Good Practice in Post-Conflict Reconstruction

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Questions

What is the best practice support to post-conflict reconstruction, including timing and necessary circumstances in order to be able to reconstruct?

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1. Summary

This rapid review synthesises the evidence on best practices in post-conflict reconstruction from academic, policy and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sources. The literature points to the importance of planning and co-ordination amongst donors and implementation partners, whilst taking into consideration the local dynamics. Donors should be prepared to provide enough funding to meet the needs of the society, and to offer support over the long-term. It is important that the local population plays a role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the process, and that both the government and population support the process. Security is a key element to the success of post-conflict reconstruction; ensuring a secure environment enables the other processes in post-conflict reconstruction. Much post-conflict reconstruction has focused on re-establishing macroeconomic structures, however this often enhances corruption of elites and does not benefit the wider society. For this reason it is important to support microeconomic structures.

Key findings are as follows:

- In order to understand the best solutions within the local context, consultations among key stakeholders to understand what the essential components to achieve positive social and economic change are needed.

- The local population and civil society should be included in the decision-making processes and all other stages of the project, as this is crucial for creating appropriate and effective reconstruction initiatives.

- International actors should also remain flexible to the changing post-conflict dynamics and should not bring preconceived ideas of the reconstruction process with them.

- Reconstruction projects should be designed based on local conditions, which is why civil participation is imperative during the planning and design.

- Although the first two years following the end of the conflict see the most investment in terms of aid, it is argued that the host country's ability to absorb and make best use of the aid at its peak toward the middle of the first decade after the conflict has ended.

- Post-conflict reconstruction is a lengthy and costly process, and international actors have to be willing to support the full cycle or progress is likely to be undone. Additionally, investment should match the needs of the population rather than the goals of the donor.

- A secure environment and the backing of the local population and the government are argued to be preconditions for successful post-conflict reconstruction.

- Popular involvement in governance should be prioritised, as this generates a sense of influence amongst the population, and offsets the sense of imposition by international actors.

- Although local ownership is important, local elites responsible for the conflict can utilise the reconstruction process to gain support.

- Reconstruction should address the needs of the locals, rather than the elites responsible for the conflict in the first place. The focus should be on rebuilding the social contract and not on consolidating elite power and wealth.

- Reconstruction needs to be linked to economic development that matches local understandings, is compatible with local culture, and is focused on re-establishing livelihoods.

- There should also be a focus on microeconomics in order to encourage the growth of the private sector and revive the economy.

- Reconstruction can have many negative environmental impacts and it is important that these are taken into account and mitigated where possible.

- Corruption is endemic in post-conflict societies, and as a result governments and aid agencies need to establish context-specific accountability measures.

- In order to prevent projects being duplicated or similar projects being implemented, it is important that there is coordination between the multiple donors and agencies involved in post-conflict reconstruction.

- Post-conflict reconstruction does not necessarily give the state legitimacy; the population is more interested in how these services are delivered and whether they are fairly delivered.

- Donors tend to exert pressure on the implementing agencies to procure goods from the donor country when often more suitable and cheaper material can be found in the neighbouring countries; reconstruction policies should take this into account.

- Strengthening local institutions helps to maximise the long-term benefits of humanitarian aid and makes better use of the available donor resources.

- In cases like Syria where the conflict has not led to regime change, the regime can use post-conflict reconstruction to rebuild authoritarianism and reimpose authority, rather than to transform the society.

- It is important to address the specific needs of women in post-conflict reconstruction, as the transitional period can be utilised to improve the circumstances of women. Thus, it is extremely important that women are included in the decision-making process

- Reconstruction should also address horizontal inequalities, which is why local participation is important and why projects should be people-centred rather than project-centred.

- Post-conflict reconstruction in Sri Lanka was successful due the participation of local people from the inception to the end, the diverse partnerships to implement the projects including donors, government and community organisations, and finally the new and innovative technologies that were used to make it cost effective and sustainable.

- It is important to ensure that the physical reconstruction is paired with elements that rebuild the society and the legitimacy of the state.

- Effective post-conflict leadership should be committed to addressing inequalities and exclusion, and should foster social dialogue and reconciliation.

