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Social Protection and Cash Transfers in Mozambique: Between international consensus and local agency

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Social protection and cash transfers in Mozambique: Between international consensus and local agency[1 2]

This article examines the rise of cash transfer programs and their embrace, since the 1990s, as a central element in global public policy on economic and social development and poverty reduction. Focusing on the example of Mozambique, an early adopter of such programs, it analyses the relationship between international organizations, development aid agencies, national government and local agents in the field, in the design and delivery of social protection policy. While external actors have been important in shaping Mozambican public policy, this study reveals the relevant role played by the country's domestic actors in agenda-setting, conception and implementation of a cash transfer program as early as 1990, and its evolution over the subsequent three decades. In this interplay between international and local levels of decision- and policy-making, the article looks into the barriers to the program's reach, pace and limited impact.

Keywords: Mozambique, social protection, cash transfers, public policy, donors, domestic actors

Proteção social e transferências monetárias em Moçambique: Entre o consenso internacional e a agência local

Este artigo examina a disseminação dos programas de transferência monetária e a sua aceitação, desde os anos 1990, como elemento-chave nas políticas globais de desenvolvimento económico e social e de redução da pobreza. Centrando-se no exemplo de Moçambique, que adotou precocemente uma medida deste tipo, o artigo analisa a relação entre organizações internacionais, agências de desenvolvimento, governo nacional e agentes locais no terreno, na formulação e operacionalização da política de proteção social. Reconhecendo a importância dos atores externos na formação das políticas sociais moçambicanas, este artigo demonstra a relevância dos atores nacionais na definição da agenda, formulação e implementação de um programa de transferência monetária em 1990 e ao longo da sua evolução nas três décadas seguintes. A partir da análise da interação entre os níveis internacional e local no processo de decisão, o artigo discute os obstáculos que se colocam ao programa e que limitam a sua cobertura, ritmo de expansão e impacto.

Palavras-chave: Moçambique, proteção social, transferências de dinheiro, políticas públicas, doadores, atores internos

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Since the 1990s, social protection has come to feature prominently in national and international policy-making debates as a key element to foster economic and social development. Generally understood as a set of policies aimed at reducing and preventing poverty and vulnerability, social protection includes both contributory schemes (often identified as social security/insurance) and non-contributory tax-financed benefits (often identified as social assistance), encompassing situations as varied as maternity, unemployment, sickness or disability (ILO, 2017). Such policies have long been common features of the western welfare state, where they are often tied to formal employment markets (Merrien, 2013), but historically have featured far less prominently in international development policy. The past three decades, however, have seen the concept of social protection expand from the almost exclusive concern of countries in the Global North to encompass the needs and priorities of the Global South.

This profound change in the understanding of social protection, seen at both the international and domestic levels, has been described as a paradigm shift[3] (Leite & Peres, 2013; Merrien, 2013). Once seen as a specific, and usually temporary, safety net to counter the worst impacts of specific economic shocks, social protection evolved into a global policy (Voipio, 2007). Two factors help explain this shift: the extremely negative effects of structural adjustment programs, on the one hand, and the recognition that economic growth alone was insufficient to address poverty, on the other (World Bank, 2012). The World Bank, the International Labour Organisation, the Inter-American Development Bank and the British Department for International Development, among other international financial organizations and development aid agencies, began promoting social protection policies, contributing to an emerging "consensus in favour of social protection," notwithstanding competing views regarding their concrete application (Merrien, 2013) and shifting views on design and implementation even within the same institution across time and space (see Vetterlein, 2015).

These changing views at the level of global public policy were soon reflected in a rise in public initiatives in the Global South, including in sub-Saharan Africa, with cash transfer programs featuring prominently (Barrientos, 2013; Hanlon et al., 2010; Merrien, 2013). Many observers have suggested that this new social protection agenda and its attendant programs reflect the influence of international actors at the expense of local decision- and policy-making (Merrien, 2013). Certainly, in the low-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa, a high level of aid

[3] Hall (1993) argues that policy change might occur at three different levels: at the first level, changes affect only policy instruments; at the second, changes alter both the instruments and the design; and at the third, changes are profound and affect the very ideas informing the policy, thus leading to major adjustments. This last type of change often takes place in the face of a major crisis or as a result of learning processes.

dependency leaves national governments exposed to external pressures and the imposition of foreign policy models. As Garcia and Moore (2012, p. 4) observe, in these countries cash transfer programs "are often short-term projects […] typically seated outside of the government […] partially or fully funded by donors." Frequently, they "simply address emergencies – whether natural disasters or events caused by humans – once they have occurred," "target a very limited portion of the population or a certain vulnerable group," and are "influenced by donor preferences." The "fragmented nature and patchy coverage" of these programs, Garcia and Moore suggest, "reflect their lack of domestic ownership and coordination." Such analyses imply there is limited or little space for national governments to participate in the (re)definition of these social protection policies. Yet, the example of Mozambique suggests the interplay between foreign and local actors may be more complex.

Mozambique stands out, at least, in its regional context, as a particularly early adopter of cash transfers. While widespread adoption of these programs in the region began only from 2005, Mozambique's first cash transfer program was introduced in 1990, and both the national government and local agents in the field were crucial in determining its reach and pace. Examining the creation and evolution of Mozambique's cash transfer program between 1990 and 2020, we argue that, in spite of its heavy dependence on external aid, the Mozambican national government enjoyed a substantial level of agency vis-à-vis donors, with a clear impact on resulting public policies. These findings suggest that even in countries highly exposed to significant external influence and with lower levels of state capacity, under specific circumstances, local voices may still shape the design and implementation of social policies.

The article begins with a brief overview of the concept and practice of cash transfers, and their growing diffusion and popularity in the Global South, before turning to focus on the case study of Mozambique. Following a general outline of its initial cash transfer program, the article considers the subsequent reform of social protection in Mozambique, analyzing the external and internal forces at play in terms of agenda-setting, design and implementation of a cash transfer program as early as 1990, as well as its evolution over the subsequent three decades. The article then delves into the role of domestic actors and their relevance in (co-)defining policies and shaping the reform of the Mozambican social protection system.

