

How the UK Government can support transformational action in the global food system

Executive Summary

The war in Ukraine has thrown into sharp relief the need for transformational change to the global food system. The impacts of climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic had already revealed the fragility of the global food system, with rising food prices and the numbers of people facing hunger increasing, particularly over the past two years. As global food and fertiliser prices continue to rise, and the Ukraine crisis leads to market volatility, the impacts will be felt most heavily in low-income countries, especially those reliant on food imports. Women farmers make up about 43% of the agricultural labour force in the Global South and face additional barriers to respond to these shocks.¹

While a short-term response is needed to stabilise global food supplies and prices, this is an opportunity for longer-term reforms to address food insecurity and build local economies that are better able to withstand future shocks. The international community must support low-income countries to invest in their own agricultural sectors, to increase their own food production, and to build local, environmentally sustainable approaches to production that are climate resilient.

This approach aligns with the commitments on agriculture and food that the UK government signed at COP26 through the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests and Land Use (GLD) and related initiatives². This includes commitments to support local communities and Indigenous peoples to own and manage their lands sustainably, redesign agricultural policies and programmes towards sustainable food systems, eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies and to increase ODA commitments to sustainable agriculture. This reinforces the existing commitments in Agenda 2030 to transition to sustainable agriculture to fight extreme poverty.³

The UK government must ensure that these global commitments are translated into its own policies and programmes on international agriculture. As the UK continues its COP Presidency in 2022, it should use key moments, including COP27 in Egypt and the G7, to galvanise action on food and agriculture that will bring triple benefits for poverty, climate and nature.

Below we propose five measures of success for effective UK action in the global food system in 2022. The briefing then outlines what actions are needed to achieve this success.

The five measures of success for UK action on international agriculture in 2022

1. The UK government's International Climate Finance prioritises agroecology to tackle poverty and support communities to adapt to climate change
2. No more UK aid flows to agricultural programmes that harm the environment or fail to show their impact on tackling poverty
3. Countries report concrete progress at COP27 on their commitments under the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests and Land Use, including redesigning agricultural programmes and subsidies, and increasing land tenure for indigenous peoples and local communities.
4. New initiatives to support agroecology and repurpose harmful agricultural subsidies are announced as part of COP27, including Agroecology Transition Partnerships.
5. The Global Biodiversity Framework to be agreed in Kunming supports the role of agroecology in poverty reduction, climate action and biodiversity protection.

Making the case: shifting the focus to agroecology to achieve the transformational potential of agriculture on poverty alleviation, climate action and strengthening ecosystems.

80 percent of people living in extreme poverty live in rural areas, and the vast majority of these depend on agriculture for their livelihoods⁴. Small-scale agriculture has a high impact on reducing extreme poverty⁵ and growth in the agriculture sector is two to four times more effective than other sectors in raising incomes among the poorest people.⁶

Small-scale farms are also highly efficient, producing around 35% of global food production on 12% of the land⁷. They also usually produce a wider diversity of crops than larger (bigger than 2 hectares) farms, contributing both to environmental and nutritional diversity and resilience.

What is Agroecology?

Agroecology is the application of ecological principles to agricultural production. Practitioners seek to create agricultural systems that resemble, and work in harmony with, natural systems.

Agroecology aims to contribute to building socially equitable food systems that empower farmers, fishers, pastoralists and others, and enable people to exercise choice over what they eat, and how and where it is produced.

“Agroecology is rooted in rebuilding relationships between agriculture and the environment, and between food systems and society.”⁸

Where agroecological practices are employed, they can help small-holder farmers to improve their food production and livestock productivity, ability to organise locally with other farmers to sell their produce, increase their monthly income and access to land.^{9 10} These agroecological approaches that focus on diversifying crops, reintroducing indigenous species where these have been lost, reforestation and restoring land and marine areas not only help communities adapt through greater dietary diversity, greater crop diversity and therefore greater resilience to climate change, but they strengthen biodiversity, can increase carbon capture, and provide viable livelihood strategies.^{11 12}