- Capacity building is a long-term initiative and donors must understand this, whilst national and local authorities must be committed to the process.
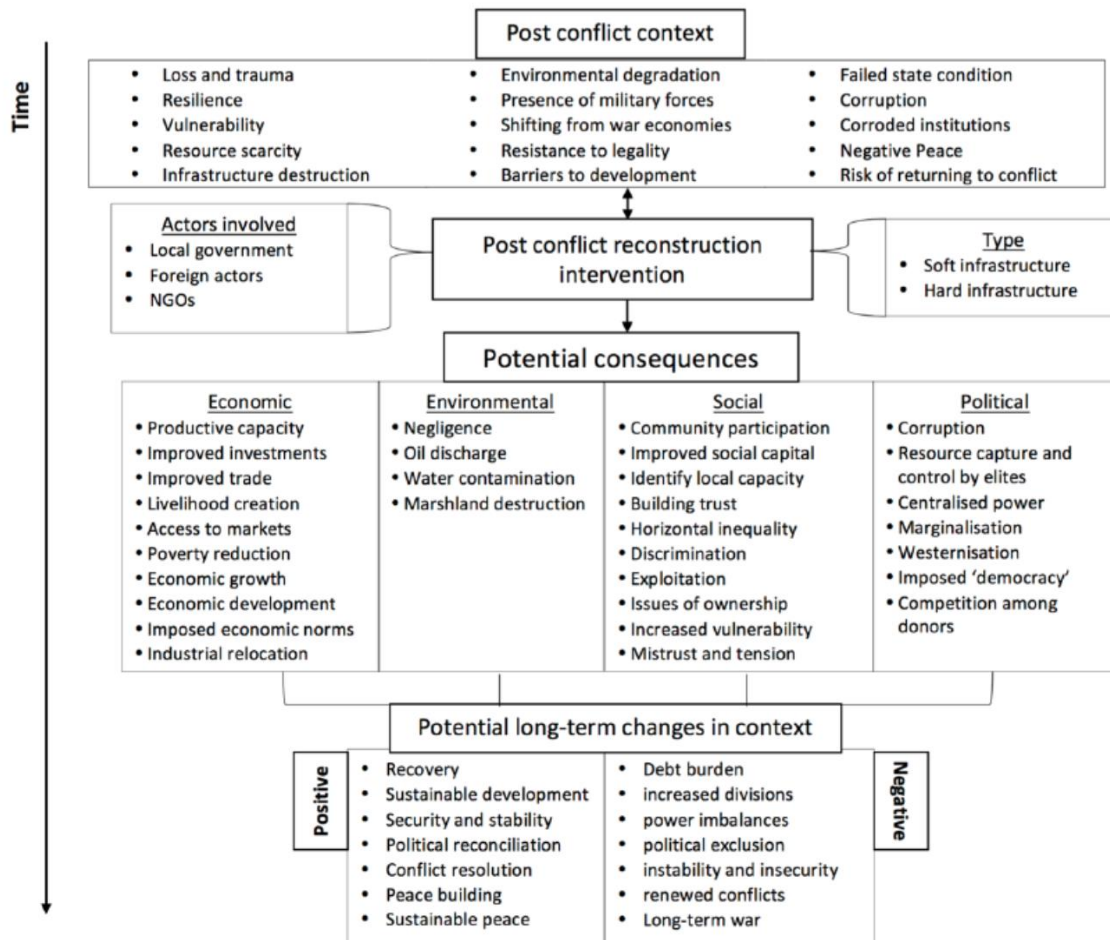
2. Planning

Decision-Making

Success in post-conflict reconstruction depends on the ability to understand the complexities of the political environment, to coordinate projects in an effective manner, and involve a wide range of community stakeholders. Consultations among key stakeholders with a direct relationship to the project are critical to ascertain what they perceive as essential components of project planning systems and processes, to achieve beneficial social and economic change (Earnest, 2015). There is a lot of criticism of post-conflict reconstruction processes for the lack of adequate planning, resources, funding, and an exit strategy. International implementing agencies, such as the UN, also often bring their own organisational policies operating procedures, rather than developing them for the context. However, it is extremely important to involve locals in the planning, implementing and evaluation, as it ensures local ownership and that the projects that are implemented are supported. The changing post-conflict dynamics also influence the perception of projects, and therefore donors and implementing agencies must remain flexible in project planning and implementation. Additionally, civil society members are seldom included in the decision-making processes, and are rather only engaged with when it comes to implementation – to achieve sustained growth and development, beneficiaries must be engaged systematically through all stages of the project (Earnest, 2015).

