



Bridges Trade BioRes

News, events and resources at the intersection of trade and biodiversity

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Forestry

G8: ILLEGAL LOGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The leaders of the world's eight wealthiest countries at the G8 Environment and Development Ministers' meeting on 17-18 March in Derbyshire, England, agreed to step up efforts to reduce the supply and demand in illegal timber. However, they fell short of adopting binding measures to restrict imports of uncertified timber as proposed by the UK government, following opposition by the US.

Among the actions adopted by the G8 ministers, they agreed to "halt the import and marketing of illegally logged timber, for example by giving

appropriate powers to our border control authorities through voluntary bilateral trade agreements or other arrangements, consistent with WTO rules". They also decided to "encourage, adopt or extend public timber procurement policies that favour legal timber, where they can influence the private sector to use legally sourced timber". Moreover, ministers acknowledged the need to increase support to developing countries to enforce forest law and improve governance. Progress on these commitments will be reviewed next year.

The commitments, however, fell short of the binding initiatives that the British government had hoped for, primarily due to opposition by the US. In a leaked US State Department memo, Head of Forest Policy Stephanie Caswell said that plans to restrict trade in illegal timber was a "watch out item" for the US. "Demand side actions involving new import or procurement regulations/restrictions are unacceptable and should not be high-lighted," the memo noted, indicating that the US would make efforts to dissuade Russia and Japan from supporting the UK.

UK Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Benn, who had led efforts to garner support among G8 countries to sign on to commitments to combat illegal logging, said his government was "delighted" with the agreement by Ministers, pointing out that "it does not make sense to give development assistance on the one hand while importing cheap illegal timber on the other". European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel welcomed the UK's initiative to place illegal logging on the G8 agenda. "The practice is responsible for vast environmental damage in developing countries and impoverishes rural communities which depend on forest products for a living", Michel said. However, he also

expressed "disappointment at the lack of new concrete outcomes".

Many environmental groups sharply criticised what they saw as weak commitments. "US business simply doesn't want any restrictions on its own practices", said Faith Doherty of the Environmental Investigation Agency in the UK. Stephen Tindale, the head of Greenpeace Britain, noted, "From our point of view this is another missed opportunity. They know what needs to be done but just lack the political will". His colleague Nathalie Rey also criticised the policy for ignoring "the huge impact that legalised, but unsustainable, logging has on the world's forests and the millions of people that rely on them directly for their livelihood". "This is like putting a band-aid on a gunshot wound", she added.

The G8 statement is available at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/illegal-logging-g8-statement.asp>.

"G8 Environment and Development Ministers Agree Action on Illegal Logging and Put Climate Change in Africa on Agenda for G8 Heads," UOFT G8 CENTER, 18 March 2005; "Illegal Mahogany Logging Exposed in Peru's New National Park," ENS, 31 March 2005; "US tries to sink forests plan," THE GUARDIAN, 16 March 2005; "G8 Agrees Need for Action on Logging, Africa," REUTERS, 21 March 2005; "G8 Ministers Pledge to Curb Illegal Logging, Climate Change," IPS, 21 March 2005.

Biotechnology

GM UPDATE: EU, BRAZIL, UK

EU tells member states to 'take responsibility' for GMO decisions

The European Commission on 22 March said that while it continued to have "full confidence" in the EU regulatory process for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and would back the continued submission of draft decisions to put new GMOs on the market, it was time for EU member states to shoulder the decision-making burden on GMO approvals. "We believe it is time for member states to take on more responsibility for the decisions on the GMOs," a Commission official said. The Commission had been forced to do the political "dirty work" in approving GMOs, the official added, because under the EU's complicated regulatory procedures, GMO submissions which have been approved by the European Food Safety Authority but fail to be approved or rejected by member states go back to the Commission for a final decision. Member states are increasingly abstaining from votes on GMOs, with a small

group including Finland and the Netherlands voting in favour and a counter-group, including Austria, Denmark and Greece, voting against. "We will even consider possible changes to legal procedures," the official added, saying that the Commission was "very concerned" with the status of the current WTO case on GMOs brought against the EU by the US, Canada and Argentina (see BRIDGES Trade BioRes, 10 September 2004, <http://www.ictsd.org/biores/04-09-10/story1.htm>).

