GEF Annual Impact Report 2011

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GEF Annual Impact Report 2011

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Foreword

This is the fifth annual impact report produced by the Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). In these reports, the Office consolidates information on completed evaluations, as well as on progress of ongoing impact evaluations, methodological developments, and other related efforts.

GEF Annual Impact Report 2011 presents progress on the following studies:

- Impact Evaluation of GEF Activities in the South China Sea and Adjacent Areas
- Assessment of Quality at Entry of Arrangements to Measure Impact
- Impact Evaluation on Climate Change Mitigation

The document also discusses how the Evaluation Office is mainstreaming impact evaluations across various evaluative streams and across the GEF partnership by assessing the quality of arrangements to measure impact, incorporating impact assessment considerations in terminal evaluation reviews, and continuing the use of the review of outcomes to impacts (ROtI) analysis through country portfolio evaluations and terminal evaluation verifications.

The Office employs a range of methods, including increased use of impact evaluation approaches,

that allow it to better take into account the complexities related to context, intervention, and impact achievement. Thus, the Office applies theory of change–based approaches to identify likely impacts and determine progress toward their achievement. The Office also uses tools and methods inspired by complex social ecological systems theory to better assess impact paths. The Evaluation Office has also simplified its approach to assessing the achievement of impacts through terminal evaluation review.

The Office would like to thank all those who collaborated with our impact assessment work: our staff and consultants, national focal points, members of the national steering committees, and the GEF Agencies. I would like to thank all those involved for their support and constructive criticism.

The Evaluation Office remains fully responsible for the contents of the report.

Rob D. van den Berg Director, Evaluation Office

Acknowledgments

The work presented in *GEF Annual Impact Report* 2011 is the joint effort of a number of Global Environment Facility (GEF) Evaluation Office staff and consultants. Serving as task team leader providing supervision of the work presented in the report was Aaron Zazueta, Chief Evaluation Officer in the GEF Evaluation Office. Neeraj Kumar Negi, Evaluation Officer, drafted the report.

Aaron Zazueta manages the ongoing Impact Evaluation of GEF Activities in the South China Sea and Adjacent Areas. Neeraj Kumar Negi and Jeneen Reyes Garcia, consultant, are the team members on this evaluation.

Neeraj Kumar Negi is the task manager for the Impact Evaluation on Climate Change Mitigation and the Assessment of Arrangements to Measure Impact at project entry; the latter is being carried out in collaboration with the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel.

Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
GEF	Global Environment Facility
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NONIE	Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation

- OPS4 Fourth Overall Performance Study
- ROtI review of outcomes to impacts
- STAP Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
- UNEG United Nations Evaluation Group

1. Overview of Impact Evaluation Work in 2011

This document is the fifth annual report on impact presented to date by the Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). In these annual reports, the Office presents information on the progress of ongoing impact evaluations, methodological developments, and other related efforts. In addition, whenever an evaluation or assessment is completed during a reporting period, a summary of its findings and conclusions is included in the report.

During this reporting period, significant progress was made in implementing the impact evaluation of the international waters focal area to assess impacts of GEF activities in the South China Sea and adjacent areas. Preparations were initiated for an impact evaluation on climate change mitigation. An assessment of quality at entry of arrangements to measure impact in GEF projects and programs was also initiated during this period.

In addition to the methods and approaches it has developed in the past, the Evaluation Office is increasingly using impact evaluation approaches that allow it to take better account of the complexities related to context, intervention, and impact achievement. It has also simplified its approach to assessing the achievement of impacts through terminal evaluation reviews. This simplified approach will be used to assess the incidence and scope of emerging impacts reported in terminal evaluations. The Office has made concerted efforts to deepen its partnership with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP), as part of an ongoing initiative to strengthen the scientific dimensions of its impact evaluations by drawing on resources available within the GEF partnership. The Office sought the participation of the STAP member for the international waters focal area in the technical advisory group constituted for the impact evaluation of GEF activities in the South China Sea and adjacent areas. Seeking STAP input through a technical advisory group is likely to become a regular feature of impact evaluations, including in the upcoming evaluations of climate change and biodiversity. During the reporting period, the Office also initiated an assessment of quality at entry of arrangements to measure impact in collaboration with the STAP.

