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Challenges of information and knowledge management in trade unions in Botswana within the context of millenium development goals

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The attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is closely tied to the challenges of globalization in Africa. Under the globalization drive, issues that centre on privatization, trade liberalization and foreign direct investment now call for most non-state actors such as the labour organizations to advocate for human centred approaches that stipulate MDGs projections. Globalization has also meant that the traditional processes of collective bargaining and advocacy in the labour movement have undergone a swift paradigm shift hastened global interactions of a high geographical spread facilitated by the advances in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). This has in essence deepened the transformation of decision-making processes of most governments, multinationals and non-state actors. Several suggestions now point to the fact that to remain viable and relevant, the labour movement requires, as a matter of necessity, to exploit the capabilities of ICTs to counter the effects of globalization by developing renewed cutting-edge skills based on information appreciation and use. This paper explores the challenges that the labour movement faces in the changing e-environment in Southern Africa, with particular emphasis on Botswana. It identifies some of the impediments for the slow response of the labour movement in using ICTs as a tool that can open up opportunities for education, training, mobilization and solidarity. The paper underscores the need for the labour movement to embrace the ICTs as a tool for information and knowledge management in their planning, implementation and evaluation of its activities within the context of MDGs.

Key words: Globalization, labour movement, trade union, information management, Information Communication Technology, Millennium Development Goals, Botswana, SADC.

INTRODUCTION

The time-bound quantitative targets of the MDGs (reducing extreme poverty, universal access to safe drinking water, reduction of child and maternal mortality, combating HIV/AIDs and malaria, promotion of gender equality and empowerment, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing global partnership by 2015) can arguably be placed and well articulated within the context of the influences of globalization. This is so because the current global economic system has placed undue persuasion that now dictate the pace of efforts to achieve these MDGs in Africa. Thus, there is now a general consensus that there is need for raising awareness, advocacy, alliance building, mobilization and solidarity by several stakeholders globally in order to accelerate political commitment and renewal for a fair and just global system that should be accountable to the achievement of

the MDGs. It has also been acknowledged that this requires close monitoring and participation by key constituents in the society that are power brokers and advocates for a socio-economic justice system and sustainable development, the very foundation for reaching the MDGs. In the same vein, it has been recognized that such effective monitoring and participation involves the inevitable integration into the global information society underpinned and accelerated by the convergence of information communication technology (ICTs). It is a society in which information and knowledge are a linkage and drivers to the global economic system. This implies access to information and knowledge is thus a critical enabler to the various sectors of society that seek to participate in the global economic system and demand for transparency and accountability in the achievement of

MDGs.

In this paper, we draw on some empirical research in Botswana and explore the challenges of the labour movement in integrating into the information society in its quest to mobilize and advocate for the attainment of the MDGs. The paper underscores the need for the labour movement in using ICTs as information and knowledge management tools that open up opportunities for collective mobilization, advocacy, solidarity and alliance building in the attainment of MDGs in the face of the current ramifications of globalization.

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON MDGs IN THE SADC REGION

Globalization is said to be the integration of trade, technology, investments, capital and labour markets throughout the world. It involves opening up of national economies into the global one, creating a global village (Stiglitz, 2002). Sutcliffe sums it up as "the conversion of the world into a single economic space, one macro economy, or perhaps mega economy and so… as a result, into a single seamless society and culture" (Sutcliffe, 1999:1) with such interdependence and integration facilitated and accelerated by new technology, particularly information technology (ICFTU, 2001:9).

The globalization drive poses socio-economic and political challenges in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) sub-region with studies showing that the supposedly potential gains from globalization are in no way automatic nor are they instantaneous. This is because the participation in the globalization process has not so far been on an equal footing thus increasing inequalities in most countries. It has now been clearly acknowledged that the whole agenda about liberalization, privatization, tighter intellectual property rights and so forth is all about putting into place institutions and ways of maximizing profits for the individual firms and producers. The result of the globalization process largely has been said to be the pursuit of self-interest and "survival of the fittest" ideology, which marginalize the poor further (ICFTU, 2001).