Cash transfer programs in Southern countries

During the 1990s, the debates on poverty reduction – sometimes presented more ambitiously as poverty eradication – gained new strength. Two factors explain the (re)emergence of this agenda. First, there was a shift in the understanding of poverty, increasingly perceived as a multidimensional phenomenon. This new notion of poverty was not restricted to academic debates (Anand & Sen, 1997; Lister, 2004; Sen, 1995, 2008; Townsend, 1985), making its way into the policy-making arena, as illustrated by several World Bank publications, for example its 1990 Report. Second, it became impossible to continue to ignore the numbers on poverty.[4] During the 1980s, in the wake of the debt crisis, many countries had implemented structural adjustment programs, resulting in the retrenchment of the state from the social sector, and restricting it to fragmented and narrow interventions. In many of them, a dramatic increase in poverty and vulnerability followed, undermining these programs and attendant policies and revealing them to be both insufficient and inadequate.[5]

From the 1990s onwards, the fight against poverty became central both in the international arena – in particular, as the Millennium Development Goals and later the Sustainable Development Goals defined a decrease in poverty as the main objective – and in national political agendas – with compelling discourses accompanied by new measures, as, for instance, in Lula da Silva's Brazil, between 2003 and 2010. Having determined that poverty was a severe problem in need of a strong and coherent solution, the discussion turned to how it could be addressed. Social protection programs, and, specifically, cash transfer programs – broadly defined as "tax-financed transfers to individuals and households aimed at addressing poverty" (Barrientos, 2007, as cited in Barrientos, 2013, p. 5) – emerged as a key instrument to fight poverty.

While cash transfer programs received renewed attention and popularity in this period, this type of policy measure was hardly new. It has, in fact, a long, yet geographically-specific, history, dating to as early as 16th century England (Hanlon et al., 2010). During the 18th and 19th centuries, such programs were gradually extended to the rest of Europe and other countries in the Global North. Although not entirely absent from Southern countries, cash transfer programs, where they were found, were limited initiatives, generally perceived to be too

[4] According to the World Bank (1990), data from 1985 shows that almost 33% of the world population was poor. The incidence of poverty varied significantly and in Africa and Southern Asia more than half of the population was below the poverty line (WB, 1990).

[5] Studies showed these measures to be costly, often biased towards specific groups, and their effectivity reduced (see Levy, 2006).

costly and, therefore, accessible to and advisable for only countries with high levels of development (Hanlon et al., 2010).

In the 1990s, however, as poverty in the Global South gained visibility, this changed. A new understanding of cash transfer programs emerged: no longer the preserve of the economically advanced, they were increasingly embraced as crucial to countries' social protection systems, including Southern ones. Their introduction and adaptation to new contexts saw, in turn, further innovation: diverse goals, innovative designs, and new strategies of implementation were born, leading to a substantial shift in both the thinking and practice of this model of social protection.

Modalities of cash transfers

Cash transfers can assume different forms. They can be unconditional, with resources transferred to poor families or individuals with no requirements attached. Old-age social pensions, childbirth grants, and social pensions for disabled individuals, for instance, all fall under the vast umbrella of unconditional categorical cash transfers. As a result of the growing consensus in favor of their adoption over the past 20 years, there has been a massive proliferation of unconditional cash transfer programs, which are now present in most Southern countries – even if they differ significantly in what concerns the target groups, the percentage of individuals covered, or the breath of the benefits. Thus, some countries, such as Malawi and Kenya, created their first unconditional transfer programs only in 2004, whilst others added additional such cash transfers to the programs already in place, such as Namibia and Mauritius, and/or expanded the existing schemes, such as South Africa and Mozambique.

The second modality of cash transfers that gained momentum in the Global South links the handover of resources to the fulfilment of particular conditions. Under these so-called conditional cash transfers (CCT), a recipient is expected to comply with pre-defined requirements in order to receive money. Generally, the conditions that must be met are related to healthcare (for example, child immunization and regular medical check-ups), education (attending school), and nutrition (attending workshops on the topic). CCTs were first enacted in Brazil at the local level, in 1995; two years later, a national program was implemented in Mexico. The perceived success of the Mexican *Progresa*, in particular – the program received very positive first evaluations (IFPRI, 2002; Skoufias et al., 1999) – encouraged widespread adoption of CCTs throughout the region. This process of "policy diffusion" has seen the development of CCTs in all Latin American countries – except for Cuba and Venezuela – as well as throughout much of the

Global South, including countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Ghana.[6] The rationale behind these initiatives is that poverty is fought at two different levels: (1) the money transfer results in the direct availability of resources; and (2) the investment in human capital associated with compliance with conditionalities is expected to break the transmission of intergenerational poverty (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).

Cash transfers are often freestanding programs, but in some cases they have been incorporated within broader programs encompassing "a wider range of interventions," with the income transfer itself not being its "dominant component" (Barrientos, 2013, p. 7). For instance, some Chilean programs incorporate an innovative component of psychosocial support at their core. Some scholars suggest such programs represent a distinct third modality (Barrientos, 2013; cf. Osorio, 2018); their emphasis is not on the money transferred, but the wide net of social services and benefits to which the transfer serves as an "entry point" (Oliveira, 2018). Programs with such features have been reproduced in Paraguay and in the Caribbean region (Osorio & Vergara, 2019; Osorio et al., 2020).

Regardless of modality, cash transfer programs have come to encompass a significant degree of variation regarding goals, design, who is targeted, amounts transferred, conditions imposed, implementation procedures, specific outcomes, and so many other program-related aspects. Two essential features, however, are common to all of them: the underlying philosophy that cash is indeed an instrument to address vulnerabilities and poverty; and the concrete handover of money.