Often infrastructure projects in post-conflict reconstruction processes suffer from low quality design and/or sub-standard construction. This can be due to failure to take into account the local conditions, needs, and capacities. For this reason, civil participation is imperative in the initial stages of planning and design of the project, which also ensures the projects are relevant and take into account the needs of all sections of the population (Earnest, 2015). It is extremely important that the context is taken into account when developing post-conflict reconstruction (Caplan, 2005). Sakalasuriya et al. (2018) highlight the different dynamics and results that need to be taken into account when developing a programme for post-conflict reconstruction in Figure 1 (below).

According to Saul (2014) Popular involvement in decision-making is crucial for creating appropriate and effective reconstruction initiatives. After all, the people that are affected have clearest understanding of what a situation needs. Additionally, the more a population has been directly involved in decision-making, the greater the awareness and understanding of the different components of the reconstruction there is. This then allows for the population to more fully experience the intended benefits of the reconstruction programme. Awareness can also help to prevent certain elements of the population who are against the reconstruction from disrupting it. However, in order for this to work in the long-term, the national government has to support reconstruction empowering the population (Saul, 2014).

Decisions on reconstruction need to go beyond the more traditional understanding of the term (with a focus on physical rebuilding, or the reconstruction of political institutions and public services) and should also take into account the societal rebuilding that needs to take place. Reconstruction should also not reconstruct the issues that led to the conflict in the first place and should rather focus on constructing inclusionary institutions, spaces, etc. that help to overcome the issues of conflict. This process has to be context-specific, but the factors that led to conflict have to play a key part in the decisions on the reconstruction process (O'Driscoll, 2018).

Figure 1: Post-conflict Reconstruction Process

Source: Sakalasuriya et al., (2018: 899)

Timing

International businesses and aid agencies focus their attention on post-conflict reconstruction at different times of the recovery. Following the end of the conflict there is much publicity and international goodwill, which leads to an increase in aid in the first two years. However, this initial enthusiasm, and the aid and support that comes with it, begins to wane by the third or fourth year. The decline in support is counter-productive, as it is argued by Bray (2005) that the host country's ability to absorb and make best use of the aid at its peak toward the middle of the first decade after the conflict has ended. International businesses (apart from construction companies) on the other hand tend to have limited involvement directly following the conflict's ending, and rather begin investing when it becomes more stable (Bray, 2005).

Post-conflict reconstruction is also a long-term commitment, and international actors too often look for a quick fix and base policies on having an exit strategy within the near future. For instance, in South Sudan the internationally-led reconstruction plan was for six years, which was not nearly enough time for the transformation necessary in the country, particularly when looking at the surrounding countries and their lengthy state-building processes. The onset of civil war in

South Sudan only acts to further demonstrate the failures of the short-term polices of the international community regarding post-conflict reconstruction in South Sudan (Francis, 2016).

Conditions

In the reconstruction framework produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) (2002) it is argued that security (including all aspects of collective and individual public safety) is a pre-condition for achieving the successful outcomes of reconstruction. However, UN-Habitat (2017) argue that in order for post-conflict reconstruction to be successful, it has to have the backing of the government and the local communities.

Funding

There is often not enough funding to meet the post-conflict reconstruction needs, and local-led projects are often sacrificed. As a result, projects often operate according to the priorities of the donors, rather than the development needs of the local community. It is therefore important that donors support local-led projects and ensure that investment matches the needs of the population rather than the goals of the donor (Earnest, 2015).

Local Ownership

Local ownership should refer to those who are going to be directly impacted by the reconstruction and should not be confused with national, regional, or even local government ownership, as is often the case. Popular involvement in governance should be prioritised in practice, as this generates a sense of influence amongst the population, which in turn builds legitimacy and offsets the sense of imposition by international actors. This also helps to increase positive engagement by the population with reconstruction initiatives (Saul, 2014).