Brazilian bill signed, GM cotton and corn approved

Following hot on the heels of the 2 March passage of legislation establishing a regulatory framework for legalising the sale and use of GM crops in the lower house of the Brazilian parliament (see BRIDGES Trade BioRes, 4 March 2005, <http://www.ictsd.org/biores/05-03-04/story4.htm>), Brazilian President Luiz Inacio "Lula" de Silva on 24 March signed the bill into law. In the interim, the country's regulatory body on GMOs, the National Technical Committee on Biotechnology (CTNBio), used the momentum generated by the controversial legislation to vote 11 to one in favour of approving Monsanto's Bollgard GM cotton on 18 March -- the first GM cotton variety to be approved for planting and sale in Brazil. The representative of the Ministry of Environment had voted against the approval, arguing that the decision went against the precautionary principle, Brazilian environmental legislation and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. On 22 March CTNBio also approved the import of 370,000 tons of GM corn from Argentina to be used as chicken feed. The approval had followed a request by the poultry industry in North-Eastern Brazil after drought pushed up domestic corn prices.

UK scientists release final study on wildlife impacts of GM crops

A 21 March report on the fourth and final British Farm Scale Evaluation (FSE) trial, which test assessed the impact on farmland wildlife of the herbicide use associated with GM crops, concluded that fields planted with winter canola (oilseed rape) genetically modified to resist a herbicide had fewer birds, bees, butterflies and other insects than fields planted with conventional canola. The report found that these differences were the result of the type and way herbicides were applied to the GM and non-modified crops rather than the genetic

modification itself. Specifically, the scientists found that -- as a result of a different type of herbicide used -- the GM field contained more weedy grass species, which attract less wildlife, and fewer broad-leaved weeds that produced flowers and seeds that are favoured by wildlife. Earlier trials had shown similar results for spring rape and beet, while GM maize field were found to be better for many groups of wildlife (see BRIDGES Trade BioRes, 16 October 2003, <http://www.ictsd.org/biores/03-10-16/inbrief.htm>).

The results of the FSE are available at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/gm/fse/fse05.htm>.

"Environment: British Study Deals Blow To GM Crops," IPS, 29 March 2005; "Herbicides, not genetic engineering, found to impact wildlife," REUTERS, 21 March 2005; "EU to Push Approving GMOs, Could Come in Few Weeks," REUTERS, 23 March 2005; "EC Considers Modifying GMO Regime As Member States Balk at Enforcement," WTO REPORTER, 15 March 2005; "Commission confirms quality of European GMO legislative framework," EU PRESS RELEASE IP/05/355, 22 March 2005; "EU Seeks Advice on Long-Term Effects of GMO Crops," REUTERS, 30 March 2005; "Brazil signs biotech safety law," AMERICAN CITY BUSINESS JOURNAL, 25 March 2005; "Brazilian Regulatory Body Approves Monsanto's Insect-Protected Bollgard Cotton," MONSANTO, 18 March 2005; "Brazilian ministry protests approval of GM cotton," SCIDEV, 24 March 2005; "Brazil gov OKs 400,000 T GMO Argentine corn import," REUTERS, 22 March 2005.

Biodiversity

MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT REVEALS 'STRAIN' ON EARTH

Human activity is damaging the planet's ecosystems at unprecedented rates that call into question the ability of the environment to provide life-supporting services, according to a landmark report released on 30 March. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Synthesis Report, the result of four years of research by over 1,300 experts, says that as many as 60 percent of life-supporting systems are being degraded and predicts abrupt changes such as emergence of new diseases, sudden changes in water quality, the collapse of fisheries and shifts in regional climate as a result of ecosystem deterioration. Such changes, the report suggests, will harm the poor the most.