This is in stark contrast to some of the more negative impacts of industrial agriculture (i.e., agriculture reliant on high levels of external inputs, often based on petrochemicals), which reduces biological diversity and has much higher greenhouse gas emissions; and is also a risky agricultural model for the poorest farmers, due to the financial burden of paying for fertilisers and pesticides.¹³

Agricultural growth focused on large-scale commercial agriculture, including for export, has a smaller impact on poverty reduction than small-scale farming for local and national markets.¹⁴ It is also a precarious model for ensuring long-term food security, as it leaves countries vulnerable to volatility in global markets. The current war in Ukraine has disrupted production and supply chains for both inputs and exports, leaving low-income countries struggling to buy fertiliser for their farmers, or grain for their populations.

The latest IPCC report on climate impacts, vulnerability and adaptation¹⁵ is sobering in its assessment that climate change has exposed millions of people to acute food insecurity and reduced water security. Reduced food production and access to food in certain countries, together with decreased dietary diversity have increased malnutrition in many communities, especially for the

poorest and most vulnerable populations, including Indigenous Peoples, small-scale food producers and low-income households, with children, elderly people and pregnant women.

The IPCC report offers signs of hope and illustrates a variety of approaches rooted in agroecological principles, which are effective in helping communities to adapt to climate change. These include “agroforestry, community-based adaptation, farm and landscape diversification, and urban agriculture.”¹⁶ as well as “ecosystem-based management in fisheries and aquaculture, and other approaches that work with natural processes support food security, nutrition, health and well-being, livelihoods and biodiversity, sustainability and ecosystem services agriculture”.

These agroecological approaches need to be supported as a priority strategy of climate adaptation, while also recognising their mitigation potential as they contribute to reducing greenhouse gases that the current food system is responsible for, which account for up to a third of the global total.¹⁷

Despite this transformational potential of agriculture – in particular agroecology – in poverty alleviation, climate adaptation and mitigation, and environmental protection, agriculture does not yet have a central place in UK or global policies on development, environment or climate.

There are key opportunities in 2022 where the UK government can support transformational action on food and agriculture, both bilaterally and as COP President. Below we outline five priorities for action for the UK government.

Five priorities for Action in 2022

1. **Place agroecology at the heart of the UK’s international development and climate policies**, developing a new international agriculture strategy and using the £3bn climate finance and biodiversity funds for transformative agricultural programmes.
2. **Review and improve existing UK bilateral and multilateral aid to agriculture** to ensure that it meets poverty, climate and environmental commitments, starting with British International Investment (BII) and the World Bank’s Development Policy Lending on agriculture.
3. **Use the UK’s COP Presidency to work with other countries to deliver on COP26 commitments on food and agriculture.** Set clear indicators for reporting under the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests and Land Use. This should include reporting on new policies and laws, as well as on reduced rates of deforestation; increased land titles for indigenous peoples and local communities; finance for agroecology and actions to repurpose agricultural subsidies.
4. **Work with Egypt to make COP27 a food and agriculture COP and a distinctly African COP**, with a special Food and Agriculture Day, new partnerships to reform harmful agricultural subsidies and a scale up of adaptation finance for agroecology, as well as progress on Koronivia and accelerated action on agriculture within revised NDCs.
5. **Support ambitious targets at the CBD that enhance the role of agriculture in climate action and ecosystem protection**, including reducing the footprint from consumption and production; reforming subsidies harmful for nature; and reducing pesticide use.

Priority 1: Place agroecology at the heart of the UK's international development and climate policies

Current ODA spend is not commensurate with agriculture's potential contribution to reducing poverty. Two thirds (65 percent) of poor working adults make a living through agriculture, but agriculture accounts for only 4.2% of UK Aid spend. UK ODA spending on agriculture projects in 2019 was £642.2m¹⁸, which compares to £632m in 2011/12¹⁹, indicating that ODA spending on agriculture has remained stagnant for 10 years, despite evidence of the effectiveness of investing in the agriculture sector.

There has been no new policy on agriculture since 2005, and no new strategy development since DFID's 2015 Conceptual Framework on Agriculture, which itself paid limited attention to the needs of poorer farmers or to the impacts of climate change. It is now well understood that people living in extreme poverty are disproportionately vulnerable to, and affected by, the impacts of climate change. An updated strategy is urgently needed.