Bottom-up and grass roots solutions to post-conflict reconstruction are vital to counter the actual causes of the conflict, such as poverty and political marginalisation. Therefore, reconstruction should include innovative bottom-up solutions that address the inequalities and marginalisation within the society (Bender, 2011). However, there are also difficulties with encouraging local involvement that need to be overcome. The process can be hijacked by local elites responsible for the conflict who can utilise the reconstruction process to gain support. This also demonstrates to the local population that violence is rewarded. This does reiterate the point that a more localised understanding of local is important. However, overlooking elites can also create tensions and lead to them trying to reassert power (Saul, 2014).

Local needs

It is important that reconstruction addresses the needs of the locals, particularly those that have been more directly negatively impacted by the conflict. For example, Sharp (2018) argues that in Lebanon reconstruction very much focused on Beirut and urban corporate development, rather than affordable housing, infrastructure, waste management, urban governance and open space. The legacy of not investing in these areas is very much still felt today, along with considerable debt due to financing urban corporate developments. Construction within reconstruction can be a violent process in itself, as it can be used to divide communities, rather than reconcile, with areas being constructed for some and not others, and contracts often going to the very actors that

perpetrated the violence during the conflict. Moreover, reconstruction can be used by elites to consolidate power and wealth, rather than rebuilding the social contract (Sharp, 2018).

Economic development

It is important that reconstruction is linked to economic development, as this allows for peace to be sustainable. However, economic development needs to match local understandings and be compatible with local culture. Thus, growth needs to be sustained beyond the immediate influx of aid and investment in reconstruction following the conflict. Infrastructure projects can be connected to poverty reduction programmes, and thus it should also focus on re-establishing livelihoods and replacing livelihoods that are based on the wartime economy (Sakalasuriya et al., 2018).

International actors often focus on macroeconomic stabilisation programmes. However, it is argued that this inhibits state capacity to develop local businesses and industry, and macroeconomic stabilisation programmes fail to provide organic growth for domestic businesses. Moreover, they tend to benefit transnational corporations rather than the people who have suffered from the conflict. A microeconomic approach would better foster the growth of the private sector and thus revive the economy, decrease dependence on foreign aid, expand the economic base, and attract foreign direct investment in local businesses and infrastructure (Bender, 2011).

Environmental Impact

Reconstruction can have many negative environmental impacts, and it is important that these are taken into account and mitigated where possible, particularly as war itself is extremely damaging for the environment. In Iraq, the infrastructure reconstruction had a number of serious negative impacts on the environment, such as oil discharges, water contamination, and the destruction of marshlands, which in turn have led to people being forced to migrate and serious issues with the lack of drinkable water even to this day (Sakalasuriya et al., 2018).

3. Reconstruction

Accountability

Corruption is often endemic in post-conflict societies, and as a result post-conflict reconstruction can prove difficult. Therefore, governments and aid agencies need to establish anticorruption monitoring systems to ensure transparency, however, it is important to also develop context-specific accountability measures (Earnest, 2015).

Coordination

Due to the lack of coordination between the multiple donors and agencies involved in post-conflict reconstruction, projects are often duplicated, or similar projects are implemented, leading to wasted resources and a failure to reach all the needs of the society. For this reason, it is important that all projects are properly coordinated amongst the range of actors involved; failed coordination leads to the benefit of the international presence being counteracted (Earnest, 2015). The post-conflict environment is very different from non-conflict environment, and factors

such as displacement, vulnerability, crowding out effect and the governance dilemma have to be taken into account. Therefore, planned coordination amongst the various stakeholders is vital in order to develop successful and context specific solutions (Sakalasuriya et al., 2018).

Legitimacy

Post-conflict reconstruction is often used by donors in order to give some form of legitimacy to the state in the statebuilding project. However, Brown (2018) argues that improving service delivery does not necessarily improve perceptions of the government's legitimacy. Rather the population is interested in how these services are delivered and whether they are fairly delivered. Additionally, local populations value a participatory approach to service delivery, and whether those that deliver the services are seen as being embedded within the community. This points to a more local-led (as in local council) led programme of post-conflict reconstruction (Brown, 2018).