Cash transfers as a global public policy

Cash transfers have been spreading across the Global South since the 1990s. How was the consensus in favor of this type of social policy born? According to Olivier de Sardan (2018, pp. 31-32), "the specific production of a travelling model involves three main processes: narrativization (a founding success story), theorization and social engineering (the construction of a mechanism) and networking (global diffusion)." He explains that international organizations play an important role in these processes (Olivier de Sardan, 2018, pp. 31-32), while Porto de Oliveira (2016) stresses the importance of individuals who act as "ambassadors" for selected policies/programs. Olivier de Sardan (2018) applies the three abovementioned processes to the case of cash transfers and argues that the Brazilian local experiences and the Mexican national program are the foundational success

[6] For more information on the diffusion of CCTs in Latin America and beyond, see Borges, 2018; Coêlho, 2008; Foli et al., 2017; Howlett et al., 2018; Leite and Peres, 2013; Leite et al., 2013; Oliveira, 2018; Osorio, 2015, 2018; Osorio and Vergara, 2019; Osorio et al., 2020; Peck and Theodore, 2015; Sugiyama, 2011, 2008a, 2008b.

stories. Experts and international organizations subsequently identified the main mechanism behind these experiments and stripped it of national/local particularities so it could be exported. A general model, encompassing different modalities, was then disseminated across the Global South through a network of experts, international institutions (in particular the World Bank), development aid agencies, and civil society organizations.

A process of policy diffusion, as well as a high degree of policy transfer, within the realm of cash transfers, has, therefore, been taking place in recent decades. According to Marsh and Sharman, policy diffusion is "a process through which policy choices in one country affect those made in a second country" (2010, p. 33). Policy transfer is understood as a "process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (present or past) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system" (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 5). The two dynamics have coexisted in what concerns cash transfers: on the one hand, general information about the first initiatives inspired other countries to adopt similar policies; on the other, direct transfers of specific policies from one country to another also occurred (e.g., from Brazil to Ghana).

Yet, this is rarely a linear process (see Dolowitz, 2017, p. 41). In reality, as Peck and Theodore explain, "policy mobility is inescapably associated with policy mutation" (2015, p. xxv). The renewed interest in social protection in the Global South generated multiple studies, regarding both specific policies and programs – in particular, the Mexican and Brazilian experiences received widespread attention (e.g., Bichir, 2010; Campello & Neri, 2014; Levy, 2006; Lindert et al., 2007; Niño-Zarazúa, 2011) – and cross-country comparisons (Barrientos, 2013; Barrientos & Hulme, 2010; Bender et al., 2013; Ellis et al., 2009; Hanlon et al., 2010). Many of these studies examine not only the role of external actors in promoting these policies, but also the relevance of local actors in shaping them (Hall, 2015; Lavers & Hickey, 2016; Oliveira, 2018). In a context where the tendency is to have high levels of external engagement and participation, the space of maneuver of national governments and their local counterparts may appear limited at first sight. Yet, as Hall (2015) reminds us, "it takes two to tango" – which the case of Mozambique, analyzed below, appears to confirm.

Social protection in Mozambique: an overview

The Portuguese colonial state provided very limited forms of social protection, to a narrow segment of individuals living in Mozambique, and was instituted rather late in time (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). Social protection was restricted to settlers and *assimilados* – African subjects considered to have reached a certain level of "civilization" and who enjoyed a specific status in the Portuguese colonial empire – who worked for the Portuguese administration and other professional categories, and excluded the native population (Quive, 2009). It took mainly the form of pension schemes and some forms of compensation for injury and death. It was instated only in the 20th century and very slowly expanded: civil servants of the colonial state (1901), railway workers (1914), civil servants and the military (1929), rural workers (1963) (Quive, 2009). A child allowance that included not only settlers and *assimilados* but also natives was designed as late as 1966 and probably as a result of the emergence of Mozambique's Liberation Front (FRELIMO) (Quive, 2009).

With the independence, in 1975, and especially with FRELIMO's turn to Marxism-Leninism in 1977, there was a significant effort to strengthen the state's role in providing public services, in particular in the fields of basic healthcare and education (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). Social protection for the elderly and the disabled was inscribed as a right in the new Constitution of 1975; a collective public insurance covering basic needs was created; native civil servants earned the right to an old-age pension; and new benefits for civil servants in case of disease, work accidents, and permanent incapacity were introduced (Quive, 2009). Yet, this progress was rapidly undone, as the devastating civil war between FRELIMO and RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance), which had started shortly after independence, worsened, and severe droughts hit the country hard during the 1980s, resulting in a sharp rise in poverty and food insecurity. Instead of a comprehensive and coherent system to tackle these crises and emergencies, measures enacted in response were essentially ad hoc (Waterhouse and Lauriciano, 2010), designed and implemented by numerous actors with great variance. Parallel to these measures, the government also subsidized agricultural products and fuel. As a result of such fragmentation, not only was a large number of people left unprotected, but also the roots of structural poverty remained untouched.

The high prevalence of poverty across the country stemming from the civil war was further compounded by structural adjustment measures implemented in 1987, by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), following the official shift from a centrally planned to a free-market economy. An end to consumption subsidies was especially hard on vulnerable people living in cities. By 1989, Mozambique had become the "poorest country in the world" (UNDP, 1992, p. 98). The relevant creation, the year before, of the National

Institute for Social Security targeted only formal workers. A US$196 GDP per capita in 1980 had fallen dramatically to US$115 ten years later (Bruck, 2001, p. 59). By the time a General Peace Agreement between FRELIMO and RENAMO was signed in 1992, putting an end to a destructive 16-year civil war, the picture of Mozambique was rather grim: more than one million Mozambicans had been killed and around one third of the population was displaced (Hanlon, 2010); approximately 60% of the schools and 30% of the health facilities were destroyed (Virtanen & Ehrenpreis, 2007); and a considerable part of the national budget was directed to defense expenditures, reducing the investment in other areas central to the country's development (Massingarela & Nhate, 2006). Facing the drastic decline of state revenues, Mozambique was now dependent on external aid for 90 percent of its food needs (Willet, 1995, p. 40).

The Food Subsidy Program

Mozambique adopted its first program to assist vulnerable families in 1990: the Food Subsidy Program – FSP (*Programa de Subsídio de Alimentos*). Whereas in the 1980s many of the measures to address poverty and vulnerability, in cities and other areas with large contingents of refugees, consisted of food distribution initiatives, public intervention during the following decade took on a different and innovative form. In 1990, World Bank consultants suggested trying out the transfer of cash as an instrument of support for vulnerable households in urban areas (Massingarela & Nhate, 2006). Initially covering exclusively the country's largest cities, the FSP was later expanded to smaller municipalities and subsequently to the rural areas (Low et al., 1998). Despite its name, the new program, in reality, was not one of food subsidies but of cash transfers. That is, it did not take the usual form of government subsidies to specific staples, nor vouchers to be used exclusively for the purchase of food. The program did, however, follow the dominant idea of poverty at the time, which understood it as the inability to intake a minimum number of daily calories, as it was initially designed to counterbalance the effects of removing subsidies to food consumption and ensure beneficiaries' access to at least 1700 calories per day (Garcia & Moore, 2012).