Taking stock of ecosystems

Efforts to meet growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fiber and fuel have led to widespread changes in ecosystems over the last 50 years, the

experts say. For example, more land has been converted to cropland -- with adverse impacts on biodiversity -- since 1945 than during the whole of the 18th and 19th centuries combined. They identify the ecosystems most under threat as fresh water, fisheries, air and water regulation, and the regulation of regional climate, natural hazards and pests. In particular, evidence suggests that the adverse state of capture fisheries and fresh water are currently well beyond the levels that can sustain current, much less future demands and as such should be the focus of particular attention. Only four ecosystem services have been enhanced in the last 50 years: increases in crop, livestock and aquaculture production, and increased carbon sequestration for global climate regulation, the report says.

Environmental damage induced by human activity is likely to place strains on nature leading to major changes in ecosystems and new threats. While in 100 years global warming can be expected to be the main source of damage, the report also looks at short-term changes such as the collapse of fisheries, nitrogen build-up from fertilizers leading to algae blooms, and increased likelihood of cholera as a result of warmer lakes.

The deteriorating state of the world's ecosystems is likely to affect the poor the most, given that sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, some regions in Latin America, and parts of South and Southeast Asia -- all of whom are facing challenges achieving the Millennium Development Goals -- will experience degradation the most. In addition, the report draws links between poverty reduction and ecosystem sustainability, saying that "any progress achieved in addressing the goals of poverty and hunger eradication, improved health, and environmental protection is unlikely to be sustained if most of the ecosystem services on which humanity relies continue to be degraded". Disease reduction, food production, access to water and sanitation are all fundamentally linked to the survival of ecosystems under threat.

What next?

The report suggests that a significant change in human attitudes and actions is necessary to ease pressures on ecosystems in coming decades. A change in perception that recognises that ecosystem services are not free and limitless, and that takes into account their full value, will enable the harnessing of technology and knowledge to

preserve ecosystems. Such efforts should, according to the researchers, involve local ownership and decision-making on natural resource conservation efforts along with coordinated efforts across governments, businesses and international institutions to make wise policy choices. Better governance, tax incentives, investment choices, consumption choices, trade, subsidy and regulation rules, new technology and more research would all work towards improved ecosystem management.

Lay blame, suggest solutions, critics say

While the comprehensive scope and scientific basis of the report was commended by all sides, critics said that the report should have taken the next step by assigning blame and making prescriptions for the future. Roger Higman, environmental coordinator of Friends of the Earth, noted that the report "does not, for instance, identify the rich nations for having taken more than their fair share of the world's natural resources". In addition, he noted that the researchers had failed to make the link between natural resources and trade liberalisation. Given international pressures on countries, and particularly small developing countries, to open up their markets, there was a need for local and national governments to focus on regulating access to resources within their borders, he stressed. "These countries are often not strong enough to resist the pressure of transnational corporations", he said. This "enables these corporations to pillage the resources of the countries".

Background

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in June 2001, is an international program with the stated aim of meeting the needs of decision makers and the public for scientific information concerning the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being and options for responding to those changes. It includes 1,360 experts in 95 nations and includes the participation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the Global Environment Facility, the Ramsar Convention, UNDP, UNEP, WHO, the World Bank, IUCN and the World Resources Institute. This synthesis report is the first of six synthesis reports summarising the findings of four working groups, with the next five aimed at different audiences.

Additional Resources

The Synthesis Report and the statement by the MEA Board, "Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and Human Well-being", can be accessed at <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/en/index.aspx>

"Human Damage To Earth Worsening Fast - Report," REUTERS, 30 March 2005; "Environment: Most Ecosystems Threatened, Major Report Says," IPS, 30 March 2005.

In Brief

EUROPEAN PROPOSAL ON PREFERENTIAL ACCESS RULES TARGETS FISHERIES

In an effort to address concerns regarding the EU's current system of rules of origin, which specify which goods can qualify for preferential market access, the European Commission adopted a strategy on 16 March to overhaul the rules to make them simpler and more transparent. The new strategy will apply to preferential access agreements such as those existing between the EU and ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries (see BRIDGES Weekly, 23 March 2005, <http://www.ictsd.org/weekly/05-03/23/story6.htm>).

