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NEPAD AND AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT CRISIS: A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF AN INITIATIVE'S CAPACITY FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC REVIVAL OF AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT
With all her natural endowment, Africa at the dawn of the 21st century remains the poorest and most problematic region of the world. Apart from excruciating hunger and abject conditions ravaging a massive proportion of the population of this region, diseases especially Malaria and HIV/AIDs continues to threaten at a somewhat volatile scale. Worse still, communal and national conflicts which often lead to erosion of peaceful coexistence and frustrate development in all ramifications have remained the hallmark of the region. Several regional and sub-regional bodies with sophisticated developmental initiatives put in place to address Africa's developmental quagmire have not delivered successful results. NEPAD, an integrated development plan that address key social, economic and political priorities in a balanced and coherent way is a strategic framework for the socio-economic development of Africa. Even though NEPAD, as an initiative for economic and social revival of Africa was never formulated to compete with other initiatives of its kind seeking to address Africa's development crisis, the truth is that NEPAD is distinguished from previous initiatives by the political commitment behind it. This paper takes a cursory look at Africa's economic, social and political woes It observed that though NEPAD is an improvement in terms of strategy and content of policy documents on all previous continental development initiatives, capacity for proper implementation remain its bane, it concludes that until NEPAD'S policy content and strategy are matched with courageous implementation, the overwhelming ambition for Africa's socio-economic revival in the 21" century may not be attained.

Keywords: ***Africa, NEPAD, Socio-economic Development, Poverty, Malaria and HIV/AIDS, Political Commitment, Policy Implementation, Sustainable Development.***

INTRODUCTION
The concept of underdevelopment was not original to Africa, as historical evidence suggests that pre-colonial African societies possessed sophisticated political institutions, vibrant trade networks, and flourishing economies comparable to many regions of the world (Rodney, 1972; Herbst, 2000; Austin, 2010). Many centuries ago, Africa was politically and socio-economically at par with Europe and other developed societies of the world (Rodney, 1972; Davidson, 1992; Nunn, 2018). Several interventions along the path of history disrupted this trajectory and stagnated Africa's growth for centuries, particularly through the transatlantic slave trade, colonial domination, and unequal integration into the global economy (Rodney, 1972; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Nunn and Wantchekon, 2011).
The impoverishment of the African continent was accentuated primarily by the legacy of colonialism, the Cold War, the workings of the international economic system, and the policies pursued by many African countries in the post-independence era (Ake, 1981; Mkandawire, 2001; Taylor, 2018). At independence, virtually all the new states were characterized by shortages of skilled professionals and a weak capitalist class, resulting in a weakening of the accumulation process (Ake, 1981; Meredith, 2005; Cooper, 2019). Thus, post-colonial Africa inherited weak states and dysfunctional economies, which were further aggravated by poor leadership, corruption, and bad governance in many countries (Bayart, 1993; Rotberg, 2004; Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2017).
These factors, together with the divisions caused by the Cold War, hampered the development of accountable governments across the continent for decades (Clapham, 1996; Young, 2012;

Cheeseman, 2015). One of Africa's major challenges in the twenty-first century is to strengthen state capacity and formulate long-term development policies capable of sustaining economic transformation (Kelsall, 2013; UNECA, 2020; World Bank, 2022). It is evident across Africa that the rate of accumulation in the post-colonial period has not been sufficient to rebuild societies, nor has it generated and sustained improved standards of living for most Africans (Ake, 1996; Collier, 2007; African Development Bank, 2024).

This situation has continued to affect negatively the political processes of many African states (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Hyden, 2013; Cheeseman, 2018). The result has been the entrenchment of a vicious cycle in which economic decline, reduced state capacity, and poor governance reinforce one another, thereby confirming Africa's peripheral role in the world economy (Wallerstein, 1974; Amin, 1990; UNECA, 2023).

Africa's active involvement in reshaping the International Economic Order (IEO) effectively began in 1963 with the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (OAU, 1963; Murithi, 2005). Through the OAU, African countries sought to influence decisions within the United Nations Organization (UNO), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and other international organizations (Akinrinade, 2000; Adedeji, 2002; Tieku, 2019). As observed by Akinrinade (2000: 23–24), several regional and sub-regional initiatives aimed at addressing Africa's development crisis and promoting economic recovery and sustainable growth have been implemented. However, many of these initiatives have not succeeded in moving African states out of persistent economic difficulties (Akinrinade, 2000; Adedeji, 2002; UNECA, 2023).

