trinidad and Tobago (Hesse-Bayne et al. 2014).

engagement in local economic development initiatives" (Budhu 2014, pp. 4–5). Gender sensitive training to promote greater community support for male or female led businesses, was viewed as essential to stimulating LED. The studies further found that local authorities were viewed by stakeholders as facilitators and enablers of a supportive community environment, with support networks that reduced the barriers faced by men and women in business.

Men and women have different motivations for starting or growing a business. The studies found that men become entrepreneurs to become financially successful, while women were motivated by financial survival or family care. Upon entry into the business world, women often allocated most of their income to family maintenance, created by inter alia *"little control over family resources and decision-making, low educational level, lack of socialization in business circles; and lack of training and support services"* (Budhu 2014, p. 6). Women and men in rural and semi-urban areas were more likely to face this difference in income allocation.

Access to capital was another challenge faced by men and women in the Caribbean. Although both men and women face challenges with credit, collateral, or other loan security requirements, it was noted that some credit institutions in Guyana still prefer that men are listed as guarantors on loans (Budhu and Sheerattan-Bisnauth, 2014). In some instances, this requirement was linked to the tradition of men working in remote areas and providing remittances to wives or partners. Credit institutions, recognising this practice, may still view males as the primary earners in the relationship, and as such, the natural guarantor on loan applications. However, lack of credit restricts women from moving from micro to small, or small to medium enterprises. The study also found that while credit institutions are aware of barriers faced by women, many have not introduced gender specific policies or practices, opting instead for a *'gender neutral'* approach.

Equal access credit and financial services is a priority for some Caribbean countries. One example is in Guyana, where public private partnerships were put in place between the government, private sector and non-governmental organisations, to develop and launch several gender sensitive micro-financing schemes (Budhu and Sheerattan-Bisnauth, 2014).

Women, particularly rural women, are more likely than men to pursue skills development, networking or business training. Training and development programmes are often costly, and limited to persons in and around urban or city areas. The investment of both time and money to access training is a deterrent for women who do not see the value of self-investment as a priority over immediate family or household responsibilities. Business networks, incubators, and shared mentorship are important for growth and sustainability in this sector. The study found that *"women interviewed placed high value on the psychosocial support they receive from being part of a network of like-minded female*

entrepreneurs; the sharing of personal challenges, encouragement received, practical advice offered and the need for women to have a 'safe' place for sharing" (Budhu 2014, p. 7).

The final focus of the study was the role of family and community in contributing to the success of men and women entrepreneurs. The study found that community and/or family support was the key to the success of an entrepreneur. However, gender-based power relations can restrict women seeking to pursue business opportunities outside of the home or community. Gender-based abuse and violence, noted across class, ethnicity and age, also significantly influences the ability of women more than men, to participate in local economic development initiatives.

Summary

In summary, the findings of the CARILED studies showed that local government gender distribution may influence community priorities, business growth and development, and overall local economic development. Representatives on local government councils should promote the identification of priority areas that give consideration to differences in the needs of males and females. Male and female role models promote female empowerment and support socially accepted redefinitions of employed males. This could be the first step in creating an enabling environment for start-ups and expansion of existing businesses.

Gender sensitisation among local government officials and staff will foster dialogue and a policy and legislative base towards facilitating the ease of doing business for entrepreneurs and investors.

There is a need for public–private partnerships to develop and implement creative solutions to fill gender gaps, such as access to finance, which will also promote business growth. Finally, the support of entrepreneurs by members of a gender aware and gender equitable local government body should reshape the social expectations of men and women in leadership, governance and business.

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