It is due to these uncertainties and other potential negative and harmful effects of globalization that nations should choose to influence the process of globalization to ensure that it conforms to local conditions and also to make it people-centred. This means that unless deliberate policies are made to tame globalization to benefit the people, developing countries will continue to slide further into underdevelopment and resign to peripheries within the "bosom of a vibrant modern global capitalist system". It is also clear that such a process if not made accountable to the needs of the people, severely undermines the very objectives and targets of MDGs. But then, how can globalization undermine the achievement of MDGs in the SADC countries?

As earlier observed, the MDGs are internationally agreed development outcomes to draw out national responses through initiatives and strategies that are geared towards reducing poverty and improving the standard of living of the poor, especially in developing countries in Africa and Asia, by 2015. The MDGs have created a platform to galvanize world political action in meeting the neglected needs of the poor. Thus, recent efforts have been to realign the continental, regional and national initiatives towards achieving these goals. The pronouncement of integration of MDGs in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) agenda, the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), the National Poverty Reduction Strategies and the call for a larger proportion of national budget towards education, health, water, sanitation and agriculture are cases in point in Africa. Specifically, the 2005 African Union Ouagadougou Declaration and Plan of Action on Employment Creation and Poverty Alleviation; the Connect Africa Summit which took place in Kigali, Rwanda, on 29 - 30 October 2007; the SADC International Consultative Conference on Poverty and Development, Mauritius from 18 - 20 April, 2008, are clear indicators of the political drive to seek consensus and achieve MDGs in the SADC and beyond (Kanyeze, 2006).

In discussing the effects of globalization on MDGs and the role of information in accountability and transparency, it may be useful to look at the impact of how SADC has faired after its rapid integration into the global economy over the years. It has been often stated and documented that the SADC region, with a total population of about 200 million and combined GDP of about US$190 billion and with earlier an estimated growth rate of around 6% per annum in the last years, although there has been considerable slow down given the economic recession, is still one of the most promising developing regions in the world in terms of economic potential (SADC, 2008). It has been argued that, on the onset in 1980, the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) did focus on its original developmental goals; emphasizing political and social goals as much as economic ones with, for example, infrastructural development as a priority rather emphasis on trade per se. (Kanyeze, 2006). However, the shift to SADC in 1992 was accompanied by a move towards 'free trade' and market outcomes and the adoption of neo-liberal approaches. Thus, the opening up of individual and the regional economies has been at a swift pace with evident "reconfiguration of the region through the various free trade agreements". As observed by Kanyenze (2006), this reconfiguration of the region has "overlapping and confusing membership across regional groupings" such as Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU), Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), East African Community (EAC) and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) (Kanyeze, 2006).

Studies have shown that though the SADC region has integrated into the world economy, with international capital

driving the processes and influencing the outcomes, the regional performance has not substantially improved (Kanyeze, 2006). In the final analysis, the sub-region continues to grapple with the situation of poverty with about 50% the region's population still living in squalor. The incidence of poverty in the sub-region is now ranked among the highest in the world with the majority of the population living below the World Bank measurement of US$1 per day poverty line with visible income inequality both between and within countries. The UNDP average human development index (HDI) of 0.512 for all the Southern African countries ranks among the lowest in the world. Further, the sub-region has high infant mortality rates of (82 per 1000 live births) compared to all developing countries (64 per 1000), industrial countries (14 per 1000) and the rest of the world (58 per 1000). The average life expectancy at birth is also one of the lowest. Over and above this, the sub-region is ravaged with a high impact of HIV/AIDS (Kanyenze, 2006).

Such stark statistics have reawakened many stakeholders including labour organizations to monitor and measure progress on inclusive participatory national economic processes, good corporate ethics, underpinned by the principles of openness, integrity and accountability as aligned to the MDGs.

As further observed by Kanyenze et al. (2006:11), "of critical importance is the political conscientization and mobilization of the people at the grassroots level so that within the proposed holistic approach they can create alternatives to the present neo-liberal development strategy at the local, national, regional and global levels". The UNDP cements this view when they point out that, "development must be by the people, not only for them" (UNDP, 1995). It further observes that as the primary force for change and development, the people therefore ought to be mobilized and organized to spearhead the required transformation through a developmental State. In this regard, through sustained advocacy and participation in national affairs, the State needs to be transformed and reconstructed from one serving the interests of global capital to one whose motive is advancing the interests of the people, a strategic, ethical and accountable State, sometimes referred to as a developmental State (Kanyenze et al., 2006).