According to the United Nations Annual Economic Report (2001), twenty-four of the world's thirty Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs) were located in Africa. More recent evidence suggests that debt vulnerability remains a significant challenge for many African economies despite debt-relief initiatives implemented over the past two decades (UNCTAD, 2022; IMF, 2024).

The African continent ranks low on many socio-economic and human development indicators, including Gross National Product (GNP), per capita income, health outcomes, food security, and life expectancy (UNDP, 2001; UNDP, 2024). Similarly, Africa remains among the least attractive regions for foreign direct investment due to political instability, insecurity, institutional weaknesses, and infrastructural deficits (World Bank, 2022; UNCTAD, 2024).

It was the limited success of the OAU and related initiatives in addressing these challenges that contributed to the emergence of the New African Initiative. On July 11, 2001, the OAU Summit of Heads of State and Government in Lusaka, Zambia formally approved the New African Initiative, which merged the Millennium Africa Recovery Programme (MAP) and the Omega Plan (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Landsberg, 2002). Subsequently, at a meeting held in Abuja, Nigeria, the initiative was renamed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Akinrinade, 2004; African Union, 2018).

NEPAD was conceived as a framework for promoting Africa's economic development through continental cooperation and partnership (Hope, 2002; NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; African Union Development Agency, 2023). Its antecedents can be traced to earlier development strategies such as the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980 and the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD) of 1986–1990 (Adedeji, 2002; United Nations, 1986).

The disappointing outcomes of UN-PAAERD led African leaders to conclude that the primary responsibility for Africa's development rested with Africans themselves, although international support remained essential (Akinrinade, 2000; Adedeji, 2002; AUDA-NEPAD, 2023). This realization informed the adoption of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), which emphasized shared partnership between Africa and the international community (United Nations, 1991; ECA, 2001).

Despite these initiatives, economic growth during the 1990s averaged below population growth rates, leading to declining per capita incomes across much of the continent (ECA, 2001; World Bank, 2000). Consequently, the emergence of NEPAD must be understood within the broader context of Africa's disappointing development performance relative to other regions of the world (Hope, 2002; African Development Bank, 2024).

EVALUATION OF NEPAD'S STRATEGY FOR AFRICA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC REVIVAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

NEPAD, which has been described as the most significant continent-wide economic initiative to emerge in contemporary Africa, is not the first initiative designed to address Africa's development crisis and promote continental socio-economic recovery, sustainable growth, and development (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Hope, 2002; Tieku, 2019). NEPAD adopted a holistic approach to Africa's development because earlier programmes had largely failed to move African states out of persistent economic stagnation and underdevelopment (Akinrinade, 2000; Adedeji, 2002; African Development Bank, 2024). In its preamble, the NEPAD policy document recognizes the historical and colonial roots of Africa's underdevelopment but argues firmly that the continent's future ultimately lies in the hands of Africans themselves (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Rodney, 1972; Nunn, 2018). The document attributes the failure of previous development initiatives largely to leadership challenges and inadequate African ownership of such programmes (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Hope, 2002; Kelsall, 2013). It further welcomes the spread of democracy across the continent, emphasizing that democratic governance and the promotion of human rights constitute fundamental pillars of the initiative (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Cheeseman, 2015; African Union, 2023).

In seeking to move the continent forward in the twenty-first century, the initiative identifies two long-term objectives:

- To eradicate poverty in Africa and place African countries, individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development, thereby halting the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process (NEPAD Document, Paragraphs 67–68; Hope, 2002; UNDP, 2024).
- To promote the role of women in all socio-economic and political activities across the continent (NEPAD Document, Paragraphs 67–68; African Union, 2018; UN Women, 2023).

The goals of the initiative are also twofold:

- To achieve and sustain an average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of above 7 percent per annum for the next fifteen years (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; World Bank, 2022).
- To ensure that the continent achieves the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequent global development targets (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2024).

The strategy is expected to produce several outcomes, including economic growth, employment generation, poverty reduction, economic diversification, enhanced competitiveness, export expansion, and deeper regional integration (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; UNECA, 2023; African Development Bank, 2024).

Thus, the foundation of NEPAD rests upon a commitment by African governments to institutionalize the essential elements of good governance, including strengthening democracy and the rule of law, promoting peace and security, and combating corruption as prerequisites for economic growth and sustainable development (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Rotberg, 2004; World Bank, 2022). These measures are expected to create an enabling environment for development and investment (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2010; African Union, 2023). In return, the international community is expected to provide improved market access, debt relief, and increased high-quality development assistance to support Africa's attainment of international development goals (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; OECD, 2023; UNCTAD, 2024).

