

# NIGERIAN NATION-BUILDING AND PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HABERMAS' DISCOURSE ETHICS

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## **Abstract**

*Seeing to the genuine completion of goods according to the set standard and effectuation of good ideas, have always been the problem of humanity in terms of nation building. Recorded failures amidst plethora of theories and practices adduced to remedy the situation are indicative of basic lack. It is lack of application of well thought out principles. It is in the light of this that this paper undertakes to argue that the principles embedded in Habermas's Discourse Ethics, serve as veritable ideas that can guarantee effective and genuine Nigerian nation-building via public policy implementation.*

**Keywords:** *Quality Control, Public Policy Implementation, Nation-Building, Discourse Ethics*

## **Introduction**

Before and from the inception of Nigeria as an Independent nation, it has been from one form of organized discourse to another in search of principled arrangement that would make Nigerians one united people irrespective of obvious differences. And this seems to have eluded Nigeria, hence, the problematic of quality control, public policy implementation and nation-building. It is the submission of this paper that it is the division among the people of Nigeria and lack of adequate dialogical principles to heal it , that have bedevilled Nigeria's efforts at nation-building via quality control and public policy implementation. To justify this claim, this

paper thereby unfolds as follows: Section I is concerned with the elucidation of the key concepts in this matter. Section II x-rays the issue of quality control, public policy implementation and Nigerian nation-building: how have they fared? Section III takes Habermas' discourse ethics into perspective as it is taken to be a panacea for Nigerian nation-building predicament.

### **Explication Of Concepts**

Quality control can be seen as:

A process through which a business seeks to ensure that product quality is maintained or improved and manufacturing errors are reduced or eliminated. Quality control requires the business to create an environment in which both management and employees strive for perfection. This is done by training personnel, creating benchmarks for product quality, and testing products to check for statistically significant variations. (Quality Control)

According to Hornby, quality control is, "the practice of checking goods as they are being produced, to make sure that they are of a high standard." (1187) A school of thought maintains that : "Quality Control (QC) is a procedure or set of procedures intended to ensure that a manufactured product or performed service adheres to a defined set of quality criteria or meets the requirements of the client or customer." (Quality Control) Related to Quality control but not identical with it is Quality assurance. "QA is defined as a procedure or set of procedures intended to ensure that a product or service under development (before work is complete, as opposed to afterwards) meets specified requirements. QA is sometimes expressed together with QC as a single expression, quality assurance and control (QA/QC)." (Quality

Control) For an effective implementation of quality control program,

An enterprise must first decide which specific standards the product or services must meet. Then the extent of QC actions must be determined (for example, the percentage of units to be tested from each lot). Next, real-world data must be collected (for example, the percentage of units that fail) and the results reported to management personnel. After this, corrective action must be decided upon and taken (for example, defective units must be repaired or rejected and poor service repeated at no charge until the customer is satisfied.) If too many unit failures or instances of poor service occur, a plan must be devised to improve the production or service process and then that plan must be put into action .Finally, the QC process must be ongoing to ensure that remedial efforts, if required, have produced satisfactory results and to immediately detect recurrences or new instances of trouble. (Quality Control).

From another perspective,

Quality control is a process that is used to ensure a certain level of quality in a product or service. It might include whatever action a business deems necessary to provide for the control and verification of certain characteristics of a product or service. Most often, it involves thoroughly examining and testing the quality of products or the results of services. The basic goal of this process is to ensure that

the products or services that are provided meet specific requirements and characteristics, such as being dependable, satisfactory, safe and fiscally sound. (What is quality control?)

Normally,

Companies that engage in quality control typically have a team of workers who focus on testing a certain number of products or observing services being done. The products or services that are examined usually are chosen at random. The goal of the quality control team is to identify products or services that do not meet a company's specified standards of quality. If a problem is identified, the job of a quality control team or professional might involve stopping production or service until the problem has been corrected. Depending on the particular service or product as well as the type of problem identified, production or services might not cease entirely. (What is quality control?)