The FSP targeted specifically poor and vulnerable households with no able-bodied individuals with the following characteristics: (1) income of less than half of the minimum wage[7]; (2) people above 60 years old and with no formal employment during the previous two years; (3) chronically disabled individuals; and (4) malnourished pregnant women (Massingarela & Nhate, 2006). In 1991,

[7] A means-test was supposed to be applied, as part of the selection procedure, but it was often not enforced (Quive, 2009; Garcia & Moore, 2012).

the FSP was extended to two additional groups: (5) single-mothers with five or more children; and (6) individuals with chronic diseases (Massingarela & Nhate, 2006). Furthermore, in order to be eligible for the benefit, applicants had to reside in that urban area for a period of 12 months and no member could be a migrant; if the household was composed of more than one person with no productive capacity, the amounts transferred adapted to the number of people, up to a maximum of three.[8]

Community leaders, as well as local health centers, passed on information regarding the program and received applications from prospective beneficiaries – those involved were paid by the FSP (Garcia & Moore, 2012). A specific agency, the Administrative Office for the Assistance to Vulnerable People (*Gabinete de Apoio à População Vulnerável* – GAPVU), was also created in 1990 to manage the program, encouraged and backed by the World Bank and UNICEF, which provided technical support (Massingarela & Nhate, 2006). However, this agency was closed due to alleged corruption, and, in 1997, management of the program was transferred to a new agency, the National Social Action Institute – INAS (*Instituto Nacional de Acção Social*). INAS maintained the former agency's structure and programs and incorporated other initiatives, namely public work programs; its delegations in each province were in charge of the implementation at the local level (Ellis et al., 2009). In each community, the *Permanentes*, individuals from the community working for and paid by INAS, were responsible for providing information on the FSP, identifying potential beneficiaries, informing the beneficiaries of the dates of payment, and helping distribute the money on payment days (Ellis et al., 2009).

An evaluation study conducted by Soares and Teixeira (2010) identified important positive impacts: (1) the FSP contributed to a reduction in malnutrition amongst children; (2) beneficiaries were able to consume an increased number of meals and could access products such as manioc and cereal; and (3) the FSP contributed to a reduction in child labor (although there was no evidence pointing to a reduction in the number of hours of work amongst adults and the elderly). The study also found that babies born from pregnant women enrolled in the program tended to have better weight-height ratios, and that beneficiaries participated in traditional forms of collective saving (Massingarela & Nhate, 2006).

The program was, however, not without its problems. In practice, the FSP's eligibility criteria proved contentious and allowed for varying interpretations of, and disagreements over, who could enroll. Verification of eligibility and de-

8 The original idea was to have a fixed amount per beneficiary, but it was replaced by a variable benefit according to the household characteristics (Garcia & Moore, 2012).

pendent beneficiaries also proved procedurally difficult (Garcia & Moore, 2012). For instance, multiple documents were required to prove that a child was a dependent, still more were needed in cases of non-parental guardianship. Such burdensome requirements appear to have prevented many children from accessing benefits (Soares & Teixeira, 2010). Indeed, many individuals, especially in the rural areas, did not possess birth certificates or any other form of official identification – a situation that remains true today. A study by IFPRI conducted in an initial phase of the program found that 2/3 of the beneficiaries met the eligibility criteria and that the amounts transferred were already significantly lower than expected – about 2/3 of what was stipulated (Garcia & Moore, 2012). The mismatch in the values was explained by payment interruptions and misinformation regarding the right amount households were to receive (Datt & others, 1997, as cited in Garcia & Moore, 2012). According to Soares et al.'s study (2010), by 2008, the program's main beneficiaries were more limited than initially designed: the elderly accounting for 93% and the disabled for 6% of the 287,454 beneficiaries. In addition, recourse to the *Permanentes* also raised administrative costs substantially (Garcia & Moore, 2012).

When it was created, the program was one of the first of its kind in the region;[9] most of Mozambique's neighbors had either very embryonic measures of social protection or none at all. In this early stage, then, the Mozambican experience was fairly distinct from the majority of other cash transfers programs enacted in Africa: it was introduced in 1990, well before it was a trend on the continent; its decision-making process was under the control of the Mozambican government; and it was also almost fully funded by the national budget and thus managed by Mozambican authorities (Arruda, 2018a, p. 5; Buur & Salimo, 2018).

Mozambican plans for poverty reduction

In 1997, around 92% of the population had less than 2 US$/day (UNDP, 2011) and 69% was considered to be below the national poverty line – 0.7 US$/day (Ministério do Plano e das Finanças, 2004). It would take five years for Mozambique to make significant progress in reducing poverty. By 2003, the numbers, whilst still high, had dropped considerably: 81.8% of the population now lived on less than 2US$/day (OPHI, 2011) and 54.7% were poor according to the national poverty line (Ministério do Plano e das Finanças, 2004). Poverty reduction during this period was driven by the war reconstruction effort, large

[9] South Africa and Namibia had long-established programmes for vulnerable elderly and children, since the late 1920s, and Madagascar, since the 1960s, which were all significantly expanded in the 1990s.

investment in megaprojects, and impressive economic growth in the 2000s, with an average 7% annual growth of GDP (World Bank Data, n.d.).