The Evaluation Office is mainstreaming impact evaluation across the various evaluation streams and across the GEF partnership by

- assessing quality at entry of arrangements to measure impact,
- incorporating impact assessment considerations in terminal evaluation reviews, and
- continuing the use of review of outcomes to impacts (ROtI) analysis through country portfolio evaluations and terminal evaluation verifications.

When relevant, impact considerations will also be addressed in thematic evaluations. The Office will compile and analyze impact-related findings from the various evaluation streams and, on the basis of this analysis, regularly present key findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations in its annual impact report.

Since the Fourth Overall Performance Study (OPS4), the Office has undertaken nine field ROtI assessments to gather information on the impacts of projects that had been completed for two years or more at the time of assessment. Through modifications in the terminal evaluation review form, the Office has been able to gather information on emerging impacts of recently completed projects. And, through the terminal evaluation review process undertaken for *Annual Performance Report 2010*, information on emerging impacts was gathered for 25 projects.

The Office continues to be an active participant in impact evaluation–related networks such as the Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE) and the impact evaluation task force of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). In March 2011, the Office participated in the NONIE and UNEG meetings in Paris.

2. Progress on Impact Evaluation of GEF Activities in the South China Sea and Adjacent Areas

The Evaluation Office initiated this impact evaluation to follow up on a recommendation made in OPS4 calling for an in-depth assessment of progress toward impact in the international waters focal area. OPS4 had focused more on the likely impacts of individual projects and had not been able to capture GEF contributions adequately at the project cluster level. This impact evaluation was targeted at bridging the gap. The South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand are the evaluation's focus, although for some of the evaluation themes, adjacent water bodies in East Asia have also been considered.

The South China Sea and adjacent water bodies are known for their rich biodiversity and natural resources. Forty years of rapid economic growth in the region, however, have resulted in growing coastal habitat destruction, increased pollution, and overfishing; these now threaten the sustainability of the social, economic, and ecological services these water bodies provide. The region also has a legacy of territorial disputes. These features make addressing the transboundary environmental concerns of these international waters both important and challenging.

Since 1992, the GEF has allocated about \$110.0 million to address the transboundary international waters—related concerns of the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand. Of the aggregate, \$107.1 million has been allocated through 35 medium- and full-size projects, and \$2.9 million through 150 small grants. These activities account for a total cofinancing commitment of \$693.7 million.¹ Of the 35 projects that make up the bulk of the evaluation's content, 24 are supported through the international waters focal area; the remaining 11 projects also address transboundary considerations of international waters, although supported through other GEF focal areas. Of the 150 small grants supported through the Small Grants Programme, 119 pertain to the international waters focal area.

Given the range of activities supported by the GEF, the length of time during which the support was provided, and the geographic extent of the activities, the evaluation was slated to be implemented over a long duration. During this reporting period, the approach paper for the evaluation was finalized, the fieldwork conducted, and preliminary findings shared with the reference group. The evaluation will be completed in the next reporting period and covered in the 2012 annual impact report.

¹ The GEF allocated an aggregate of \$231 million for these activities, with a cofinancing commitment of \$943 million. However, since not all of these activities were fully incident on the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand, presenting these figures would have given an optimistic estimate of GEF support. The figures cited in the text are adjusted to account for partial incidence, and are more conservative than the estimates presented in *Annual Impact Report 2010*, which did not make this adjustment.

2.1 Objectives of the Evaluation

The main objective of this evaluation is to analyze the extent to which the processes, knowledge, technologies, and capacities to which the GEF contributes have led to, or are likely to lead to, changes in policies, technology, management practices, and other behaviors that will address the priority transboundary environmental concerns that affect the social, economic, and environmental services of the South China Sea, the Gulf of Thailand, and adjacent areas.