The EC communication makes specific mention of the fisheries sector. Under the current rules of origin governing preferential access of fish caught within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of ACP countries, fish are only considered to "originate" in ACP countries -- and thus qualify for lower tariffs in lucrative EU markets -- if they are caught within 12 nautical miles of the shore or, if outside this boundary, they must be caught on an ACP or EU registered vessel, sail under an ACP or EU flag, the crew must include at least 50 percent EU and/or ACP nationals, and the vessel must be at least 50 percent owned by EU/ACP nationals. The new strategy suggests that current criteria for determining the nationality of fishing vessels may need to be reviewed, proposing that the origin of fish would be based on the flag, registration and "simplified yet adequate conditions regarding property", while the crew conditions would be removed.

While the movement towards simplification of the rules was welcomed in many sectors, some critics would like to see the crew conditions to be preserved as they force boat owners to hire ACP or

EU labour. Instead they favour changes to the requirement for boats to be at least 50 percent owned by EU or ACP nationals. The latter requirement, they argue, gives EU-owned boats an unfair advantage over those of developing countries whenever there are no ACP boats available.

The EC Communication can be accessed at http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0100en01.pdf

"Customs: Commission proposes strategy for simplified rules of origin," EU PRESS RELEASE IP/05/320, 17 March 2005; "The rules of origin for preferential trade arrangements: Orientations for the future," EU COMMUNICATION, 16 March 2005; "Rules of Origin for Tuna Products (HS 16.04) in the Cotonou Agreement: A Subvention to EU Vessels?" COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT, 14 December 2004.

UN SECRETARY GENERAL CALLS FOR DISMANTLING TRADE BARRIERS

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, in a 21 March report presenting a set of "bold but achievable" proposals for UN and global reform, called on developed countries to establish a timetable to dismantle market access barriers and begin phasing out trade-distorting domestic subsidies, especially in agriculture, as an "urgent priority." The report, entitled "In Larger Freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", also urges WTO Members to complete the Doha Round of trade negotiations by 2006 and suggests that providing duty-free and quota-free market access for all exports from least-developed countries would be a good first step in this direction. Furthermore, the report calls on UN members to ensure environmental sustainability in their national development plans and highlights the importance of global action towards reducing desertification, biodiversity depletion and climate change. Stressing that climate change promises to be "one of the greatest environmental and development challenges in the twenty-first century", Annan calls for the creation by 2012 of a more inclusive international framework to mitigate climate change that includes major emitters of greenhouse gases. Oxfam urged countries to take advantage of the opportunity posed by the report to take action to implement the proposed goals against poverty.

The report can be accessed at <http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/>

"Politics: Landmark UN Report on Reform Gets Mixed Reviews," IPS, 22 March 2005; "Annan Calls for Bold Moves to Reform United Nations," ENS, 21 March 2005.

LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES LODGE NEW WTO BANANAS CASE

Ecuador, Costa Rica, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama lodged a challenge at the WTO to the EU's proposed 230 Euro import tariff on 30 March (see BRIDGES Trade BioRes, 4 February 2005, <http://www.ictsd.org/biores/05-02-04/inbrief.htm>). The move comes in reaction to fears from the six Latin American countries that the new tariff, which aims to replace the old EU quota system which was ruled illegal by the WTO in 2000, is too high and could be discriminatory for foreign banana producers and threaten their exports of bananas to the EU. However, African, Caribbean and Pacific countries -- who export into the EU under preferential access agreements -- have suggested the proposed tariff is too low.

"Six Latin American countries challenge planned EU banana tariff at WTO," AFP, 1 April 2005; "Trade-EU: New Banana Battle Looms," IPS, 1 April 2005.

Events & Resources

EVENTS

For a more comprehensive list of events in trade and sustainable development, please refer to ICTSD's web calendar, <http://www.trade-environment.org/page/calendar.htm>.