But for the civil society (including labour organizations) and other stakeholder to carry out this task, there is need for them to build effective capacity to counter the excesses of globalization. This paper posits that the need for effective information and knowledge base propelled by newer technologies can assist to engage effectively in this process.

CIVIL SOCIETY, INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND MDGs

Civil society comprises all elements of society that do not fall into the category of the "State" and its three pillars, but is not confined to "non-governmental organizations" or NGOs alone (FES, 2008). It also includes organizations of the private economic sector (employers' organizations, chambers etc.), the labour movement (trade unions, professional associations etc.), religious organizations and more. All these organised interests are combined in the term "non-state-actors" or NSA. Such a broad definition of actors of civil society is important, especially when reference is made to the involvement of civil society in decision-making and shaping of the political future in a democracy (FES, 2008).

Over the past years, there has been several arguments about "the nature and role of CSOs in the context of a highly contested socio-economic development policy context" in the SADC within the context of MDGs. As Gabriel (2003:1) aptly observes:

> ...Millennium Development Goals correspond directly with the objectives of civil society organizations that have been active in social and economic justice advocacy work in the region. However, Southern African civil society organizations have either ignored or been slow in taking up the Millennium Development Goals framework in their research, service provision, community organization and advocacy work. This has happened because of a lack of information and in some cases, because the Millennium Development Goals have been seen as a global multilateral government concern in which civil society organizations have not had at stake.

Thus, one could say many CSOs in the SADC have been involved in research, policy development and advocacy work within the context of the MDG framework. In fact in countries such as Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania, CSOs are said to have been active in the area of development financing as well as "highly developed regional human rights programmes and increasing work on regional and global trade justice issues" (Gabriel, 2003:14).

Many activities in the SADC, NEPAD and AU have also been aligned to the MDGs. In this context, the MDGs have been seen as a "unique opportunity for increased and more focused research, popular mobilization, advocacy and resource mobilization among the civil society" (Gabriel, 2003). It has also been argued that "the MDGs as benchmarks can serve as a basis for CSOs themselves to find common national and regional ground for more cohesive CSO networks" (Gabriel, 2003). In fact, global CSO campaigns for social and economic justice such as the Jubilee debt cancellation campaign are said to have been built on clear benchmarks for marking progress.

As Gabriel (2003:20) observed:

Target-driven goals, even though limited, enhance focus, determination and planning. They also provide measures for assessing the effectiveness of policy reforms. Levels of debt cancellation, for example, could (and should) be measured in terms of their efficacy towards costed MDG achievement plans. Similarly, budgeting processes could

be held accountable to the MDG targets. The MDGs provide a ready-made and widely supported framework of social development benchmarks that can be effectively used as an advocacy tool by Southern African civil society organizations to monitor and expand social development programmes in the region.

In particular, labour organizations in the SADC have over the years been engaged in issues that centre on poverty eradication and sustainable development as aligned within the context of MDGs. As has been observed throughout this paper, the ramifications of globalization have reawakened trade unions to look beyond the core functions of collective bargaining to broader socio-economic issues that have a bearing on the workers and populace. The poverty agenda among trade unions has even been deepened given the consequences brought about by the implementation of the neo-liberal policies in general and particularly the IMF conditions in most countries.

Despite all these efforts, however, even though CSOs "routinely argue their wish to participate more effectively in policy formulation processes, with a few notable exceptions in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, South Africa and some regional CSOs, SDC CSOs have done very little to develop systematic local research and policy analysis processes" to participate in the development, monitoring and transformation of poverty reduction strategies (Gabriel, 2003:15). As has been argued in this paper, such participation is critical for them to substantiate the view that their campaigns are not based on mere rhetoric. Therefore the need for an information support system driven by ICTs provides the opportunity to engage on a broader and effective scale in such a process.