The bottom line from the foregoing is that quality control aims at the adherence to best standard set for best service delivery in the general interest, well-being of the people. It is a safety valve, so to speak, that tries to guarantee the safety and general well-being of the people.

### **Public Policy Implementation**

Policy, according to Mairi, is "1. a plan of action, usually based on certain principles, decided on by a body or individual. 2. a principle or set of principles on which to base decisions. 3. a course of conduct to be followed." (1074) For Muhammad Auwal Umar in

his work entitled *Policy Formulation and the Challenges of Implementation: The Case of Oil and Gas Sector*,

a policy is:

- A deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome(s).
- Could apply to government, private sector organizations and groups and individuals.
- Include presidential /Executive orders, corporate guidelines or legislative rules of order.
- Differs from rules/laws—while law can compel or prohibit behaviours, policy, merely guides action toward achieving a desired outcome.
- Policies can target political, management, financial, and administrative outcomes.

One cannot think of policy without its formulation. To this regard, Umar in his work mentioned above, talks of two parts to policy formulation. 1. Analytical phase, that is, effective formulation signifying that the policy envisaged is seen to be *valid, efficient, and implementable* solution to the problem in view. 2. Political phase, that is, acceptable formulation, meaning that the entertained policy possibly merits the sanction of legitimate decision makers normally through majority votes in a bargaining format. Enunciating the entailments of both analytical and political phases of policy formulation, Umar in his work above, itemizes them as follows:

- First, effective policy alternatives, presumably based on sound analysis, must be conceived and clearly articulated.

- Second, a political choice among these alternatives must be made: The policy must be authorized through a political process, such as legislation or regulation.
- Both phases—analysis and authorization—make up policy formulation
- Analysis + Authorization = Formulation
- On Analysis – professional policy analysts, use their skills and analytical tools to study an issue and to devise policy alternatives to address the issue. They consider aspects such as means, behaviour, cost, implementation strategy, and consequences.
- Elected or appointed officials, however, have the final choice among the alternatives presented. Which brings judgement, wisdom, and accountability to policy formulation. They consider goals, trade-offs, value priorities, and weighing the overall effects of the policy which makes them accountable to the people, under our representative form of government.

Articulating policy implementation, he says that it is hard to make a conceptual difference between policy formulation and policy implementation because policy formulation fundamentally occurs throughout the whole policy process. That, what is required is a means of conflating the analytical gains presented by the 'stages' model with the recognition of the interrelations between the stages. In furtherance, he maintains that one should use the term 'policy-making' for the entire process, 'policy formulation' for the initial part of policy-making and 'policy implementation' for the latter part of the policy-making process. Summing the issue of

policy formulation and implementation, Umar states that they entail some steps. These steps are: 1. to check whether a new policy or reform is needed. 2. Advance the new policy or amend an extant one. 3. Allow the process to be more participatory by involving the stakeholders. 4. Accept the new policy, (mostly combined with the real implementation stage). In the last analysis, the policy is implemented, executed. 5. After the execution, implementation, policies should of necessity be checked and examined from time to time. 6. A method and an action plan are equally needed for the policy implementation process.

In a less technical explication, Egonmwan says, on one hand, "Policy formulation—this is done after the government has acknowledged or identifies the existence of public problems and the need to do something about it. Here, policy makers need to take or decide on what course of action to be done, when as well as how it could be done." On the other hand, "Implementation- this is the second stage ,after a public problem had been identified and made its way to the policy agenda, and various options have been provided, what remains is putting the decision into action or practical terms" (qtd. in Aminu A. Ayuba , Charles, Madu Tella and Paul, Y. Mbaya 59)

Having seen various definitions on policy, policy formulation, policy implementation in both technical and less technical senses, the question now becomes, what is public policy? "Public policy is an attempt by government to address a public issue by instituting laws, regulations, decisions or actions pertinent to the problem at hand." (Aminu A. Ayuba, Charles, Madu Tella and Paul, Y. Mbaya 57) In addition, Aminu A. Ayuba, Charles, Madu Tella and Paul, Y. Mbaya maintain that,