2.2 Evaluation Approach, Scope, and Limitations

The Office is using several methods and approaches in this evaluation. It is using **theory of change–based approaches** as a heuristic tool to identify the likely impacts and determine progress made toward their achievement. It is also using tools and methods inspired by **complex systems theory** so as to better address issues related to intervention scale, time lags between intervention and natural system response, and ways in which complex socio-ecological systems affect impact paths.

Implementation of the evaluation is being carried out in three phases. The **first phase** consisted of the development of the theory of change for the clusters of GEF-supported projects in the South China Sea and adjacent areas. This phase has been completed.

The **second phase** consisted of data collection along three distinct lines of inquiry:

- Portfolio analysis to provide a broad picture of GEF support at the regional, national, and local levels
- Examination of the regional dimensions of GEF support in the South China Sea

• Country case studies to assess the effectiveness of the various GEF approaches in addressing transboundary environmental concerns, as well as the country factors contributing to or hindering transboundary impact.

This data collection phase has also been completed.

In gathering data on GEF-supported activities, the evaluation team encountered constraints such as gaps in data due to weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) arrangements and their implementation, gaps in scientific knowledge on many aspects of the natural systems and their response, and inability to establish reliable counterfactuals in most situations. Despite these limitations, rich data have been gathered on GEF contributions to capacity development, knowledge sharing, and— in several instances—environmental stress reduction and changes in environmental status.

The **third phase** will consist of data analysis and synthesis. It will focus on assessing achievements related to stress reduction and changes in environmental status, and their transboundary significance; the steps needed to ensure the sustainability of the social, economic, and ecological services provided by the South China Sea; and the likelihood of environmental services becoming permanently degraded. It will also identify corrective intermediate steps or actions for the GEF and other actors.

2.3 Stakeholder Involvement

The Office has drawn on various resources, such as the technical advisory group and reference group that were constituted for this evaluation, and the GEF International Waters Task Force, to strengthen the scientific and technical aspects of the evaluation and to seek input from key stakeholders. The technical advisory group consists of six scientific and technical specialists with expertise in international waters and/or evaluation. The group provides quality assurance support on methodological, scientific, and technical issues. The International Waters Task Force, which consists of international waters focal area coordinators from the 10 GEF Agencies, the GEF Secretariat, and the STAP, has been providing input on selection of knowledge products and has facilitated ongoing communication with the GEF Agencies on the evaluation. The reference group consists of more than 30 persons, including representatives from the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies, key staff involved in the execution of GEF projects in the South China Sea, and some non-GEF stakeholder institutions. Besides the responsibilities it shares with the other groups, the reference group will play an important role in the follow-up to the evaluation.

2.4 Progress to Date

During the last reporting period, a draft **approach paper** for the evaluation was prepared, incorporating preliminary input from the technical advisory group and the GEF International Waters Task Force. The approach paper was shared with the reference group in a meeting held in Bangkok in September 2010. Based on input received from the technical advisory group, the reference group, and the International Waters Task Force, the approach paper was finalized in December 2010.

A **preliminary portfolio analysis** was conducted to understand distribution patterns of GEF support, and to prepare an inventory of demonstration sites where local-level stress reduction might be expected.

Three distinct clusters of GEF projects involving the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand have been identified: (1) a South China Sea project cluster implemented through the United Nations Environment Programme, (2) the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) cluster implemented through the United Nations Development Programme, and (3) the Investment Fund project cluster implemented through the World Bank. During this reporting period, case studies were prepared outlining the theory of change for these clusters and documenting GEF support through these clusters.

Seven of the nine countries bordering the South China Sea are eligible for GEF support. The support provided to these seven countries to address international waters-related transboundary concerns was used as a criterion in selecting countries for detailed **case studies**. Based on the level of support provided by the GEF, four countries— China, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam were selected for detailed study (<u>table 2.1</u>). Each of these case studies is being conducted by a twomember evaluation team. Even though Cambodia was not selected for a full-scale country case study, a field visit was undertaken to Cambodia to gather information on GEF activities.