Research into UK aid also suggests that UK aid to agriculture in 2020 was potentially responsible for the majority of estimated reduction in greenhouse gas emissions achieved through the UK aid programme.²⁰ Mitigating climate change and transitioning towards sustainable agriculture are intrinsically linked to tackling extreme poverty.

Furthermore, the UK government has ringfenced £3bn of the ICF budget to nature-related spend for the period 2021-2026,²¹ most of which will be through bilateral spend. With increasing evidence of the role of agriculture in climate adaptation, the UK's ICF strategy currently under development must give agroecology a central role in future ICF programmes, particularly around programmes of agroecology, agroforestry, mangrove or coastal restoration.

Specific recommendations for the UK Government

- a) **Create a new vision and strategy for international support for agriculture** to harness its potential to alleviate poverty, supporting livelihoods and rights, tackling climate change, and protecting and restoring nature. The vision and strategy must be led by the FCDO and adopted across government departments to ensure policy coherence and effective implementation of policies and programmes. Agroecology should also be included as part of the International Development Strategy for its poverty alleviation and climate adaptation potential.
- b) **Include Agroecology as a key sector in the ICF strategy and programmes and wider UK Aid Programmes.** The new ICF strategy – including the £3bn climate finance earmarked for nature – needs to be explicit on the role agroecology and agroforestry will play to support communities to tackle poverty, protect the environment and adapt to climate change. It should also be explicit on how funds will support local communities and Indigenous Peoples who are at the forefront of action on adaptation, including on land ownership and wider livelihood strategies.

Priority 2: Review and improve existing UK bilateral and multilateral aid to agriculture

CAFOD's research has found that the single largest source of UK aid support for agriculture is the CDC Group (now referred to as British International Investment), whose investments often do not prioritise tackling poverty.²² Bodies such as the International Development Committee (IDC)²³, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI)^{24,25}, the Public Accounts Committee²⁶ and the National Audit Office (NAO)²⁷ have previously referenced the CDC's lack of poverty focus and difficulty of showing development impact.

For example, between 2013-2019 UK aid-funded institutions invested at least £126m of UK aid (mainly CDC, also via PIDG (Private Infrastructure Development Group) and the IFC (International Finance Corporation), part of the World Bank Group) in chemical fertiliser production at the Indorama petrochemicals and plastics plant in Nigeria.²⁸ This is in comparison to £26.2m bilateral UK aid to Nigeria for agriculture and rural development during that period – a fifth of the amount.²⁹

The World Bank is a leader in public development finance, not only because of the amounts of money that it channels through grants and loans, but also in the policy environment that it encourages through its Development Policy Lending (DPL). The DPL has come under scrutiny³⁰ for imposing conditions on many low-income countries that encourage policies that are primarily focused on economic growth and have had detrimental impacts on tackling poverty, on the environment and on climate change. This is in urgent need of review to make it fit for purpose, and to make sure that countries can develop effective policies to increase their food sovereignty so that they withstand global shocks to food markets, whether they be through climate, Covid-19 or conflict.

At the same time, there are existing multilateral initiatives, such as the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP), which provides financial support to low-income countries to invest in sustainable agriculture and food security. The majority of GAFSP projects operate in countries with the highest poverty rates,³¹ and the investments focus specifically on smallholder farmers and those often left behind in development programming, with particular emphasis on women and girls' empowerment. GAFSP is now raising its ambition on climate, increasing its potential to contribute to national and global climate commitments and is also one of the few instruments providing grants to low-income countries as multilateral ODA, as agricultural development tends to be loan-based. The UK is one of the founding and leading donors of the GAFSP but it has now substantially reduced its participation and contribution.

Specific Recommendations for the UK Government

- a) **Review all existing public support for agriculture in UK aid via CDC/BII** and stop any programmes that cannot show how they tackle extreme poverty and that are not in line with the UK's global commitments on the environment and climate change.
- b) **As a board member, ask the World Bank and other Multilateral Development Banks to review and reform their development policy lending for agriculture** to ensure it has a clearer poverty, climate and environmental focus – and to announce the findings ahead of COP27.
- c) **Provide enough financial support to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP)** in its second replenishment process, matching previous UK contributions.