Numerous issues can be addressed by public policy including social such as schools, economical such as industries, cultural such as Arts, political such as appointment etc. However, in respect of these definitions, public policy is the process of formulating and implementation of government development policies or activities and programs for the benefits of its citizenry. (57)

From a different view point, a public policy is often said to be by policy professionals as government programme of action or anything government decides to do or not to do for its citizens, while other scholars adduce the point that policy is what government does and not what government hopes to do or what government pronounces it is going to do. Hence, public policy is perceived as an action rather than intention. (Aminu A. Ayuba, Charles, Madu Tella and Paul, Y. Mbaya 58)

In all, one can sieve from the foregoing conceptualizations that public policy implementation has as its objects as the execution of government plans of action for the benefits of its citizenry. However, if it is for the benefits of the people, it therefore presupposes that the people should be at the heart of considerations for such actions. But, is this most often the case in Nigeria?

### **Nation Building**

Maintaining the stand that nations do not come by historical accident, Ibrahim A. Gambari, in *The Challenges of Nations Building: The Case of Nigeria* averred that Nation-building is the outcome of conscious statecraft and not a happenstance. It is usually a work-in-progress, a dynamic process in consistent demand for nurturing

and re-invention. It never ceases and real nation-builder in no time relents for every nation is persistently being confronted with one new challenge or the other. Detailing the ramifications of nation-building, Gambari in the above work opines that:

Nation-building has many aspects. Firstly, it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is also about building institutions which symbolize the political entity – institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service, and civil society organizations. Above all else, however, nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging. Nation-building is therefore about building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose. Even in these days of globalization and rapid international flow of people and ideas, having a viable nation remains synonymous with achieving modernity. It is about building the institutions and values which sustain the collective community in these modern times.

Gambari underscores a crucial point in the course of his explication of the concept of nation-building. He says: “Above all else, however, nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of

belonging.” This is crucial in the sense that nation-building is all about the people. The institutions built are all there for the service of the people. It all revolves around the people, citizens of the country in question, in order for them to have a sense of belonging, sense of oneness and then meaningful development resulting in general well-being of the people. Have we achieved this in Nigeria?

From the explication of the concepts that form the hinge of this discourse: quality control, public policy implementation and nation-building; all show that the people of a nation is at the centre. It borders on the well-being of the people in a particular locale, country, and in the context of this discourse, Nigeria. The question that logically comes to mind is, how has each of the key concepts (quality control, public policy implementation towards nation-building) in this discourse, rightly facilitated the well-being of Nigerians?

### **Quality Control, Public Policy Implementation and Nigerian Nation-Building: How have they fared?**

In this important discourse, this paper is, as stated earlier, out to argue, among other things, that due to lack of true oneness (divisions) among the people that make up the nation called Nigeria, the phenomena of quality control, public policy implementation and nation-building have not fared excellently. As an evidence and origin of this “unoneness”, Ekinah and Ezeani have this to say: “The imperial power forced the amalgamation in order to get money to administer the North. But the two peoples of the South and the North lived separately in every town and city in the country during the colonial era.” (5) Also, it is on record that Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who later became the first Nigerian Prime Minister maintained that: “The Southern people who are swamping into this Region... are really intruders; we don’t want

them; and they are not welcome here in the North...we here in the North, take it that 'Nigerian Unity' is only a British intention for the country they have created; "IT IS NOT FOR US." (Ekineh A., and Geo'Ben Ezeani 11) Since then, it has been sectional or rather selfish interest pursuit and not national project. This singular act of unoneness is still having reverberating effects in virtually every aspect of Nigerian existence. That is why Ayuba and team of researchers in their study "Public Policy Formulation and Implementation in Nigeria" said, among other things that, the study equally uncovered that there is lack of full practice of federalism in Nigeria as stipulated in the 1999 Constitution ... Sequel to the above, in spite of the importance of public policy formulation and implementation as a critical factor in the management of government affairs in Nigeria, yet there are no standard formats or generally accepted guidelines towards such. Against this backdrop, the bureaucrats have a way of constituting obstacles or frustration in the way of policies formulated by the political officials especially those policies on which they hold different opinions or are not of immediate gain or benefit to them. (57) The same phenomenon is evident when Ibrahim A. Gambari, in *The Challenges of Nations Building: the Case of Nigeria* pointed out the challenges before Nigerian Nation-building. For him, "Nigeria faces five main nation-building challenges: (1) the challenge from our history; (2) the challenge of socio-economic inequalities; (3) the challenges of an appropriate constitutional settlement; (4) the challenges of building institutions for democracy and development; and (5) the challenge of leadership." Commentarily, on each of the challenges, he says: (1) the historical legacies of colonial rule originate certain challenges for nation-building in Nigeria, (2) how can we have a united citizenship when there is a sharp contrast in