Coming up in the next two weeks

7-8 April, New York, US: NEW CURRENTS IN CONSERVING FRESHWATER SYSTEMS: A BIODIVERSITY SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM. This symposium, hosted by the American Museum of Natural History, will highlight recent successful initiatives in freshwater conservation; discuss cutting-edge ideas and tools; and investigate how and where these innovations might be implemented on the ground. For further information contact Fiona Brady, tel: (+1 212) 496 3431; fax: 769 5292; email: brady@amnh.org; Internet: <http://cbc.amnh.org/symposia/freshwater/>.

11-22 April, New York, United States: THIRTEENTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. CSD-13 will be a "Policy Year" to decide on measures to speed up

implementation and mobilize action to overcome these obstacles and constraints for the thematic clusters of water, sanitation and human settlements. For further information contact the United Nations Department for Sustainable Development, tel: (+1 212) 963 2803; fax: 983 4260; email: dsd@un.org; Internet: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd13/csd13.htm>.

14 April, Paris, France STUDIES ON THE IMPACT OF TRADE AGREEMENTS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ASSESSMENT AND PROSPECTS. Organised by the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development, and GRET. The seminar, which will be given in French and English, aims specifically to bring together experts involved in impact assessments and sustainable development (the Ministries of European Union member states, international organisations, research institutes, the private sector, and NGOs) so as to take stock of impact assessments and reflect on operational ways to improve this tool. For further information, contact Isabel Berest, tel: (+33 1) 40 05 61 51; email: berest@gret.org.

14-15 April, Aalborg, Denmark: 4TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUSINESS AND SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE. The EURO Sustainability 2005 conference, organised by a broad range of representatives from international business, government and NGOs, is focused on partnerships between business and all its stakeholders, as a valid strategy for responsible behaviour, and as means for sustainable solutions and concrete results. The two-day conference features workshops on building solutions and opportunities, creating business commitment, financing business partnerships, and partnership models that work. For further information, contact the EURO Sustainability secretariat, tel: (+45 9935) 5555; fax: 5533; email: che@akkc.dk; Internet: <http://www.euro-environment.dk/>.

Other Upcoming Events

1-5 May, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada: CONFERENCE ON THE GOVERNANCE OF HIGH SEAS FISHERIES AND THE UN FISH AGREEMENT - MOVING FROM WORDS TO ACTION. "Moving From Words to Action" is the theme of this conference, hosted by the government of Canada. The meeting provides the international community with an opportunity to join Canada in determining how management of high seas fisheries can be improved and identifying what steps need to be taken to ensure the immediate protection and the rebuilding of fish stocks in the years to come. For further information contact the organisers, email: fgccgp@dfo-mpo.gc.ca; Internet: http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fgc-cgp/program_e.htm.

2-4 May, Paris, France: OECD FORUM 2005: FUELLING THE FUTURE: SECURITY, STABILITY, DEVELOPMENT AND OECD MINISTERIAL SUMMIT. The OECD Forum will discuss policy issues

in the areas of international trade and investment, economic development, the Millennium Declaration, and energy. The four main themes of the conference are world economic outlook; energy; economic development and the Millennium Development Declaration; and trade, development, and the Doha Development Agenda. For more information contact John West, tel: (+33 1) 45 248 025; fax: (+33 1) 44 306 346; email: john.west@oecd.org; Internet: http://www.oecd.org/site/0,2865,en_21571361_342252_93_1_1_1_1,00.html.

RESOURCES

If you have a relevant resource (books, papers, bulletins, etc.) you would like to see announced in this section, please forward a copy or review by the BRIDGES staff to hbaumuller@ictsd.ch.

STATE OF THE WORLD'S FORESTS 2005. Food and Agriculture Organization (March 2005). The theme of this biannual publication is "realizing the economic benefits from forests" and includes main contributions on: enhancing the economic benefits from forests; economic benefits from agroforestry; the economics of wood energy; impacts of tariffs and non-tariff measures on forest products trade; and violent conflicts in forested areas. The edition also provides an update on issues related to forest resources, forest conservation and management, institutions and the international forest policy dialogue. To access this paper visit http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/docrep/007/y5574e/y5574e00.htm.