Procurement

In a post-conflict environment there is often a lack of materials for reconstruction projects, and thus these need to be imported. This usually leads to a tendering process to procure goods, which international donors often choose to be involved in. Donors tend to exert pressure on the implementing agencies to procure goods from the donor country even when they do not match the local requirements, or are more costly than importing goods from neighbouring countries. This increases the cost, sustainability and suitability of post-conflict reconstruction, therefore it is important that the procurement process is more open. Often, more suitable and cheaper material can be found in the neighbouring countries, and reconstruction policies should take this into account (Earnest, 2015).

Strengthening Local Capacity

The lack of local capacity can be a major institutional constraint in implementing reconstruction projects. Therefore, strengthening local institutions is not only beneficial to the community, but also helps to maximise the long-term benefits of humanitarian aid. Enhancing local institutional capacity, through training programmes, study trips, etc., makes better use of the available donor resources and will assist in mitigating risks and expectations (Earnest, 2015).

Reconstruction when government is not supported

Heydemann (2018) argues that the case of Syria (where the regime is not supported by the majority of donors) stands in contrast to the norms of post-conflict reconstruction, where the process is seen to transform the state, society, and economy, as well as form a new inclusive social contract. In Syria the conflict did not breakdown the pre-war political economy, and legacies of the pre-war economic governance exerted influence on the wartime economic order. The Assad regime has operationalised the post-conflict rebuilding of Syria's economy as a process of rebuilding authoritarianism, and thus reconstruction is being utilised to re-impose authority rather than to transform the society. As the regime takes control of territory, the reconstruction process is used to reassert its sovereignty and is slowly establishing a strong base of power regardless of the areas outside of its control. Heydemann (2018: 20) argues that this process is likely to

lead to a consolidated post-war political economy that will be similarly organized, if more repressive, more exclusionary, and comprised of transactional coalitions that include newly-enriched wartime profiteers and cronies, to the one over which it presided before the start of the uprising in 2011.

The example of Lebanon demonstrates the failure of the 'Western donors' tactic of trying to influence the governance of Lebanon through interventions, as despite these interventions Hezbollah managed to gain significant power. The focus of intervention on trying to bring Lebanon into line with donors' expectations ultimately failed and Lebabon's 'political dispensation was decided by brinkmanship, force and the show of force, and decidedly traditional politics' (Hamieh and Mac Ginty, 2010:118). On the other hand, Gulf and Arab states focused their reconstruction efforts on big ticket infrastructure programmes, which resonated better with local political constituencies and in turn increased their political influence. However, it also acted to reinforce the existing political system based on patronage that the liberal peace actors were trying to circumvent (Hamieh & Mac Ginty, 2010).

Gender and equality

The literature on the best practice with regards to post-conflict reconstruction highlights the importance of addressing gender needs. It is particularly important to address the specific needs of women in the post-conflict context, such as matters related to sexual violence, internal displacement, and responsibility for the household. This means utilising the transitional period to improve the circumstances of women, however, it is argued that this also contributes to a general improvement in the socio-economic circumstances of the population. For this reason it is extremely important that women are included in the decision-making process (Saul, 2014).

Post-conflict reconstruction allows for the opportunity to focus on women's rights and to acknowledge and value the contribution of women in reconstruction. However, there should also be a focus on women as a specific group in order to redress gender disparities in access to essential services and resources. Zuckerman and Greenberg (2004) put forward a number of areas that should have special attention paid to in order to eliminate gender inequality, these are:

- **Women's rights to political participation:** Post-conflict countries provide an opportunity for women to fill political positions previously held by men. This can be done through quotas, or in elections, but it is important that support is given to increase the capacity of women to govern, as they are more likely to be criticised than men. Strengthening women's capacity for leadership will help them be a success in office and the likelihood of voters supporting them. This should include developing women's ability to run for office, win seats, and serve effectively. It is important to have women role models and women in office that actually promote gender equality.

- **Property ownership:** Post-conflict reconstruction often involves resolving disputes over property ownership, and drafting property laws which uphold the rights of individuals to property. This gives an opportunity to guarantee women's full and equal rights to own property, as failure to do so – particularly in areas with customary practices that prevent women from ownership – can negatively impact women's rights. However, in order for women to benefit from new laws post-conflict reconstruction programmes must develop women's legal literacy and access to justice.