terms of living conditions between the person in Ilorin and another in Yenagoa? (3) from independence, Nigerians have been confronted with the challenge of having a constitutional arrangement that has the approval of almost all, (4) that whether nations are able to manage their political cum social disagreements amicably, without recouring to conflict, or maintain economic growth without originating massive inequalities, hinge essentially on the quality of the relevant national institutions,(5) in line with Chinua Achebe, that the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership. From the stance of Gambari above, one may not be wrong to say that he subscribes to the problem of unoneness in Nigeria as the root of our problems, hence, in the order of his listing above, challenge from our history ranks first. It is this factor that has remotely or proximately been behind the failures in every aspect of Nigeria's existence. And in turn it has given rise to many others.

From the foregoing, one sees that, as has been stated in the course of this discourse, that the people of Nigeria is at the centre of quality control, public policy implementation and nation-building. But the failures of the aforementioned factors is basically due to divided nature of the people of Nigeria and the divisive elements that pervade almost every action plans taken by the government. A good instance is the phenomenon of quota system in Nigeria. Quota system is a policy put forward whereby every group of people that make up Nigeria is represented in the governance of the country to avoid marginalization. This is in the bid to build a nation called Nigeria. But unfortunately, it has rather further torn Nigeria apart than building it. This is because it has instituted mediocrity in Nigerian institutions as qualified persons are displaced by unqualified ones just to maintain the so called peace and stability in the country. It has mainly been counter productive.

No doubt, various efforts have been made to bring the people together so that effective nation-building can take place via quality control and public policy implementation. But the question is, why is it that Nigerian nation-building efforts still leave much to be desired? It is simply this; it lacks principles that constitutionally make Nigerians truly one with its corollary of lack of principles that ground genuinely people-oriented policies. On the latter, government policies till date are either elite-oriented or lip-service people-oriented. It is in the face of this that Nigeria needs principles that are inclusively people-oriented that will genuinely lead to effective nation-building through quality control and public policy implementation. These principles are found in Habermas' principle of practical discourse (D) that is integral in his Discourse Ethics embedded in his theory of Communicative Action informed by his idea of Communicative rationality. What do they imply?

### **1. From The Perspective Of Habermas' discourse Ethics**

For better understanding of Habermas's Discourse Ethics, one has to know his idea of communicative rationality that informed his theory of Communicative Action which in turn gave rise to his idea of Discourse Ethics. This is because rationality is that thread that runs parallel to his fabric of thoughts. According to Habermas,

This concept of *Communicative rationality* carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views, and owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction,

assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld. (10)

With the above foundation, Habermas articulates communicative action thus:

In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definition. In this respect the negotiation of definitions of the situation is an essential element of the interpretive accomplishments required for communicative action. (286)

“The concept of communicative action presupposes language as the medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested.”(99) Essential to communicative action is the idea of validity claims. Validity claims:

When someone rejects what is offered in an intelligible speech act, he denies the validity of an utterance in at least one of the three respects: *truth, rightness, or truthfulness*. His “no” signals that the utterance has failed to fulfil at least one of its three functions (the representation of state of affairs, the maintenance of an interpersonal relationship, or the manifestation of lived experience [respectively]) because the utterance is not in accordance with

either *the* world of existing state of affairs, *our* world of legitimately ordered interpersonal relations, or *each participant's own* world of subjective lived experience. (137)

