



Managing and Recovering from Crises at the Local Level

Factsheet

VNG International's
approach to crisis
management and recovery

Crisis Management and Recovery:

Empowering Local Governments to Lead in Times of Crisis

Disasters, whether from war, natural events or epidemics, have profound and long-lasting impacts. Both the immediate response to disaster and crisis as well as the effective recovery of communities, regions, or countries requires the cooperation of all levels of stakeholders: local, national and international. It is crucial that local government is included from the start of the emergency and recovery response as they play a key role in planning and managing services in emergency situations and the recovery of their communities. They know their communities best and are key to rebuilding lives, restoring infrastructure and shaping a more resilient future.

Crisis management helps local governments respond quickly and effectively during a disaster, saving lives and limiting damage. Recovery from the impact of a disaster is just as essential, as it focuses on rebuilding communities and creating long-term resilience. Both are connected, since strong crisis management lays the foundation for a successful recovery.

Too often, the role of local governments in disaster prevention and response is overlooked. From the moment a disaster happens, local governments should be at the table to lead in:

- the inventory and data gathering on damages and demographic developments,
- creating recovery plans and prioritizing recovery projects,
- steering initiatives in relation to urban planning, economic development and service delivery to citizens,
- and engaging citizens in shaping their future.

This gives local governments the responsibility and authority to steer the crisis response and the recovery process and ensure this is done in an inclusive, forward-looking manner, grounded in local needs and aspirations.



About VNG International

VNG International is the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). Rooted in the Netherlands' rich tradition of local governance, we invest in empowering local governments worldwide to build better futures for all. Established in 2001, we focus on practical and innovative solutions that enhance the capacity and resilience of local governments.

VNG International designs and manages large, complex projects across a variety of sectors, collaborating with a diverse range of donors, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Commission, World Bank, and USAID. We take pride in our ISO-9001 certified quality management system, which underpins our commitment to high standards and client satisfaction. Our success is driven by our ability to combine local expertise with international knowledge, enabling us to implement solutions that are both practical and effective.

Together with local governments and their citizens, we are creating resilient, thriving communities that are equipped to face the future. At VNG International, we are not just building projects, we are building better futures for all.

Our approach: practical, local and inclusive

VNG International has decades of hands-on experience in the recovery of areas affected by war and natural disasters. Ensuring local ownership and leaving no one behind is central to our approach. We thus work with communities to:

- Develop recovery and reconstruction plans
- Create corresponding detailed investment catalogues that guide action and funding
- Implement concrete projects that rebuild communities and their social fabric, we do so in critical areas like water management, urban planning, economic development, citizen participation, good governance, and project management.
- Build preparedness and resilience for future disasters, through investing in disaster risk management.



How we work: local expertise and global solidarity

By bringing together the solid understanding of the local situation and communities with international innovative practices on how to build back better and shaping this into effective multistakeholder collaborations is key to lasting results in crisis and recovery efforts. VNG International is uniquely positioned to call upon Dutch municipal urban development experts and city planners to share their experiences in a colleague-to-colleague approach. Through our network of Dutch, international and local experts, we ensure that every recovery effort is :

- Aligned with local policies
- Coordinated with national and

- international frameworks
- Tailored to the real needs of the community

VNG International works with all types of local governments, including villages, cities, and regions, often in close cooperation with local government associations. But we also ensure that through our work with national governments, we can ensure that local good practice can be scaled up and incorporated in national policies and legislation.