THE STATE OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT FOR THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN BOTSWANA

Over the past decade, information management has largely gained more impetus as a result of the revolution in information and communication technologies. There has been a growing understanding that these technologies can be powerful instruments for advancing economic and social development through the creation of new types of economic activity, employment opportunities, improvements in health-care delivery and other services and the enhancement of networking, participation and advocacy within society. ICTs also have the potential to improve interaction between governments and citizens, fostering transparency and accountability in governance. This implies that the labour movement needs to re-strategize and put benchmarks in relation to the manner in which they manage information, be it planning; evaluation; monitoring; dissemination; decision making and accessibility.

Literature on the penetration and depth of ICT in Botswana shows varying levels in the various sectors. Over the past years, the production or creation of information in electronic form has been on the rise in Botswana. This is a result of the various strategies and efforts that the government has made to promote the use of ICTs designed to achieve high productivity and efficiency in its operations. The government of Botswana has been making progressive investments in the ICT sector since the 1990s. These investments have resulted in the establishment of a basic ICT infrastructure in the country. According to the Government Computer Bureau (GCB), expenditure on ICT projects represented 0.2% of the total budget of Botswana's Seventh National Development Plan (NDP7) covering the period 1991 - 1997; capital expenditure as on ICT projects during NDP8 (1997 - 2003) increased tenfold to 1.9% of the development budget. This commitment to ICT use in government is expected to grow to about 3.7% during NDP9 covering the period 2003 - 2009 (GCB, 2003). The Botswana government has also put in place an ICT policy which is designed to guide the ICT environment. In addition to this, the government is enacting various pieces of legislation to backup the implementation of the ICT policy. Like in other African countries, the increasing production of electronic information in Botswana has undoubtedly raised the issues concerning the challenges relating to access and use in various sectors. This section attempts to bring out some of these challenges within the labour movement.

A study by Kalusopa (2007) shows that the information support system for most labour organizations is structurally non-existent in Botswana. For example, among 26 labour centres that were surveyed, 79.2% indicated that they used meetings as the main way of sharing information within and outside their organizations; 64.6% found it (direct formal meetings) as an effective tool while e-mail was found to be the least used tool for communication (6.3%).

In Botswana, the new e-forms have not conclusively offered great opportunities to labour organizations with regard to the management of information and knowledge, which is crucial to the modernization of Trade Unions for the purpose of planning; evaluation; monitoring; decision-making; the process of collective bargaining; democracy and accountability. For example, the study (Kalusopa, 2007) also showed that a lot of materials and publications such as reports on labour and related issues were being generated every day at national level but these information resources needs are not systematically collected, organized, repackaged and disseminated to target users. The main labour centre – Botswana Federation of Trade Unions does not even have a database for tracking or monitoring and keeping up-to-date information on the affiliates such as registration, type of union activities and financial standing to the federation etc. This state of affairs is the same across most of the trade unions in the country. The information networking among most of the

national labour centres and their affiliates has remained elusive. The creation of linkages through strong regional information center is also absent.

Kalusopa (2007) has singled out three main obstacles that the labour movement I Botswana as:

i) The difficult challenge of creating a national information network. The inability to reach majority of the workers (failure to reach critical mass). The BFTU has not been successful in bringing all of their national union affiliates on-line. The failure to reach critical mass has been as a result of various reasons such as information support systems of most of the union bases are to a larger extent non-existent; information resources for knowledge management are not accessed by the intended consumers and generally there is lack of an effective and efficient information support system.

ii) Another obstacle to the realization and achievement of a national labournet is that of the nonexistent of training and apparent lack of support from the Union leadership. The study showed that 29.7% indicated limited budget for training in information management, 21.9% cited lack or limited information on training and 20.3% cited lack of training development policy in information management.

iii) The other point is more of an internal factor in the Trade Unions. The labour movement in Botswana has been slow in the adaptation to the use of ICTs or resistance to the use of e-forms of communication or interaction as confirmed by most respondents indicating that the e-mail even at their workplaces was least used for trade union activities such as building solidarity. There is high dependence on personal experience, internal manual communication with none indication of the existence and use of websites. The failure to embrace the new e-forms has made the process of knowledge management cumbersome in most of the trade unions.