Data collection and field verification for the country case studies have been completed. Sixty-one demonstration sites at GEF projects have been identified where stress reduction was expected to take place. Of these, 31 sites were selected for field verification using a stratified random sampling approach; all but 1 of the sampled sites has been visited. Thus, overall, the demonstration sites for which data were collected are representative of the countries sampled for the case studies. The evaluation team also visited other demonstration sites in China and Cambodia that are included in the GEF's South China Sea portfolio but were not sampled.

The country case study teams interviewed more than 300 local- and national-level stakeholders.

Table 2.1

Country	National projects	Regional projects	Global projects	Small grants	Total support
Cambodia	3.6	6.5	0.0	0.1	10.2
China	27.5	6.3	0.5	0.1	34.4
Indonesia	1.2	3.6	1.3	0.0	6.1
Malaysia	1.6	4.2	0.2	0.3	6.4
Philippines	11.0	6.1	0.3	0.5	17.9
Thailand	0.0	12.7	0.0	1.4	14.2
Vietnam	7.8	12.7	0.0	0.4	20.9
Total	52.6	52.2	2.4	2.9	110.0

Distribution of Allocated GEF Support for International Waters Projects in the South China Sea by Country *million* \$

Analysis and synthesis of information collected for the country case studies through both primary and secondary sources is presently being conducted.

In addition to the country case studies, analyses are being undertaken on concerns related to coral reefs, mangroves, and marine pollution, as well as in the larger context of GEF support; this latter includes analysis of key actors operating in the South China Sea, regional governance, and trends and emerging scenarios relating to key environmental services provided by the South China Sea. These analyses will be completed in the next reporting period. In September 2011, the Office held a second reference group meeting in Bangkok to share the information collected by the evaluation team. The reference group provided valuable suggestions on harmonizing presentation of information in the case studies, accurately reflecting the perspectives of various stakeholders, and ways to improve the approach to information analysis and synthesis. These suggestions are being incorporated in the evaluation's third phase. The final evaluation report will be presented to the GEF Council at its November 2012 meeting.

3. Progress on Assessment of Quality at Entry of Arrangements to Measure Impact

The assessment of quality at entry of arrangements to measure impact in GEF projects and programs was initiated during this reporting period. The Evaluation Office is collaborating with the STAP so as to benefit from the latter's recognized expertise on scientific issues. The assessment is being undertaken to

- assess the quality of arrangements to measure impact incorporated in the design of GEF projects and programs; and
- provide feedback on the effectiveness of the quality control mechanisms for impact measurement arrangements in project and program proposals, identifying any areas for improvement.

3.1 Rationale

The impact of GEF activities has been among the key themes covered by the Second (2002), Third (2005), and Fourth (2010) Overall Performance Studies of the GEF. These studies report considerable gaps in the evidence base on impact due to weaknesses in M&E arrangements and implementation. The constraints faced by the South China Sea impact evaluation team in gathering data on impact confirm these concerns.

To a great extent, the quality of information on impact that is available for analysis after project completion is contingent on the arrangements made during project design to measure impact, and the manner in which these arrangements are implemented. Therefore, to address the quality of information on impact that is available at project completion, oversight of quality at entry of arrangements to measure impact and their implementation is important.

The experience of the Evaluation Office shows that quality-at-entry assessments could be an effective way to give real-time feedback and facilitate change in practices within the GEF partnership. In 2005-06, the Office undertook a pilot review of the quality of M&E arrangements at entry. The review assessed the degree to which the M&E arrangements of projects endorsed by the GEF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) projects were in compliance with GEF M&E requirements. The findings of the pilot review were shared with various stakeholders and presented in GEF Annual Performance Report 2005 (GEF EO 2006). In 2008–09, the Office undertook a follow-up review to track changes in compliance with M&E arrangements. This review found that, thanks to measures such as revision of project appraisal criteria and stricter implementation of M&E requirements, some of the weaknesses identified in the pilot review had been rectified-leading to improved compliance with the minimum requirements (GEF EO 2008).