Priority 3: Use the COP Presidency to work with other countries to deliver on COP26 commitments on food and agriculture

At COP26, countries signed up to ambitious commitments on food and agriculture, as part of the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests and Land Use,³² which was signed by 141 countries and covers over 90% of the world's forests. This was supported through other associated financial and policy commitments, producing an ambitious package of development, environmental, climate, trade and finance commitments. These commitments go wider than just food and agriculture, covering forest and ecosystem protection, support for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, among other issues.

Below we highlight some of the more salient commitments that governments signed up to on agriculture as part of this broad package.³³

1. **Conserve forests and accelerate their restoration** – placing forests at the centre of climate action, protection of biodiversity and supporting sustainable livelihoods.
2. **Tackle deforestation in commodity supply chains**, through the FACT (Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade) Roadmap,³⁴ tackling key agricultural commodities that are responsible for forest loss, displacement and environmental harm.
3. **Support Indigenous Peoples and local communities** to own and manage their lands and ensure their active participation in development programmes and policies, with agroecology and agroforestry as two principal livelihood strategies.³⁵
4. **Redesign agricultural policies and programmes** to incentivise sustainable agriculture, promote food security, and benefit the environment; repurpose harmful agricultural subsidies with perverse incentives, estimated at \$470bn annually.³⁶
5. **Significantly increase finance for sustainable agriculture**, forest management and Indigenous peoples, recognising its key role in poverty alleviation, climate action and nature protection.
6. **Align finance flows with global goals** to prevent forest loss and land degradation, ensuring that no finance is responsible for environmental loss, climate change or human rights abuses.

Governments that have signed up to these commitments have also signed up to report on progress. Indeed, to build momentum and trust that these commitments will lead to meaningful action, it is vital that we can see some progress by COP27 and a roadmap for action for subsequent years. We also need a clear set of criteria on which governments will report in subsequent years.

For many of the broad commitments, there are existing SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) indicators, which enjoy a high level of technical and political legitimacy as products from several years of negotiations and consultations in the multilateral system. These should be the starting point for developing indicators on the GLD where relevant.

Likewise, the FAO's 15 Core Principles in their Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE) provide a set of principles on sustainable agriculture that are more ambitious and provide a systemic approach to implementing and monitoring progress towards sustainable agriculture. These should be used as a key reference document for developing indicators for the GLD implementation.

Specific recommendations for UK as COP26 President

- a) **Ensure that governments that have signed up to the Glasgow Leaders Declaration on Forests and Land Use provide a written report on the progress that they have made by COP27** to hold themselves accountable to their citizens and to build trust and momentum. This should include a report by the UK government on its own progress.
- b) **Develop a set of concrete criteria on which countries will report progress annually on their commitments within the Glasgow Leaders Declaration**, drawing on SDG indicators where they exist, as well as more ambitious principles of agroecology, such as the Agroecological Principles adopted by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition,³⁷ and the FAO's 15 Core Principles in their Tool for Agroecology Performance Evaluation (TAPE).

In Annex 1 we suggest some specific indicators to report back on below, to show progress in policy and institutional change as well as concrete changes in the status and livelihoods of the population:

Additional recommendation for the UK government on agricultural supply chains

The UK has included provisions to tackle deforestation through agricultural commodity supply chains with the Environment Act (2022), which is currently undergoing consultation around its implementation.

To make sure that the Environment Act is truly “world leading” as it aspires to be, the following measures are needed:

- Include the widest scope of agricultural commodities from the very beginning.
- Clearly specify the due diligence obligation and align it with the UN Guiding Principles on Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.
- Set out the categories of law that businesses must comply with, including those explicitly protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Empower and resource the relevant authorities to effectively monitor and enforce the legislation, including ensuring full supply chain transparency and traceability.