THE STRUCTURE OF NEPAD'S STRATEGY FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC REVIVAL OF AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Under this framework, the following structure was established (NEPAD Document, Paragraph 74):

- Conditions for Sustainable Development
- Sectoral Priorities
- Mobilizing Resources (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Hope, 2002).

CONDITIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The initiative recognizes that action is required in three broad areas: Peace, Security, Democracy and Political Governance; Economic and Corporate Governance; and Sub-regional and Regional Approaches to Development (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; African Union, 2023). The first area is divided into Peace and Security, and Democracy and Political Governance. Under the Peace and Security Initiative, NEPAD envisages actions in four key areas: conflict prevention, management and resolution; peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace enforcement; post-conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction; and combating the illicit proliferation of small arms, light weapons and landmines (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Williams, 2011; African Union, 2023).

The document further affirms that detailed and costed measures would be developed to operationalize these priorities (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001). Actions under the Democracy and Political Governance Initiative include:

- Commitments by participating countries to establish and consolidate democratic governance processes and institutions.
- Undertakings by participating countries to support initiatives that promote accountability, transparency, and good governance. (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; African Peer Review Mechanism, 2021).

The two other conditions for Africa's economic revival and sustainable development are the Economic and Corporate Governance Initiative and the Sub-regional and Regional Approaches to Development (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001). Good economic management is widely recognized as a prerequisite for sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, and macroeconomic stability (World Bank, 2022; IMF, 2024). African integration into the global economy has historically been constrained by fragmented markets that prevent economies of scale and reduce competitiveness (UNECA, 2023; AfDB, 2024). Consequently, regional integration is considered essential for industrialization, economic diversification, and reducing Africa's marginalization within the global economy (Adedeji, 2002; African Union, 2023; UNECA, 2024).

However, Africa's previous attempts at regional and sub-regional integration have achieved only limited success, particularly in expanding intra-African trade (Akinrinade, 2000; UNECA, 2023; AfCFTA Secretariat, 2024). In the continuous search for solutions to Africa's development challenges, the architects of NEPAD hoped that the programme would become a catalyst for launching the "African Century" (Mathew and Solomon, 2002; Hope, 2002).

Many observers argue that what distinguishes NEPAD from earlier initiatives is the political commitment demonstrated by African leaders, particularly in the areas of peace, security, democracy, and governance (Hope, 2002; Tieku, 2019). Persistent conflicts across the continent have remained major obstacles to development and foreign direct investment (Collier, 1999; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; UNDP, 2024). As Collier (1999:26) observed, political instability, social unrest, and governance failures significantly increase investment risks and discourage foreign direct investment. The leaders of NEPAD recognize that sustainable development cannot occur in the absence of peace and security (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; African Union, 2023). Similarly, the commitment to democratic governance is expected to enhance conflict management and strengthen institutional capacity across the continent (Cheeseman, 2015; African Peer Review Mechanism, 2021).

SECTORAL PRIORITIES

Under sectoral priorities, NEPAD identifies actions in six major areas:

- Bridging the infrastructure gap, including narrowing the digital divide and investing in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).
- Human Resource Development, including reversing brain drain.
- Agriculture.
- Environment.
- Culture.
- Science and Technology. (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001).

The strategies proposed under these sectoral priorities have significant potential to promote inclusive development and improve living standards across Africa (UNECA, 2023; African Development Bank, 2024). Investments in infrastructure, ICT, agriculture, education, science, and technology are widely recognized as critical drivers of structural transformation and sustainable economic growth (World Bank, 2022; IMF, 2024). Furthermore, the fact that these priorities are relatively practical and achievable has contributed to the perception of NEPAD as a credible development framework rather than merely a collection of aspirational goals (Akinrinade, Op. cit.; Hope, 2002; AUDA-NEPAD, 2023).

MOBILIZING RESOURCES

This represents the final component of NEPAD's strategy for Africa's socio-economic revival in the twenty-first century. It is organized under two major action areas:

- Capital Flows
- Market Access (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001).

(a) Capital Flows

This initiative proposes actions in four major areas:

- Increasing Domestic Resource Mobilization.
- Debt Relief.
- Official Development Assistance (ODA) Reforms.
- Private Capital Flows.

(NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; OECD, 2023).

A central theme of the initiative is the emphasis on Africa's own resources as the primary foundation for development financing (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; African Union, 2023). Consequently, increasing domestic resource mobilization is considered essential for generating the capital required to finance development programmes and reduce dependence on external aid (UNECA, 2023; IMF, 2024). At the same time, NEPAD recognizes that domestic efforts must be complemented by international support, particularly through debt relief mechanisms that free resources for productive investment (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; UNCTAD, 2024).