The study however, confirms the appreciation of the role of information management by most trade unions. Thus 84.7% of those surveyed agreed that the following would be the outcomes of the enhancement of information management skills:

a) Participation and democracy would be enhanced in the Union.
b) Information sharing and solidarity among union members would be enhanced.
c) Accountability of Union leadership to members would be enhanced.
d) There would be increase in education and ideological depth among members.
e) There would be an increase in outreach activities.
f) Regional and global social activism would be enhanced.

Only 1.2% disagreed that the information management skills would enhance the above.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR KNOWLEDGE AND DIGITAL INCLUSION FOR LABOUR MOVEMENT IN BOTSWANA WITHIN MDGs

Most labour organizations exist for historical and ideological reasons of advancing the cause of workers. They engage the working social and economic order and may either accept the existing economic order and work within that order to achieve a "favourable set of economic terms and employment conditions, or they may seek to overthrow the existing economic system and replace it with another" (Rainsberger, 1998:1). The former strategy has been called "business unionism" or "simple unionism" while the latter strategy tends to go beyond workplace issues to deal with broader socio-economic matters that affect the workers and the people, a strategy called "social trade unionism" (ICFTU, 2001; Rainsberger, 1998; Wood, 2001).

This philosophical foundation is grounded in the belief in fair social transformation and justice and aims to influence society based on its organized power, capacity to mobilize and building affective political and social alliances (ICFTU, 2001:1). It is committed to workers control and democracy and to maintaining its character as a movement. Such a trade union movement is supposed to be effective and "proactive and able to negotiate and monitor complex agreements with government and employers" as well as making meaningful contributions to national development. (ICFTU, 2001:1).

However, this can only happen if such unions adapt to the global, regional and national challenges through collectivism and solidarity with other stakeholders. ICTs thus provide an enabling framework to enhance this solidarity and partnership in ensuring that the MDGs are met for the good of society. These opportunities facilitated by ICTs are presented below.

Effective National, Regional and Global Engagement

Though the 2004 status report on achievement of MDGs in Botswana shows that the country has achieved universal access to 10 year basic education reduced gender disparities in all education sectors and is poised to potentially or likely to achieve the other MDGs by 2015, the country continues to undergo profound political, socio-economic challenges. In the midst of political challenges, globalization has continued to change the economic landscape of the country. Global and regional economic integration such as that under the aegis of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the SADC continues to influence economic policies as evidenced by the implementation of programmes such as privatization and liberalization. This means there is need for the labour movement to identify and analyze key economic, social and political issues, including the promotion of labour standards, union bargaining rights, renew of national,

regional and international trade and investment policies and their effect on labour interests and the populace within the context of MDGs.

For example, the labour movement needs to develop its own positions and keep track of the various trade and development frameworks such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), SADC Protocols (labour, trade, etc) and other economic instruments that affect the country and region. The preparation of comprehensive alternative policy framework on the basis of national trade union positions is therefore critical. This can be realized by the collecting, collating and analyzing the positions of national trade centres on these issues which will in turn inspire them to be engaged in national economic programmes more meaningfully. Such a process will thus require the labour movement to utilize a strong information base. Thus, the use of the ICTs can allow the labour movement to co-operate, lobby and bargain on key issues confronting society within the context of globalization and MDGs.

Electronic Proximity for Solidarity

ICTs provide the imminent logic in that on-line trade unionism can transform the decision making process by increasing the interaction and geographic spread in Botswana. Most multinationals and their agents now make use of intranet and Internet in organizing their daily business strategic transactions. Trade Unions can also make use of information technology for political campaigns at grassroots and achieve visibility on the issues of MDGs.

The membership spread across the country and the region that are traditionally separated from solidarity by distance are highly proximate with ICTs and can daily reach each other and share experiences at local, regional and global levels on MDGs achievements and challenges. Electronic adjacency or proximity thus provides opportunity for new enhanced forms of solidarity at each level and reconnects the workforces and other stakeholders with similar interest and facing similar challenges (Hogan, 2000).