At this point, the international consensus within development aid was shifting towards a renewed interest in poverty reduction, translated into the World Bank and the IMF's new approach of requiring low-income countries to come up with their own Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Integrating this trend, Mozambique also presented its own specific plans to reduce poverty and vulnerability. A first national plan to reduce poverty, Plan of Action for Absolute Poverty Reduction (*Plano de Acção para a Reducção da Pobreza Absoluta* – PARPA), designed for the period between 2001 and 2005, pointed to the importance of economic liberalization and the creation of a friendly environment for the private sector as drivers for the stimulation of economic growth, widely understood at this time as the key to poverty reduction. A subsequent plan, PARPA II (2006-2009), took on board a new recognition of the importance of social protection provided by the state, in addition to the already-mentioned measures (Massingarela & Nhate, 2006; Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). The inclusion of social protection as an essential area in PARPA II translated into an increase in the resources allocated to this policy sector; these were, nevertheless, far from comprehensive or sufficient (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010, p. 26). A new plan, PARP, for the period between 2011 and 2014, shifted concern from levels of absolute poverty – removing the mention of "absolute" poverty from its title – to issues of inclusive economic growth and the strengthening of social protection (Lledó, 2014). After 2014, Mozambique dropped these plans for action in favor of a poverty reduction strategy squarely in the context, and under the control, of the government's Five-Year Plans (*Planos Quinquenais do Governo*).

Reform or continuity? The Food Subsidy Program under a different name

Towards the second half of the 2000s, Mozambique was still facing widespread poverty and, in fact, experiencing a rise in inequality. The social policies enacted appeared inadequate to reduce in a sustained manner the incidence of poverty and vulnerability in the country. A spike in food – wheat, in particular – and fuel prices led to massive urban protests in 2008, and later again in 2010 and 2012[10], revealing popular discontent with the government's strategy. These upheavals – combined with international pressure – helped drive renewed concern with the need for social protection policies (Buur & Salimo, 2018). In the wake of the

[10] Massive so-called food riots also occurred in other African countries, such as Egypt, Somalia and Uganda.

global economic crisis, for example, donors focused their attention on its impact on the poor and most vulnerable and directed their efforts towards supporting the design and the implementation of initiatives to fight poverty, including cash transfers. Basic social protection in Mozambique is mostly funded by the state budget via the Ministry of Women and Social Action (in Portuguese, MMAS) (Arruda, 2018a) – in 2016, 96% of the budget allocated to this sector was funded by the State (Buur & Salimo, 2018). While a great part of Mozambique's state budget is comprised of donations and loans, both by multilateral institutions and bilateral development aid agencies, it is up to the national government to decide where to allocate the available financial resources. Therefore, even if there is a "silent deal" as suggested by Buur and Salimo (2018, p. 8), the decisions concerning social spending remain under the responsibility of the national government. Nevertheless, the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2008 by the government of Mozambique and a group of donors – UNICEF, International Labour Organisation (ILO), UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Netherlands – created space for development partners to contribute directly to the program's budget (UNICEF, 2007). Both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom stated they would commit to funding the FSP for the following five and ten years, respectively (UNICEF, 2007). The agreement allowed the program to be expanded at two levels: it was extended to a larger number of beneficiaries and the amounts transferred were increased. When the program was first implemented in 1990, it reached 2,000 people; by 1995, it had been expanded to reach 80,000; and by 2016, it reached some 336,000 households (Arruda, 2018a; Massingarela & Nhate, 2006).

Back in 1990, each beneficiary was to receive an amount equivalent to about a third of the then minimum wage. Later, in 1991, the benefit was indexed to the full amount of the minimum wage. Yet, the amounts actually transferred never complied with this measure; indeed, one study found that beneficiaries were receiving only about 6% of the minimum wage until 2008 (Soares & Teixeira, 2010). Moreover, the absolute amounts received were never adjusted for inflation and living conditions, up until 2008 and the injection of donor money and engagement. This financial support allowed awards to be increased from 70 MTZ to 100 MTZ in 2008, per beneficiary, and from 10 MTZ to 50 MTZ for each dependent (Soares et al., 2010). In 2016, the amounts transferred were 259 MTZ per beneficiary and 60 MTZ per dependent (Arruda, 2018a, p. 12 – data from 2016).

Nonetheless, two main concerns regarding payments remained: the value of the transfers, despite having increased, was still considered to be too low to positively impact the lives of beneficiaries and their dependents; and more than half of all beneficiaries were receiving less than their entitled award (Soares & Teixeira, 2010). The mismatch between entitlement and actual transfer stemmed from problems in recognizing and registering the correct number of dependents (Soares et al., 2010), a lack of information concerning the FSP's rules, and the inconsistency of payments (Garcia & Moore, 2012).

The effort to expand the FSP in the second half of the 2000s was part of a broader strategy to reinforce social protection in the country. The Social Protection Law (SPL) was adopted in 2007, which corresponds to the period in which the concept of "social protection" started to feature in official discourses, despite the limited analysis that is given to it, suggesting that the topic was garnering increasing attention (Francisco, 2010). The SPL delineated three distinct parts that continue today to make up Mozambique's social protection system. First is social assistance, with the MMAS in charge of its supervision and implementation, via INAS. Under the umbrella of social assistance fall two programmatic areas: (1) social assistance programs that target vulnerable families unable to work; and (2) socioeconomic development programs, directed at vulnerable families with work capacity (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). A second part encompasses social security, applicable only to those integrated into the formal labor market – that is, only 5% of the economically active (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). Social security comprises two systems: one that targets private sector employees under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor, and a second system targeting civil servants under the Ministry of Finance (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). The third part is the complementary system of social protection. Additional social programs are under the responsibility of the Ministries of Health and Education (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). According to Ruth Castel-Branco (2020a), only about 10% of the population is covered by pillars 1 and 2 of social protection, which means that the vast majority of Mozambicans has no access to social protection, despite its institution as a right by the SPL.

The 2008, 2010 and 2012 instances of social unrest, which occurred in particular in the urban areas of Maputo and Matola, where many were especially vulnerable to the impact of price rises and changes to subsidies on their livelihoods, triggered a national debate on poverty and social protection, and forced both the government and its international partners to consider alternative strategies (Brito et al., 2015). After acknowledging that poverty was rising, the government approved additional regulation regarding basic social security (Decree 85/2009). Four main areas of intervention were identified: (1) direct social assistance; (2) health-related social assistance; (3) education-related social assistance; and (4) productive action. In turn, the international community considered changes in its support to Mozambique: some donors opted for the allocation of direct funding to social protection measures; the IMF pushed for the introduction of conditional cash transfers, based on the experiences of Latin American countries (Buur & Salimo, 2018). This latter suggestion faced resistance by the Mozambican government, whose President, Armando Guebuza, continued to argue that poverty was explained by other factors, such as laziness (Buur & Salimo, 2018).