It is from the foregoing postulations that Habermas articulated his Discourse Ethics which he termed a program of philosophical justification. This justification entails, most importantly, two steps: (a) a principle of universalization that serves as a rule of argumentation in practical discourse and (b) the rule of argumentation is grounded in terms of the substance of the pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation as such in relation to an explication of the meaning of normative claims to validity.(116) Discourse Ethics, therefore, is informed by two principles, viz: principle of universalization (U) and the principle of discourse ethics (D). The principle of universalization (U) states that: "For a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects that its *general* observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interest of *each* person affected must be such that *all* affected can accept them freely."(120) On the other hand, the principle of discourse ethics (D) states that: "Every valid norm would meet with the approval of all concerned if they could take part in a practical discourse."(121) Habermas defines practical discourse as "A procedure for testing the validity of hypothetical norm, not for producing justified norms. It is this proceduralism that sets discourse ethics apart from other cognitivist, universalist and formalist ethical theories, and thus from Rawls' theory of justice as well."(122) These principles in the main, lead to unity of people, course of action through common understanding in the background of rational argumentation. Explicating the four most

important features of argumentation, that is, rules of the principle of Discourse ethics (D), Habermas thus:

that nobody who could make a relevant contribution may be excluded ;(ii) that all participants are granted an equal opportunity to make contributions.(iii) that the participants must mean what they say; and(iv) that communication must be freed from external and internal coercion so that the “yes” or “no” stance that participants adopt on criticizable validity claims are motivated solely by the rational force of the better reasons.(44).

In furtherance, Habermas maintains that:

If everyone who engages in argumentation must make at least these pragmatic presuppositions, then in virtue of (i) the public character of practical discourses and the inclusion of all concerned and (ii) the equal weight to the interests and evaluative orientations of everybody can influence the outcome of practical discourses; and because of the absence of (iii) deception and (iv) coercion, nothing but reasons can tip the balance in favor of the acceptance of a controversial norm. Finally, on the assumption that participants reciprocally impute an orientation to communicative agreement to one another, this ‘uncoerced’ acceptance can only occur ‘jointly’ or ‘collectively’. (44)

The tenor of Habermas's discourse ethics above is simply that in practical discourse, that is, open discussion in the background of equality of all, freedom of all, sincerity of all, without any form of force apart from the rational force of better reasons of argument that people can harmoniously live together without much tension occasioned by deep-seated unresolved differences. But the problem with Nigeria till date is that most of the discussions previously had were couched in deception, insincerity and "no-go-areas" conditions. The no-go-areas of yester years and the deceptions and insincerity that accompanied previous discussions in the form of constitutional assemblies, constitution drafting committees and numerous commissions of inquiry led to new problems of today that are being tried to be resolved in the name of national conference. Has the national conference no "no-go-areas" proviso? No! Needless, therefore, papering over the wall, for logically, problems of fundamental type will continue to rock Nigeria until Habermas principle of discourse ethics that eschews such obstacles are adopted for genuine discussion. Habermas maintains that reason is that which is common to all the human persons, and that when they gather together, what can eschew any form of bias, discrimination or domination in any nation, state or human community is by bringing openly all the issues to the table without any reservation. The only factor that will carry the day is the fact of rational force of better reasons and not regional proclivity, religious inclination, "born-to-rule" mentality and other factors that do not stand to the test of rational argument

that have bedevilled Nigerian nation-building. A corollary to discourse ethics is the phenomenon of public sphere. For Habermas, issues must be publicly debated by the people for whom the issues are meant for. Decisions must not be superimposed from above or smuggled from under. They must be reached through open discussion. When these principles are adopted in Nigerian political platform, oneness is surely guaranteed. And that will be a sure step to effective public policy implementation in Nigeria. Furthermore, for policies to be legitimated in Nigeria and effectively implemented, they must originate from the people themselves in the public sphere where better arguments carry the day in the background of rational discourse. For, "It is in public sphere that reason is put to use publicly." (Habermas 24) Most policies in Nigeria do not work because they are not legitimated by the people through free and open discussion. Hence, they are mostly sectional-interest driven or selfish policies, not national ones. It is the candid submission of this paper that if principle of discourse ethics (D) is applied in Nigerian situation, many woes expressed due to lack of genuine shared identity occasioned originally by the colonial error of the past and frantically being tried to be perpetuated by a section of Nigeria, would be a thing of the past. Habermas' principle of discourse ethics guarantees genuine dialogue that Nigeria needs in order to work and achieve real nation-building. A Latin adage says *sanatio in radice* (healing from the root). Nigeria needs to be healed from its foundational problems first. Otherwise, it will continue to stay together without any genuine progress if