GROW OUR OWN OIL -- US BIOENERGY AND AGRICULTURAL WORKING GROUP EPORT. (March 2005). Sustainably produced biomass is a highly undervalued and underutilised energy asset in the US and around the world. Leaders in the chemical and biotech industries - companies like DuPont, Cargill Dow, Iogen, and Genencor - are developing new technology to make ethanol, a biofuel, from almost anything that grows or that once grew: corn stalks, prairie grass, rice straw, sawdust, even paper. The working group recommends the continued development of biofuel technologies in the US including through incentives for energy crops, government-led competitions, and increases in research and development. It suggests that the US Trade Representative propose shifting funds from agriculture export subsidies to bioenergy subsidies. To access the report visit http://www.energyfuturecoalition.org/new_fuels.cfm.

GOLIATH AGAINST DAVID: WHO WINS AND WHO LOSES WITH THE CAP IN SPAIN AND THE POOR COUNTRIES. By Gonzalo Fanjul (Intermon Oxfam Spain, March 2005). The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) hurts developing countries and farmers in Europe alike by granting massive subsidies to a few wealthy large producers in Europe, according to this report by the Spanish affiliate

of Oxfam International. The concentration of CAP subsidies amongst the largest farmers has hit small-scale farmers hard in Spain, the report shows, with 40 percent of subsidies going to four percent of producers, and has put producers in developing countries at a disadvantage. It calls for more equitable distribution of subsidies, along with respect for fair trading practices that do not hurt the world's poor nations. To access this report visit <http://www.intermonoxfam.org>.

CHINA'S WOOD MARKET, TRADE AND THE ENVIRONMENT. By Z. Chunquan, R. Taylor, and F. Guoqiang. Science Press USA and WWF Intl, 2004. China is a major player in the global forest products market, both as a producer and consumer. With relatively limited forest resources, China's wood imports are likely to expand dramatically in order to meet the increasing demand for wood and paper products. This report provides an overview of the diverse policies that shape China's forest products market as well as an analysis of China's forest products market, including estimates of future wood supply and demand. Potential policy changes and actions that could reduce the negative impacts of China's wood products market on the environment are also suggested in the report. To access this report visit <http://panda.org/downloads/forests/chinawoodmarkettadeenvironment.pdf>.

SOUTH BULLETIN ISSUE 97/98: "SOUTH BENEFITING FROM ITS BIODIVERSITY". South Centre, February 2005. To access the bulletin visit <http://www.southcentre.org/info/southbulletin/bulletin97-98.pdf>.

TRADE EFFECTS OF THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY. By Matthias Busse and Rasul Shams in The Estey Centre Journal of International Law and Trade Policy 6(1), 2005. This article evaluates the trade effects of the new East African Community, which fosters trade liberalisation among Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The commodities that will be particularly affected by the customs union are identified. The results show that considerable trade effects cannot be expected, except for a very narrow range of products. The transitional fund, which has been proposed to counter trade imbalances due to the new customs union in East Africa, becomes less urgent from this perspective. To access this paper visit http://www.esteyjournal.com/j_pdfs/busseshams6-1.pdf.

TRADE, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE INTERNATIONAL REGULATION OF BIOTECHNOLOGY. By Anne Petitpierre et al. in Ecologic Policy And Law 7-8 (December 2004). This article provides an overview of the research carried out at the University of Geneva Faculty of Law which looked at the legal ramifications of import restrictions and trade law with regard to genetically modified products and the implications and limits of scientific evidence in the presence of complex, diffuse and scientifically inadequately explained risks to biodiversity and to certain aspects of food safety. To access the article visit http://www.ecologics-international.org/epal_2004_8_snsf_unige_lawfac_buwal_research_project_int_biotech_regulation.pdf

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