It must also be noted that many aspects of Official Development Assistance (ODA) reform lie beyond the direct control of African governments and depend largely on the policies of donor countries and international financial institutions (OECD, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Consequently, the success of this component of NEPAD depends on both domestic commitment and sustained international cooperation (African Union, 2023; United Nations, 2024).

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEPAD STRATEGY FOR AFRICA'S REVIVAL

As noted earlier in this paper, Africa has never been short of programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting the economic revival and development of the continent, yet many have remained largely at the level of theoretical commitment and declarations of intent rather than practical implementation (Ake, 1996; Akinrinade, 2000; Adedeji, 2002). NEPAD represents one of the first continental initiatives that explicitly links economic revival and sustainable development to political reform, security, governance, and continental cooperation (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Hope, 2002; Tieku, 2019). The initiative makes it clear that political cooperation and economic integration must be pursued simultaneously if Africa is to achieve meaningful development outcomes (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; African Union, 2023; UNECA, 2024).

The NEPAD initiative, in all its sophistication, undoubtedly generated hope that Africa could embark upon a pathway toward sustainable economic revival in the twenty-first century (Hope, 2002; Landsberg, 2002; AUDA-NEPAD, 2023). The structure of the NEPAD strategy is comprehensive, addressing major dimensions of the development question, including governance, infrastructure, human development, agriculture, science and technology, and resource mobilization (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; African Development Bank, 2024). This perhaps explains why NEPAD has frequently been described as an integrated development framework that addresses key socio-economic and political priorities in a balanced and coherent manner (Hope, 2002; Taylor, 2002; AUDA-NEPAD, 2023).

Since NEPAD was relatively new at the time many early assessments were conducted, scholars argued that it was premature to make definitive judgments regarding its effectiveness (Hope, 2002; Landsberg, 2002). Nevertheless, several analysts identified implementation weaknesses that could potentially undermine both the short-term and long-term objectives of the initiative (Matthew and Solomon, 2002; Taylor, 2002; Tieku, 2019).

The first major criticism concerns the mobilization strategy adopted by NEPAD's leadership. Critics argue that efforts have been concentrated disproportionately on mobilizing support from the international community rather than building broad-based ownership among African citizens and institutions (Matthew and Solomon, 2002:3; Taylor, 2002; Brown, 2017). The leadership of the initiative appeared more focused on securing international legitimacy and external support than on ensuring widespread commitment among African populations (Matthew and Solomon, 2002; Adésínà, 2004). Sustainable development initiatives generally require strong domestic ownership and local participation to ensure long-term success (World Bank, 2022; United Nations, 2024).

Second, in their efforts to secure support from the international community, NEPAD leaders were perceived by some observers as placing excessive emphasis on attracting external financial assistance (Akinrinade, Op. cit.: 21; Taylor, 2002). However, officials from developed countries repeatedly emphasized that partnership under NEPAD should not be interpreted merely as a mechanism for transferring financial resources to Africa (Akinrinade, Op. cit.; OECD, 2023). This raised concerns regarding the extent to which external partners were genuinely committed to addressing structural inequalities in the global economic system that constrain African development (UNCTAD, 2024; UNECA, 2023).

Third, critics have argued that NEPAD relies heavily on the same neo-liberal development paradigm that has shaped African development policies since the 1980s without producing transformative results (Adésínà, 2004; Taylor, 2002; Mkandawire, 2015). Many of the policy prescriptions contained in NEPAD closely resemble the orthodox neo-liberal approaches promoted by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the G8, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Adésínà, 2004; Bond, 2005; Taylor, 2002). These prescriptions include reliance on aid, foreign credit, market liberalization, export competitiveness, integration into global markets, and cooperation with multilateral institutions as pathways to development (World Bank, 2000; Bond, 2005; UNCTAD, 2024).

Consequently, some scholars contend that NEPAD's acceptance by Western governments and international institutions stems largely from its compatibility with prevailing neo-liberal policy frameworks (Taylor, 2002; Bond, 2005). Western governments and institutions have often described the initiative as "realistic," "pragmatic," and "sensible" (Taylor, 2002). However, doubts remain regarding the ability of African states to engage effectively with powerful international institutions on equal terms and whether the policy prescriptions advanced by those institutions can adequately address Africa's unique development challenges (Mkandawire, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

Fourth, despite NEPAD's recognition of the relationship between democracy, good governance, and development, implementation of governance-related commitments has often been weak (NEPAD

Secretariat, 2001; APRM, 2021; African Union, 2023). The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), established as one of NEPAD's flagship governance instruments, was intended to promote accountability, transparency, and democratic governance among participating states (APRM, 2021; Hope, 2005). NEPAD established strict membership criteria requiring visible commitment to democratic values and good governance (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001).