A National Strategy of Basic Social Security – NSBSS (*Estratégia Nacional de Segurança Social Básica*) was then established for the period between 2010 and 2014, replacing the FSP. The main goals were to increase coverage and efficiency, and to foster coordination between the different social security measures (Cunha et al., 2013). In 2011, a Plan of Operations to implement the NSBBS was adopted. It identified four key programs: a Basic Social Subsidy Program (BSSP), a Direct Social Action Program, a Productive Social Action Program, and Social Units, described below, in Table 1. The main actions defined in the Plan of Operations fall into two categories: the creation of a comprehensive social security system; and the definition of a single mechanism for accessing the programs, thus increasing coverage and creating fiscal space (Cunha et al., 2013).

Table 1
Programs included in the Mozambican Social Protection System

Basic Social Subsidy Program (Programa de Subsídio Social Básico – PSSB)	Cash transfers targeting extremely poor households with no fit-for-work adults (elderly, disabled and/or individuals suffering from chronic diseases).
Productive Social Action Programme (Programa Ação Social Produtiva – PASP)	Public works in poor communities combined with educational training, targeting vulnerable households with working capacity.
Direct Social Action Program (Programa de Ação Social Direta – PASD)	Food vouchers targeting child-headed households, households with sick and/or malnourished people, and households suffering from food insecurity.
Social Units or Social Assistance Services	Residential units for vulnerable individuals, such as poor elderly and abandoned children.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Arruda (2018a, 2018b).

Although it was presented as a brand-new initiative, the BSSP can, in fact, be considered a revamped version of the FSP under a different name. The BSSP's administrative architecture is the same as the FSP's: the program is run by INAS and operated locally by selected individuals of the communities (*Permanentes*). The BSSP targets vulnerable families with no able-bodied individuals – due to age, disability and/or chronic diseases – and transfers a monthly amount, which is calculated in accordance with the number of dependents living in the household (Republic of Mozambique, 2011). Eligibility criteria remain quite vague, which leads to numerous inclusion and exclusion errors (Cunha et al., 2013).

Moreover, although the program was designed to include a double assessment of household beneficiaries (by both *Permanentes* and INAS representatives), implementation failures have created space for somewhat discretionary decisions (Arruda, 2018a). In reality, the *Permanente* – a local with ties to the community and employed by INAS – is invariably solely responsible for household selection. The INAS representative, who is supposed to visit the household to verify the information previously collected by the *Permanente* and gather additional data in order to evaluate whether the household meets the criteria to be part of the program, rarely completes this second phase of the selection process, since INAS local offices lack the necessary human resources (Arruda, 2018a). *Permanentes* are also responsible for providing information and helping with payments. In order to receive the payment, beneficiaries' fingerprints are verified to confirm their identities (Republic of Mozambique, 2013). Financial resources to fund the program come mainly from the state budget and about 17% of the program's budget corresponds to bilateral donations from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, as agreed in the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding (Republic of Mozambique, 2013). Expansion of the program continued until 2014, when it reached 427,000 individuals (Falange & Pellerano, 2016). While the number of beneficiaries almost doubled in less than a decade, there were still numerous potentially eligible households excluded. According to Arruda (2018b), this is the result of *Permanentes*' individual decisions: as the budget does not match the needs, they have often opted to include a higher number of households with few individuals and disfavor large families, who would receive greater sums of money.

The BSSP has very strict eligibility criteria and targets only those who are unable to work. Vulnerable households with fit-for-work individuals are covered by public works (PASP), a program that has a time limit (maximum three years of enrolment) and is geographically focused (areas with higher levels of poverty and/or food insecurity are prioritized) (Arruda, 2018a). This means that, despite the changes to the system and the expansion it has experienced, a very important segment of the population remains uncovered.

During the last decade and in spite of the maintenance of substantial and sustained economic growth, the decline of poverty appears to have stagnated, which suggests that, contrary to the neoliberal notion of the "trickle-down effect," economic growth by itself is not a sufficient condition to tackle poverty and vulnerability. In the case of Mozambique, economic growth was driven by the reconstruction of infrastructures and by a few sectors and megaprojects, underestimating the need to produce the structural transformation and the creation of new jobs that were needed for a sustainable economy and a more inclusive society (Lledó, 2014). According to Xiao (2014), the Mozambican economy is not creating formal employment and is, therefore, not capable of changing the labor market structure: around three-quarters of the active population are informal workers and a large percentage of these are subsistence farmers, particularly vulnerable to poverty and seasonal hunger. It is worth highlighting that a considerable contingent of the poor is thus considered capable of working and consequently not eligible for the BSSP. Furthermore, over the past several years, inequalities appear to be deepening (World Bank, 2018). There is a significant gap between rural and urban areas, and a large percentage of those who live in rural zones and depend on agriculture face poverty (World Bank, 2016). The overall national figures hide very different realities at the regional level – some of the regions are much more affected than others and, in some provinces, namely Zambezia, Sofala, Manica and Gaza, poverty is rising (World Bank, 2016).

Reforming the Mozambican social protection system: the role of domestic actors

Unlike most African countries, Mozambique initiated its own cash transfer program very early on, in 1990. Its reform, in the second half of the 2000s, when such programs were being promoted internationally, provides us with an interesting setting within which to analyze the role played by both the Mozambican government and the different external actors present in the country at the time.

Previous studies on policy diffusion suggest that countries which have high institutional capacity are more prone to innovating on developments elsewhere, whilst countries with lower institutional capacities are more likely to simply emulate (see Osorio, 2018). At the same time, aid-dependent countries tend to be more easily influenced by donors, who often make disbursements dependent on the adoption of particular policies. Mozambique has a low institutional capacity, with governmental agencies often lacking human resources and a specialized bureaucracy. Moreover, it is particularly dependent on external aid, remaining between 1990 and 2004 as one of the most aid-dependent countries in Africa (Batley et al., 2006, p. 10). In the context of its cash transfer program's reform, what room was thus left for Mozambican actors to push forward their own ideas and interests?