The experience of the Evaluation Office with the assessment of quality at entry of M&E arrange-

ments informs the present quality-at-entry assessment, but with some important points of departure. The scope of this current assessment is much narrower in terms of the breadth of M&E-related issues covered. These issues, however, are covered at a considerably greater depth, and focus is more on quality-related concerns than on compliance. Also, to ensure that it has the benefit of the latest relevant scientific knowledge in conducting this assessment of a highly specialized technical topic, the Evaluation Office is drawing on the capacities and expertise of the STAP. This outreach will also lend greater credibility to the exercise.

3.2 Key Questions

The assessment is focused on ascertaining the quality of arrangements to measure impact incorporated in the design of GEF projects and programs, and on providing feedback on the effectiveness of the project and program proposal appraisal process in ensuring quality. The assessment's key questions follow:

- To what extent is the appraisal process for project and program proposals effective in ensuring the quality of arrangements to measure impact?
- To what extent is the approach proposed in the project or program proposal to measure impact scientifically sound and likely to generate reliable information on the achievement of impacts?
- To what extent are the proposed approaches realistic, practical, and in line with existing capacities in the recipient country/countries?
- Are the resources allocated for implementing arrangements to measure impact sufficient and appropriate?

3.3 Methodology

A representative sample of 55 projects and programs were endorsed by the GEF CEO in fiscal year 2011 has been drawn up using a stratified random sampling approach.¹ The project documents and relevant annexes for each project will be reviewed by a panel of two subject area experts. The panels will assess quality of arrangements for impact measurement using an instrument that details key questions on the reliability and realism of the approach, and the resource allocation for impact evaluation–related activities.

GEF stakeholders such as the GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies will be interviewed to gather complementary information on the effectiveness of the systems in quality control and assurance for measurement of impact, and the factors that affect measurement of impact.

3.4 Progress to Date

An approach paper, along with a draft instrument for the review, has been prepared in consultation with the STAP. The Office and the STAP have jointly identified subject area experts for the reviews.

The reviews, and the analysis and synthesis of information from the reviews and other sources, will be undertaken in 2012. Conclusions and recommendations will be reported to the Council during the next reporting period. The resulting report will draw on evidence collected and analyzed as part of the South China Sea impact evaluation and through other evaluation streams.

Once the GEF partnership has had sufficient time to assimilate the information provided by the assessment, the Office will undertake a follow-up assessment to track progress.

¹ The GEF fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30. The period covered by the annual impact report is determined by the timing of the fall meeting of the GEF Council, with coverage beginning one month before the preceding year's meeting to one month before the meeting at which the report will be submitted.

4. Progress on Impact Evaluation on Climate Change Mitigation

The Evaluation Office is undertaking an impact evaluation on climate change mitigation. This evaluation will focus on assessing impacts of a theme, a priority, or a project cluster pertaining to climate change mitigation in which the GEF has made major investments, and which continues to be important. To ensure the utility of the evaluation to GEF stakeholders, the Evaluation Office has been consulting with the climate change mitigation team of the GEF Secretariat and the STAP member for the climate change focal area. To determine the focus of the evaluation, the Office is presently undertaking a preliminary analysis of the GEF project portfolio on climate change mitigation. Based on the findings of the analysis and in consultation with the Climate Change Task Force and the STAP, the Office will distill the specific focus of the evaluation. Fieldwork will be undertaken during the next reporting period. The evaluation is scheduled to be presented to the GEF Council in 2013.

5. Mainstreaming Impact Evaluation across Different Evaluation Streams

The Evaluation Office is mainstreaming impact evaluation across its other evaluation streams country portfolio evaluation, performance evaluation, and thematic evaluation.

In the **country portfolio evaluation stream**, impact evaluation considerations are being addressed through documentation of catalytic impacts and long-term achievements of GEF activities, and by undertaking ROtI analysis for completed projects that are amenable to such an analysis. Once a substantial number of countries have been covered through country portfolio evaluations, the ROtI assessments undertaken for these portfolios will provide a representative picture of the impact achievements of GEF projects.