Ward and Lusoli (2002) have alluded to the fact that new ICTs could be used as a vehicle for targeting and recruitment of members. New union member recruitment is important for advancing and strengthening the efforts of the labour movement in monitoring MDG targets. For, example, the Norwegian Union of Graphical Workers (NGF) has tried out the 'Digital Trade Union' concept with the aim of using ICTs to attract new employees as potential members (Gomez et al., 2004). The 'Digital Trade Union' concept yielded positive results in that, apart from increased membership (grew by almost 10%), it attracted younger workers. In this context, the 'Digital Trade Union' concept can also be used for the mobilization of membership in articulating the MDG targets as well as monitoring their achievement at micro levels of society.

Enhancing Advocacy through In-depth Research

There is need for the labour movement in Botswana to strengthen its advocacy through linkages with strategic professional and technical allies in the struggle to monitor and achieve MDGs. This engagement with strategic allies on MDGs will enable the labour organizations to be more pro-active in its socio-economic campaigns. Ultimately, through the use of ICT, focal points for labour organizations should be able to provide guidance to the affiliate trade union centres on MDGs. Through this strategic partnership, the labour movement, for example should be able to assemble and disseminate well-researched policy positions. The following are therefore the expected benefits of such a strategic use of ICT:

1. Strengthening the technical and professional capacity in information management through the creation of databanks and maintenance of the web sites through updates and dissemination of information through all relevant delivery systems on MDGs.
2. Strengthening the technical and professional support in terms of policy development as well as administrative back-up such as collating information into briefings or reports, to inform and create labour policy on MDGs.
3. Providing technical assistance by specialist knowledge and experience to assist in the development, of national, regional and global campaigns on MDGs.

Enhancing Trade Union Outreach Programme

For any labour organization, education and training at all levels is a critical weapon to build solidarity among the affiliates. In addition, for workers to participate fully in economic decision-making processes, they need to understand the current dynamism of government, employers, regional and global frameworks within the context of MDGs. In this regard, through the use of ICTs labour organizations can co-ordinate the training of members on various issues that affect them in order to build their information literacy on MDGs. It is feasible and practical for labour organizations to provide on-line courses with a locally-oriented content for their members. Labour organizations, for example, can hold virtual meetings, discussions, garner support for campaigning issues without moving an inch from their office spaces. The Internet could also be utilized inexpensively for purposes of communication with authorities though e-mail protests on pertinent issues on MDGs.

Using ICTs to Modernize Trade Unions

The other impact involves trade union harnessing ICTs to "update their traditional functions" and market their organization hence boost their dwindling image in the political process. ICTs could thus radicalize the traditional

trade union structures and "facilitate processes of distributed discourse" hence entrench democratization (Lee, 1997; Hogan and Grieco, 2000; Diamond and Freeman, 2001). Ward and Lusoli (2002) identified the following as basis for those that advocate such as a modernization approach:

i) Building their administrative portfolios through websites that would have capacities for information bases containing organizational, personnel, policy documents and regular news releases. In such cases there are efficiency gains in terms of time.

ii) Provision of on-line services of offering professional assistance and training to deal with the individualistic culture. This will also provide useful communication forum for the isolated workers.

iii) Enhancing the recruitment drive of those members especially the younger generation that resent the traditional trade union culture.

iv) Building the image of the stereotyped "old fashioned, male dominated, confrontational" Trade Unions into a more positive social movements.

Conclusion

The challenges that the labour organizations face in SADC and Botswana in particular underscore the need for such organizations to embrace the management of information for its planning, implementation and evaluation of its activities in the context of MDGs. Most labour organizations' activities are largely knowledge-based and information intensive. The challenges of conception, initiation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities in labour organizations will always require the provision of reliable, pertinent and timely information. Consequently, it can be acknowledged that well-managed information delivery systems propelled by ICTs in labour organizations in Botswana can actually facilitate problem definition, measurement and analysis, taking inventories and gainful decisions, evaluation of the plans, programmes and projects within the context of MDGs.

Thus, it is not even far fetched to argue that the very survival of labour organizations in Botswana and the SADC is dependent on the ability to use information as a strategic and operational resource in their campaigns on the achievement of MDGs.

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