The evolution of a social policy depends on the interests, preferences and resources of those actors involved in its design and implementation. Albeit to distinct degrees, they all shape the process and the outcome in their own way. In the particular case of cash transfer programs in Mozambique, not only did external stakeholders play a role, at a time of strong international engagement in this arena, but so did the Mozambican government, as well as the numerous local actors involved in each phase, from conception to implementation.

In Malawi, in 2004, for instance, UNICEF funded a cash transfer program implemented in partnership with a local CSO, thus sidelining the national government's control. Conversely, while the suggestion to adopt this type of initiative was advanced by an international organization (the World Bank), the FSP was a state-led program, implemented by the government, in partnership with community representatives (*Permanentes*), and funded almost solely from the state budget. During its first phase, the FSP covered only a very small portion of the population, in line with the views espoused and publicly expressed by the government on poverty and on how to tackle it. At that time, the government argued that economic growth would result in poverty reduction and, for some time, Mozambique's experience of good economic performance coupled with a decrease in poverty numbers appeared to lend support to such a view.

In the new century, cash transfers became a best practice and within a very short period were disseminated across the Global South. The general support for this measure translated into its deliberate promotion by international experts and organizations, from the dissemination of knowledge regarding these programs, to technical cooperation and funding – which, in turn, further reinforced the consensus in favor of cash transfers. The African Union joined these efforts, supporting, in a statement in 2004, the strengthening of social protection in the continent, particularly in the form of cash transfers, and promoting events that encouraged them, such as: the Livingstone meetings that led to the Livingstone Call for Action (2006); the Yaoundé Declaration on the need to include social protection in national development plans (2007); and the Windhoek meetings that generated the Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) (Garcia & Moore, 2012). Support for cash transfers in African countries translated into the adoption of programs in several countries or the development and expansion of initiatives already in place, many of which with intense participation of donors and other development partners (i.e., international CSOs), not only in the form of financial aid, but also in the design and management of such programs (Garcia & Moore, 2012).

In the wake of this international and regional trend of creating or strengthening existing social protection systems, it is, therefore, unsurprising that social protection made it onto Mozambique's donors' agendas. Indeed, international actors stressed the need to reform Mozambique's social protection, including the FSP. External stakeholders contributed to the reform of the social protection system, in particular by providing technical and financial aid and through the participation in different stages of this process, including the general evaluation of existing measures, and the design and support to the implementation of the new program. The abovementioned expansion of the FSP's coverage was, in fact, a partial result of the additional funding provided by donors following the financial crisis of 2008. The British and Dutch development aid agencies' financial engagement was retained as the FSP was replaced by the BSSP.

In addition to the agreed funding, the understanding with donors also contemplated technical cooperation regarding information systems, and monitoring and evaluation of the social programs provided by international actors (UNICEF, 2007). HelpAge International also partnered with INAS in the implementation of two pilot experiences related to the FSP, which aimed at evaluating the ability of the program to reach the orphan and vulnerable children (OVC) and to test a different targeting method expected to reduce administrative costs (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). Other organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG), also became involved with the program later and developed several studies to understand how it was being implemented, as well as its impact (Soares et al., 2010; Soares & Teixeira, 2010).

Interestingly, it was during this period of intense worldwide activism in favor of poverty reduction and cash transfers that poverty ceased to decline in Mozambique and social unrest spread. In the midst of flourishing discontent, the government acknowledged that economic growth would not suffice, and additional measures had to be considered. This contributed to the opening of a window of opportunity for policy change (Kingdon, 1984). The international agenda had met a domestic need to respond to the worrying figures on poverty and the population's growing mobilization (in 2008 and following years), as Buur and Salimo (2018, pp. 24-25) explain:

> The riots pushed the poverty crisis to the forefront of political concerns, as they were experienced as an existential threat to the government's political and financial survival. Thus, even though ideas about laziness predominated over other ideas about how to deal with poverty at this time, they were overtaken by foundational ideas concerning 'national unity' organized in and around the continued dominance of the Frelimo party as the legitimate government of the country. Social protection at this stage became important for the ruling elite, as they could see that adopting it would help it solve other problems, such as neutralizing the fear of urban youth mobs.

Social protection was therefore introduced in the national strategy to fight poverty. Yet, while a change in discourse can be identified, social protection remained marginal, as it was not amongst the government's preferred tools to address poverty.

FRELIMO's government has often resisted the idea of adopting a more comprehensive approach to social protection and to fight poverty. Historically, when poverty was mentioned in political discourse it was often presented as a result of the Portuguese colonial rule or, later, as a consequence of the civil war (Chichava, 2010). The virtually non-existent protection offered by the colonial regime might also explain resistance (Francisco, 2010; Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). More recently, there has been a shift in discourse, and poverty has become "public enemy number one" (Chichava, 2010). However, this did not automatically translate into action to strengthen social policies. One of the main arguments not to invest more in social policies was that it should be the poor themselves to escape their situation of poverty (Brito, 2010). The idea that the poor should be able, through their own efforts, to change the circumstances they find themselves in is rooted in an understanding of poverty as the result of laziness and unwillingness to work, frequently present in the discourse of government members, in particular President Armando Guebuza's (see Castel-Branco, C., 2010; Chichava, 2010). This vision is also espoused by civil servants (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010). Moreover, there is a deep concern with generating dependency among those receiving the benefit (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010) – a fear also frequently voiced in other countries, namely Brazil and South Africa, which are home to large cash transfer programs (Oliveira, 2018). Resistance to the use of cash transfers was illustrated by the refusal to adopt such measures to support vulnerable children, in 2007, on the basis that the money could be misused by the recipients – a criticism that was also addressed to a USAID funded program targeting individuals affected by the 2001 floods (Waterhouse & Lauriciano, 2010).

In this sense, then, the influence of the national government can be seen not only in the early adoption of a cash-transfer program in Mozambique, but also, somewhat paradoxically, in its rather narrow and isolated position within the broader field of social protection policy. Still, while such policies remain of marginal interest to the Mozambican government, developments such as the BSSP suggest some openness to innovation. Such policy developments may stem in fact from the interplay of domestic and external interests and actors. Buur and Salimo (2018), for instance, point to a need for showing that Mozambique is producing positive results in order to support the idea that the country is a successful case of joint efforts between the international community and the national government in promoting and implementing development practices (see Almeida Cravo, 2012). Therefore, it is important that the reform and the programs enacted are seen as government-led initiatives. Buur and Salimo (2018) affirm that this arrangement is also in the interest of the government, which can use the program to promote its own agenda of "national unity".