In the **performance evaluation stream**, impact evaluation is being mainstreamed through inclusion of impact considerations and criteria based on the ROtI methodology into the terminal evaluations of GEF projects and terminal evaluation reviews, and through the opportunistic use of the ROtI methodology in field verification of terminal evaluations.

Impact evaluation issues will be mainstreamed in the **thematic evaluation stream** analysis related to the Fifth Overall Performance Study when assessing focal area strategies and tracking tools and, more broadly, in specific evaluations when appropriate. A simplified four-rating system has been developed for field ROtIs. Since OPS4, the Evaluation Office has carried out ROtIs of nine projects within the framework of country portfolio evaluations. Five projects are in the biodiversity focal area, three in climate change, and one in international waters. No conclusions could be drawn from such a small set of observations. Nonetheless, the emerging evidence from these assessments is consistent with some OPS4 findings based on ROtI assessments. The evidence shows that the contribution to progress toward impacts of GEF projects, through support to countries for activities on information generation, knowledge management, and awareness building regarding global environmental concerns, maydepending on circumstances—have considerable influence on the policy-making process.

Consistent with OPS4 findings, the new ROtI assessments undertaken in the fifth GEF replenishment period (2010–14) continue to produce evidence indicating that progress toward impacts frequently requires attention to a variety of factors. For example, in several instances, it was found that the uptake of new technologies was limited or unlikely because appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks, market outlets, or financial support instruments were lacking. Three of the projects reviewed that were found to have had limited or low contributions toward impacts had been based on weak assumptions or had a poor project design, which contributed to significant implementation failure. As part of the 2010 annual progress report process, 27 terminal evaluations were reviewed by the Office. For 25, an assessment on incidence of environmental stress reduction and status change at the point of project completion was also carried out. Local-level environmental stress reduction was reported for 14 projects (56 percent); project system boundary-level environmental stress reduction was reported for two (8 percent). Local-level positive environmental status change was reported for 5 projects (20 percent). Positive improvement in socioeconomic parameters was reported for 7 projects (28 percent). Because terminal evaluations provide evidence only up to the point of project completion, positive environmental or socioeconomic status change was not reported for any of the projects at a systemic level. Negative impacts have not been reported for any of the projects.

The impact-related evidence drawn from the various evaluation streams will continue to be consolidated and analyzed, and will form the basis for findings and recommendations to be presented to the GEF Council. Several actions are being taken to implement this approach. For example, during the next reporting period, the Evaluation Office will present combined findings on the quality of arrangements to measure impact, taking into account the South China Sea impact evaluation, terminal evaluation reviews, country portfolio evaluations, and information generated through GEF focal area tracking tools. This information pool will be synthesized by the Office to propose recommendations on actions that can be taken in the short term to strengthen the evidence base for impact evaluation.

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All publications cited here are available at <u>www.thegef.org/gef/eo_office</u> under Evaluations & Studies and in the online documents database ASK ME.

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55	GEF Annual Performance Report 2010	2011
54	GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2011	2011
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51	Evaluation of the GEF Strategic Priority for Adaptation	2011
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59	GEF Country Portfolio Evaluation: Moldova (1994–2009), Volumes 1 and 2	2010
58	GEF Annual Country Portfolio Evaluation Report 2010	2010
57	GEF Annual Performance Report 2009	2010
56	GEF Impact Evaluation of the Phaseout of Ozone-Depleting Substances in Countries with Economies in Transition, Volumes 1 and 2	2010
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54	OPS4: Progress Toward Impact—Fourth Overall Performance Study of the GEF, Full Report	2010
53	OPS4: Progress Toward Impact—Fourth Overall Performance Study of the GEF, Executive Version	2010
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ED-3	Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations	2008
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ED-1	The GEF Evaluation and Monitoring Policy	2006



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