Priority 4: Work with Egypt to make COP27 a food and agriculture COP

One of the priorities that the UK government has identified for COP27 is to “work with donor countries towards the commitment to double adaptation finance, and with all parties to make progress towards the Global Goal on Adaptation.”³⁸ It is increasingly clear that agroecology has a central role in climate adaptation as well as in climate mitigation. An FCDO-supported evidence review³⁹ shows that agroecology provides more climate change adaptation and mitigation than conventional agriculture by emphasising locally relevant solutions, participatory processes, and co-creation of knowledge.

However, currently the percentage of overall climate finance going to agriculture has been on a downward trend for two decades, from 45% in 2000 to only 23% in 2019.⁴⁰ COP27 needs to reverse this trend and step up in investing in climate adaptation for agroecology for the lowest-income and most at-risk nations, reaping the benefits on biodiversity protection and poverty reduction.

Beyond financing, the UK should work closely with the Egyptian Presidency to ensure that COP27 is a Food and Agriculture COP that highlights the interconnectedness of tackling issues concerning climate, food and agriculture. Within the formal UNFCCC process, this will mean formalising the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture, which will in turn give guidance to governments and financing entities can better align their NDCs and climate finance on agriculture and climate.

COP27 is also the change to have a distinctively “African COP” that prioritises the voices of African farmers and civil society. One way to do this is through an inclusive multilateral process that will lead to a “Food and Agriculture Day” at COP27 where farmers, Indigenous peoples and local communities and wider civil society, as well as governments, business and international institutions will make policy and financial commitments to reform the global food system.

The South African Just Energy Transition partnership is a political and financial commitment from the governments of South Africa, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, along with the European Union, to help accelerate South Africa’s decarbonisation transition away from coal, and to repurpose public support for energy away towards renewable energy, as well as reskilling and compensating workers whose livelihoods have been affected.⁴¹

In the same way, the UK should use its COP Presidency to encourage and broker Agroecological Transition Partnerships to be announced at COP27 between countries in the global south and donor institutions and governments as a way of repurposing harmful agricultural subsidies in a way that support low-skilled and vulnerable workers and farmers.

Specific Recommendations for the UK as COP President

- a) **Ensure farmers, Indigenous people and local communities are at the centre of a COP Food and Agriculture process.** Support the calls of civil society and the initiative of the Egyptian Presidency have a Food and Agriculture Day at COP27, and make sure this is built on an inclusive multi-stakeholder stream of work, where farmers, Indigenous peoples and local communities and wider civil society, as well as governments, business and international institutions will make policy and financial commitments to reform the global food system.

- b) **Develop Agroecology Transition partnerships.** Build on the South African Just Energy Transition partnership at COP26 to support Agroecology Transition Partnerships between specific countries and donors to be announced at COP27. Work with multilateral funders such as the Green Climate Fund, to support region or country-wide programmes on the transition towards agroecology, prioritising support for small scale projects. Ensure that these partnerships are linked to ongoing initiatives that seek to repurpose agricultural subsidies and support workers and farmers to make a viable transition, such as the Just Rural Transition and Policy Action Agenda⁴² and Global Action Agenda⁴³
- c) **Mobilise increased adaptation finance towards agroecology.** Continue to work with governments around the world to fulfil their commitments to double adaptation finance and to achieve the Global Goal on Adaptation, with a focus on increasing adaptation finance for agroecology in real terms and as a percentage of overall adaptation finance.
- d) **Help formalise the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture under the UNFCCC:** build momentum to establish an institutional framework for Koronivia together with modalities for policy and finance. This should help define how governments and financing entities can better align their NDCs and climate finance on agriculture and climate. Ensure agroecology is formally recognised by Koronivia.