The Zimbabwe crisis became widely regarded as a major test of Africa's commitment to democratic governance and the seriousness attached to NEPAD's governance agenda (Taylor, 2002; Raftopoulos, 2009). According to Taylor (2002), Africa's response to the Zimbabwe crisis led many observers to question the credibility and effectiveness of NEPAD. Observers expected a stronger response from NEPAD against the perceived decline of democratic governance in Zimbabwe, yet such action did not materialize through the NEPAD framework itself (Taylor, 2002; Raftopoulos, 2009). The fact that Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Thabo Mbeki relied primarily on Commonwealth mechanisms rather than NEPAD institutions to address Zimbabwe's governance challenges was viewed by some analysts as evidence of NEPAD's limited implementation capacity (Taylor, 2002; Tieku, 2019).

Fifth, the priority areas identified during the October 2001 Abuja Meeting of the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee were comprehensive and strategically important. These areas included peace and security, economic and corporate governance, infrastructure development, information and communication technology, financial standards, agriculture, and market access (NEPAD Secretariat, 2001; Akinrinade, Op. cit.). These priorities remain central to Africa's development agenda today (African Development Bank, 2024; UNECA, 2024).

However, significant implementation challenges continue to hinder progress in many of these sectors. Persistent corruption, weak institutions, inadequate transparency in public financial management, governance deficits, ineffective conflict-management mechanisms, and severe infrastructure shortages remain major obstacles to achieving NEPAD's objectives (Rotberg, 2004; Transparency International, 2024; World Bank, 2022). Many African countries continue to face capacity constraints that limit their ability to implement large-scale development programmes effectively (African Development Bank, 2024; IMF, 2024).

Finally, historical experience provides limited confidence regarding the success of continental development initiatives, leading many observers to remain skeptical about NEPAD's prospects (Akinrinade, Op. cit.: 28; Adedeji, 2002). Skepticism has been particularly pronounced among civil society organizations, which have consistently called for greater public participation in the formulation and implementation of the NEPAD agenda (Akinrinade, Op. cit.; Adésínà, 2004). These groups argue that African leaders should devote as much attention to engaging their citizens as they do to securing international approval and support (Adésínà, 2004; AUDA-NEPAD, 2023).

Like many previous post-independence efforts aimed at African political and economic integration, NEPAD has largely remained a state-led process (Adedeji, 2002; Tieku, 2019). Critics argue that many continental integration initiatives have achieved limited success because they have been driven primarily by political elites with insufficient grassroots participation (Ake, 1996; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Despite the natural inclination of African societies toward regional interaction and economic integration, ordinary citizens have often remained peripheral to the implementation process (UNECA, 2024).

The NEPAD initiative continues to rely heavily on state institutions and political leadership, and in its efforts to secure the confidence of international partners, insufficient attention has sometimes been paid to the meaningful engagement of civil society organizations, community groups, and ordinary Africans (Adésínà, 2004; AUDA-NEPAD, 2023). This limited societal participation may ultimately constitute one of the weakest links in the implementation of the initiative, since successful development programmes require broad-based ownership, accountability, and public participation (United Nations, 2024; World Bank, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Africa has never lacked in development strategies. Indeed, powerfully structured organizations and initiatives with well articulated action plans for development have always been there. In all their structural sophistications, the OAU/AU, the Lagos plan of Action and the Abuja Treaty could not regenerated Africa It was argued that these initiatives failed to revive Africa due to three major reasons of timing, lack of capacity for implementation and a lack of genuine political will. At the dawn of the 21" century, NEPAD. an integrated development plan that is holistic in design emerged to explore avenues to revive Africa. In its effort to be more purposive and to detach itself from rhetoric's of all previous continental initiatives. NEPAD provides three key new elements; it is African developed, managed and owned, it brings the concept of a new partnership: and Africa is undertaking certain commitments and obligations in its own Interests which are not externally imposed. However, despite sustained confidence being exuded by NEPAD apologists, prevailing conditions reveal that the political courage and the moral will by African leaders to implement to the letters the content of this initiative are not there. It is for this that the initiative has lost steam. It is also for this that barely seven years after the policy framework of the initiative was finalized. serious question mark has been stamped on the capacity of the initiative to rev ive Africa.

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