Oliveira (2018) suggests that, to better understand global public policies, it is important to move beyond the phases of agenda-setting and policy formulation and also take implementation into account. Decision-making is not restricted to the initial moments of a policy's conception, rather taking place all throughout the implementation phase (Winter, 2006). As acknowledged by Porto de Oliveira and Pal:

> Institutions will be the crucibles for application, and at the street level, bureaucrats can make a thousand cuts and bleed a policy initiative in its tracks. Bureaucracies and implementing agencies also have interests in the policy process, and will defend their interests – will resist – if they feel they must and they can. (Porto de Oliveira & Pal, 2018, p. 211)

While the country's social protection reform did introduce a few novelties, such as the public works program, the cash transfer program for vulnerable individuals remained almost unchanged, except in name. Again, the "new" program is run by the national government and displays the very same design and implementation strategies (and shortcomings) as its predecessor. Where Osorio's (2018) analysis of the diffusion of conditional cash transfers in Latin American countries might suggest a country like Mozambique, with its fragile institutional capacities and dependence on foreign aid, would be highly susceptible to external influence, we in fact find a policy terrain where the national government has had considerable space of maneuver. Fundamental continuities overtime point to an ability to resist policies adopted elsewhere, as the implementation of the country's cash transfer program and its rhythm of expansion has been determined by the government, in spite of external actors' calls and financial incentives. In short, while international stakeholders have sought to influence social protection in Mozambique using different mechanisms – funding, technical cooperation –, the national government appears to enjoy a significant deal of agency. Future research could further explore adherence/resistance to travelling models and take a closer look at these dynamics in different moments of the policy cycle.

Lastly, it is also worth looking at the role played by local agents in the field, in particular by *Permanentes* and INAS representatives. As mentioned earlier, implementation is a phase replete with decision-making, with many of those decisions being often made by individuals on the ground guaranteeing policy delivery (Lipsky, 1980). In this specific case, providing information and selecting beneficiaries is central to the program, in particular reviewing whether individuals fit the eligibility criteria and categorizing potential beneficiaries. This implies an asymmetric relation established between those individuals responsible for the selection process and those applying (Dubois, 2019; Pires, 2019). Those in charge of delivering the policy at the local level, in their engagement with candidates and beneficiaries, carry their own world visions and pre-conceptions of poverty, social protection and the program itself, which, in turn, impacts its nature and success. In Mozambique – as in other contexts – these local agents enjoy a high level of discretionarity (Arruda, 2018a) and make a number of decisions along the way. Both in FSP and PSSB, *Permanentes* and representatives from INAS are responsible for enrolling new beneficiaries, which means identifying those individuals who might be included in the program. Given only a small fraction of eligible candidates will actually integrate the program, this is no minor deed. Soares et al.'s study (2010) showed that the program overwhelmingly targeted the elderly – 93% of the beneficiaries – rather than other groups. Moreover, a study on the perceptions of local representatives from INAS of the program in Cahora Bassa suggests that, while there is a recognition of the importance of the program, as well as of its limitations (i.e., restricted funds and the lack of a multi-sectoral approach to reduce poverty), there is also concern that the benefit might be misused or generate dependency (Castro, 2016) – a vision aligned with some of the arguments presented by the national government to argue against social protection. Other studies (see Olivier de Sardan & Piccoli, 2018) found that views espoused and actions taken by local agents involved in selecting candidates, as well as controlling compliance with conditionalities, in effect introduce changes to the original design of the program and may generate unintended effects. The authors refer to this mismatch between a general model and the unexpected behaviors and results stemming from its concrete application across different places, without taking local specificities into account, as "the revenge of the contexts" (Olivier de Sardan & Piccoli, 2018).

Conclusion

The international community played an important role in fostering international consensus on the need to expand cash transfer programs and in encouraging African countries to develop and strengthen their own social protection public policy. Nonetheless, the role of national actors in addressing poverty, as well as formulating and implementing specific policies, should not be dismissed. In the case of Mozambique, despite the presence of numerous international actors involved with social protection (and other related areas of social development), as well as the country's high levels of dependence on foreign aid, the national government remained the key stakeholder in the process of decision- and policy-making, both in the first phase of the program and in subsequent reforms. The program appears to be aligned in particular with the government's understanding of poverty and how to reduce it, as well as its usefulness in serving state and party interests of curbing social unrest and shoring up popular support.

Recent developments appear to further this understanding. In 2020, the unexpectedly rampant worldwide dissemination of SARS-COV-2 prompted a health, economic and social crisis, which especially impacted the most vulnerable people. International institutions defended the need to reinforce social protection as a means to mitigate the negative impact of the crisis and facilitate a faster and fairer recovery. Recommendations of emergency measures have tended towards protecting formal employment, expanding extant social programs and building bridges with civil society. For developing countries, the current crisis represents a tough challenge and an additional burden: not only do they harbor the highest number of vulnerable people, but their systems of social protection are considerably less robust.

Mozambique has been no exception. The government has seen the need to reinforce its social programs: existing beneficiaries (including those of the BSSP) were entitled to an additional payment; families in situations of vulnerability, including 14,000 of those on waiting lists for the government's various social programs, received an emergency transfer for six months. The national budget for 2021 stipulated the establishment of a fund for emergency measures, financed by foreign aid, which has allowed the budget for the BSSP to remain the same as that of the previous year (Vieira et al., 2020). Studies also point to the possibility of implementing additional measures, such as a universal basic income or the adoption of an unemployment benefit (Castel-Branco, R., 2020a, 2020b). Yet, so far, access to such protection remains understood as a transitional and temporary aid, rather than a right. Given the BSSP's original limited scope, its expansion through these emergency measures still leaves many people in situations of high vulnerability uncovered by and possibly excluded from the emergency transfer program. In all, the country's response to the most recent crisis has rested on emergency aid, rather than seizing the opportunity to strengthen Mozambique's social protection system as a comprehensive approach to tackle vulnerability.

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