Priority 5: Support ambitious targets at the CBD that enhance the role of agriculture in climate action and ecosystem protection use

The world's top climate and biodiversity scientists have underlined that we need to tackle biodiversity loss and climate breakdown together, in order to avoid dangerous trade-offs, and that maximising nature-climate synergies also brings significant social and economic benefits. Some progress towards a more joined-up approach was made at UNFCCC COP26, which brought an unprecedented focus on nature to the climate process, with a range of initiatives and announcements, as well as the inclusion of nature in the formal process and the Glasgow Climate Pact.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP15 in 2022 provides a crucial opportunity to continue to develop a truly ambitious, robust Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. This can contribute towards the reform that is needed of the global food system to achieve its potential of tackling poverty, biodiversity loss and climate change. Commitments and targets on agriculture and food are relevant to many parts of the Global Biodiversity Framework and we mention a few key areas for progress below:

Specific recommendations on agriculture for the UK government to support in the Global Biodiversity Framework

- a) **Halve the footprint of consumption and production (Goal B).** The issue of footprint should be elevated in the GBF, with a 2030 milestone to halve the footprint of production and consumption.
- b) **Reduce pesticide use (target 7).** An ambitious target on reducing pesticide use needs to be accompanied by a commitment to review public finance towards chemical pesticides and fertilisers. Each country needs to develop a roadmap on pesticide reduction, including policies to promote agroecology and agroforestry, developed in harmony with the environment and with stronger poverty links.
- c) **Reform harmful agricultural subsidies (target 18).** Countries should be required to assess and disclose their harmful subsidies early in the implementation period, including agricultural subsidies, so that the finance can be repurposed as quickly as possible towards transformational approaches to agriculture, and contribute towards filling the climate and biodiversity financing gaps that currently exist.
- d) **Support Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and gender responsive implementation of all targets.** Progress was made in the CBD intersessional in Geneva in March 2022 on incorporating the role of IPLCs throughout the GBF. This progress should be upheld and the GBF should strengthen recognition of the role of locally led implementation, in line with human rights obligations. The UK government should also support the proposed additional target on ensuring women's and girls' equitable access to, and benefits from, biodiversity.
- e) **Reform agricultural supply chains (target 10).** Progress was made at COP26 to shift towards deforestation-free supply chains and accelerate the transformation of the agriculture sector and food systems in ways that benefit climate, nature and people. This should inform the discussions on the targets of the GBF related to agriculture (target 10), sustainable supply chains (target 15), and sustainable consumption (target 16).

- f) **Ensure the rights and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, and the fair and equitable benefit sharing from seeds and genetic resource (Goal C and target 13).** Some progress was made in Geneva in setting a framework for resolving the highly contentious issue of fair and equitable benefit sharing arising from the use of genetic resources in any form, including Digital Sequence Information (DSI). It is vital that the rights and knowledge of IPLCs are respected and recognised in any decisions on the use of genetic resources, that there is a substantial increase in benefits shared and that measures agreed in the GBF are compatible with existing international access and benefit sharing agreements.

Annex 1: Example national level indicators for measuring progress on agricultural reform as part of the commitments in the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use

Conserve forests and tackle deforestation

- Legislation to prevent deforestation through agricultural commodity supply chains (FACT dialogue commitment)
- Proportion of agricultural land area under sustainable agriculture (SDG Indicator 2.4.1)
- Rate of deforestation year on year

Secure Land Rights

- Legal framework (including customary law) to guarantee women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control (SDG Indicator 5.a.2).
- Number of communities that have secured their land rights within the past year, or started the process, and total percentage with secure land rights
- Total number / proportion of agricultural population with secure rights to agricultural land and share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land (SDG Indicator 5.a.1)

Support Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples

- Number of programmes where indigenous peoples and local communities have actively participated in the design and implementation of programmes (see also Article 32 of UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasant and other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).
- Amount / percentage of climate finance for adaptation that is a) focused on and b) managed by indigenous peoples and local communities.

Finance sustainable agriculture

- Amount of international and domestic public finance, including ODA, flowing to support agroecology, agroforestry and other sustainable agricultural practices, the change year on year (see SDG2).
- Percentage of ODA and climate finance spent on agroecology

Repurpose harmful agricultural subsidies (drawing on UNEP's propose approach⁴⁴).

- Estimate of the existing agricultural subsidies and their impacts
- Plan to support small-holder farmers and women affected by repurposing subsidies as part of transition to agroecology
- Percentage change and total flows of subsidies to environmentally sustainable agricultural practices
- Evidence of change in farmer's lives and environmental health

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