all areas of grievances are not healed through genuine open discussion grounded in better reasons.

### **Any other way forward?**

sincerely and meaningfully about ways forward in terms of change of attitude of Nigerians through education. Why? First, there is little or no spirit of patriotism in Nigeria. This is because government has failed almost woefully in her responsibilities to the citizens of Nigeria: lack of basic infrastructures, health care services, employment opportunities, etc. "An average Nigerian ambition to climb to the top in the public sector is neither motivated by patriotism nor the wish to render an honest service to humanity." (Chukwudum 32) Again, due to regional proclivity, Nigerians cannot rise in unison to demonstrate against a seating government when it is failing in her duties. Why? It is because people from the region(s) of the ruling government will see it as a ploy to undermine the government of their brother or sister, hence, would rather protest against such demonstration. Lack of oneness! This stems from the fact that Nigerians have not in the background of common understanding agreed to live together as a people of one nation through resolution of basic differences; hence, the unpatriotic attitude of Nigerians. Second, our educational policies lack practical relevance to realities on ground in Nigeria. The curriculum in Nigerian schools, does it still have history of Nigeria as a country to teach Nigerian pupils and students? Is there a country that has no history, no matter how bad it is? That is why there is need for practical discourse in Nigeria to streamline issues for common agreement tailored from Habermas's Discourse Ethics. There can be no meaningful way out in terms of policy implementation in a polarized country. The hard way and,

arguably, the only way out is discussion of Habermas's stamp in Nigeria.

Our public policy makers will continue mostly to make and implement selfish or at best sectional policies and not national ones. Struggles for quality control will continue to be derailed: that is why people will wilfully import sub-standard goods into the country because there is no spirit of patriotism that normally comes with shared common destiny born out of common understanding. Until Nigerians resolve to dialogically in Habermas' understanding agree to live as one people in a nation, genuine quality control, public policy implementation and, nay, nation-building will continue to elude Nigerians.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In the course of this discourse, those who articulated the concept of policy formulation and implementation made it clear that stakeholders must be involved in order to make it more participatory. Precisely, Umar in his work entitled *Policy Formulation and the Challenges of Implementation: The Case of Oil and Gas Sector* says: "Elected or appointed officials, however, have the final choice among the alternatives presented. Which brings judgement, wisdom, and accountability to policy formulation. They consider goals, trade-offs, value priorities, and weighing the overall effects of the policy which makes them accountable to the people under our representative form of government" We guess this was followed when the president announced the full withdrawal of petroleum subsidy in January, 2012! What was the outcome? Mass protest by Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and Civil Societies. If this had come through public sphere as Habermas will advocate, that is, open discussion on it both in formal and informal settings, it could have won the approval of the masses having been legitimated

by them through their inputs during discussions. Again, who are the stakeholders? Are they the experts? Whether the experts or not, our point is that after the experts must have done their professional job, the policy has to go through the sluice of public sphere where better rational arguments win thereby legitimating the policy and, hence, its implementability. Nigeria, indubitably, will achieve effective nation-building via quality control and public policy implementation, if it truthfully adopts the principle of discourse ethics as articulated by Habermas. Till date, Nigeria has not adopted dialogical process that is on the basis of freedom of all, equality of all, sincerity by all, devoid of any form of coercion apart from that of better reason, in an open discussion. Until the reverse is the case, Nigeria most probably will continue to wobble in her efforts at nation-building via quality control and public policy implementation.

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