- **Employment:** Alongside laws there needs to be a willingness to act to ensure that women are not discriminated against with regards to employment. The post conflict phase provides an opportunity to ensure that women are better represented in society. It

is also important that women are not pushed out of their employment once men return to the workplace. Additionally, post-conflict reconstruction programmes often exclusively focus employment on demobilised men, which can act to further marginalise women. Additionally, cutbacks in government spending such as on healthcare should be analysed to ensure that they do not overly negatively impact on women.

- **Freedom from violence:** In the post-conflict context there are a number of male demobilised soldiers who are accustomed to the use of force. It is important that women and their rights are protected against any form of abuse.

- **Infrastructure:** It is important that donors take the time to conduct gender analysis in various contexts which can reveal special infrastructure-related needs. Women must participate in identifying and designing infrastructure to reflect their gendered needs which are dependent on context and the social norms. Women and men prioritise the rebuilding of different types of infrastructure due to their different labour roles and conceptions of well-being. For example, men often prioritise the construction of main roads to reach cities for work, whilst women often prefer rural roads to give them access to markets, water, schools, health facilities, and other essential services.

- **Demilitarisation, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR):** DDR is important in post-conflict settings, but there is a tendency for it and the positive aspects related to it such as training, employment, allowance, etc. to focus solely on men and as a result marginalises women.

It is important that post-conflict reconstruction does not lead to inequality in resource distribution as this can further marginalise those that suffered during the conflict and can lead to conflict re-emerging. Failure to address horizontal inequality in post-conflict reconstruction can lead to interventions that increase the vulnerability of people by exploiting resources and widening socio-economic inequalities. This is why local participation is important and that projects should be people-centred rather than project-centred (Sakalasuriya et al., 2018).

4. Successes and Lessons learned

Lessons from Sri Lanka

UN-Habitat (2017) argue the post-conflict reconstruction programme in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces was successful due to three main elements: the participation of local people from the inception to the end; the diverse partnerships to implement the projects including donors, government and community organisations, and finally the new and innovative technologies that were used to make programme cost effective and sustainable. Crucially, UN-Habitat also argue that the reconstruction would not have been possible if it were not supported by the Sri Lankan government and local communities, as it required full acceptance and participation of both. The programme was also sustainable and empowering, as it was based on a people's participatory process for rebuilding their own homes as well as infrastructure. This process was also inclusionary, as the Village Reconstruction Committees that were key to village development and housing construction included men and women, old and young, as well as the disabled (many as a result of the conflict). Through utilising new technologies in construction to reduce costs and be sustainable, the programme had to remain flexible and adaptable, as some were highly successful whilst others failed. The reconstruction programme was also an

opportunity to construct anew and elements such as access for disabled, child-friendly facilities, disaster risk reduction, gender mainstreaming, environmental conservation, and boosting the economy were all included in the programme (UN-Habitat, 2017).

Donors and Post-conflict governments

Ernstorfer et al. (2007) argue that successful process of post-conflict recovery consists of many different sectoral interventions that are mutually supporting and carefully attuned to each other. Additionally, they argue that it is important to ensure that the physical reconstruction is paired with elements that rebuild the society and the legitimacy of the state. They also put forward a number of lessons, best practices and conditions with particular focus on the relationship between donors and the post-conflict government:

- It is critical that the country emerging from the conflict has a leadership committed to adopting effective, trustworthy, transparent, participatory and efficient governance institutions that will deliver services to the population;

- Effective post-conflict leadership should be committed to addressing inequalities and exclusion, and should foster social dialogue and reconciliation;

- In order to promote a participatory partnership with the civil society the genuine and active participation of the civil society and citizens in the workings of the local government should be encouraged through the reconstruction process;

- The public service is key agent of change in reconstruction and therefore needs to transform its systems to (re)gain people's trust;

- The promotion of macro-economic reconstruction and stabilisation needs to be closely aligned with peace-building components, such as inclusion and reconciliation;

- Post-conflict reconstruction should also focus civil service capacity building efforts aimed at generating capacity at all levels, as this enhances effectiveness of public institutions and installs checks and balance in government, enhancing accountability and trust;

- Capacity building is a long-term initiative and donors must understand this, whilst national and local authorities must be committed to the process.

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