The Participatory Task Force: local voices, united action

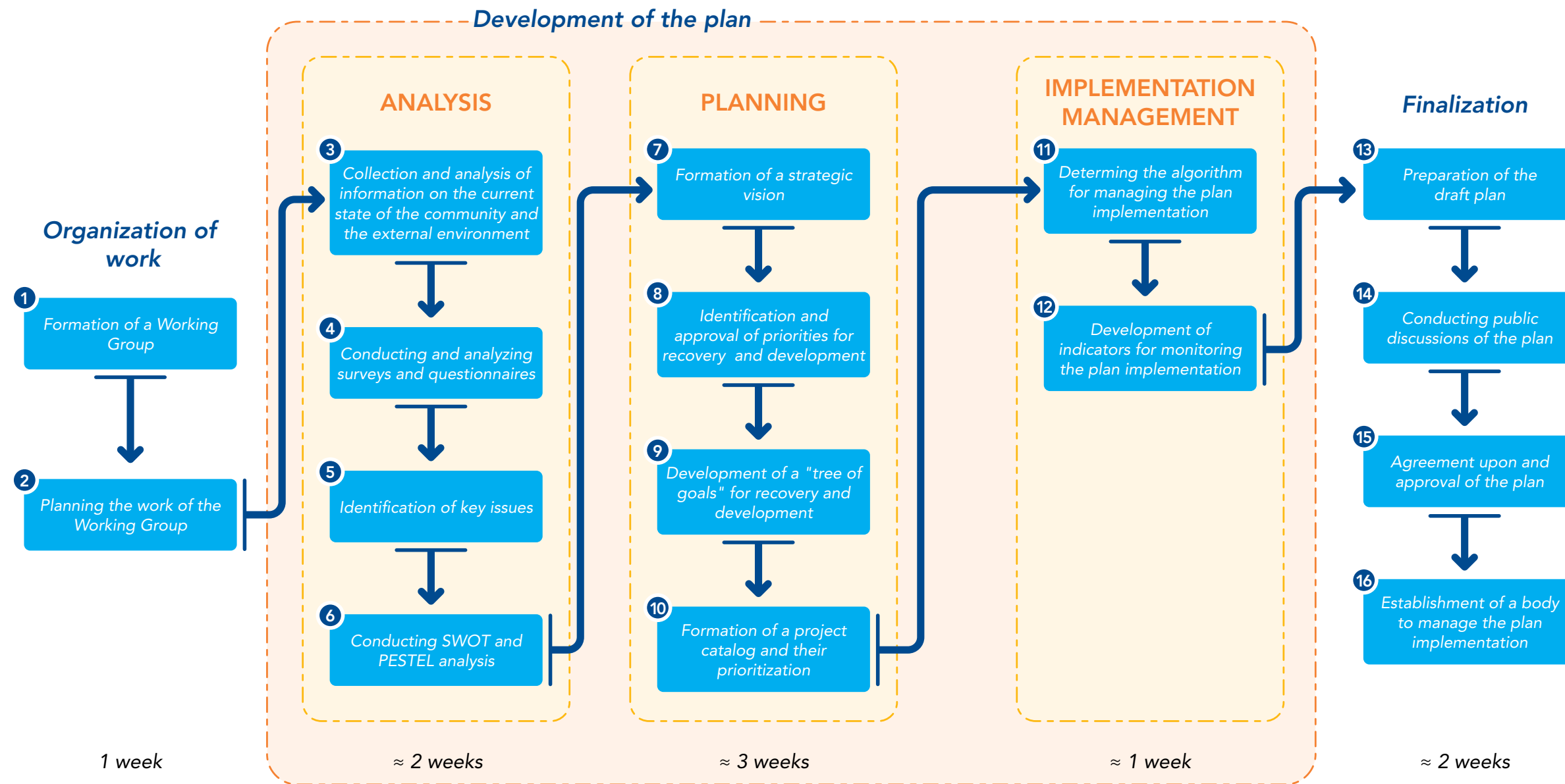
A key part of our recovery approach is the **Participatory Task Force method**. VNG International supports the set-up of a multistakeholder Participatory Task Force mandated to develop and monitor a **Local Recovery and Development Plan** that will steer all recovery initiatives on the territory in question. Both the composition of this working group (key stakeholders in recovery) and, in particular, their participatory approach ensure that the results of their work are holistic, inclusive and responsive to needs. Tailored to the specific context and determined territory, the Participatory Task Force usually brings together mayors, council members, appointed officials, civil society representatives, the private sector, regional or national government representatives and, when needed, military administration.

The Participatory Task Force is thus key in promoting collaboration between different stakeholders, inclusive decision-making and information sharing. Part of the Local Recovery and Development Plans is to define and prioritise projects, often bundled in **investment catalogues** to guide action and attract external funding. By integrating smaller grants, technical support, and capacity building, VNG International supports local governments in the implementation of these Local Recovery and Development Plan. These efforts ensure local governments have a strong foundation for recovery, reconstruction, and future disaster responses. This helps create strategic decisions for long-term and sustainable redevelopment.

The Recovery and Development Plans reflect the key principles listed below:

- **Bottom-up** approach and **citizens' participation** to ensure responsiveness to their needs and inclusiveness of all groups in society
- **Build Back Better** principle fostering innovation and ensuring sustainable development
- **Transparency and accountability** to contribute to the trust between government and citizens
- **Coordination and multi-stakeholder engagement** to unite forces and be most effective

These activities underscore the pivotal role of local governments in disaster response and post-disaster/post-war recovery. It also illustrates the pivotal role that VNG International plays in providing support, e.g. by Dutch municipal urban development experts and city planners, and demonstrating solidarity to fellow municipalities abroad.



The figure presents an example of the process for developing a recovery plan by municipalities, the particular example stemming from Ukraine.



Reconstruction support following hurricane

Where
St. Maarten
St. Eustatius
Saba
When
2017-2021

Following the Hurricane that struck St. Maarten, Saba and St. Eustatius on September 6, 2017, VNG International provided support to the islands in their recovery. The overall objective of the project that ensued was to contribute to the recovery of the islands, in particular St Maarten, focusing both on the immediate follow up of the hurricane, but more particularly on the preparedness for future disasters.

The results of the project include:

- A revisited and upgraded disaster management structure, including corresponding legislation, has been developed;
- Politicians and civil servants of line ministries and police, fire brigade and ambulance, as well as community representatives have been trained on the disaster management structure;
- Improved access of government to information for disaster management purposes;
- Improved services related to psychological preparedness have been realized;
- More effective and efficient implementation of the recovery programmes on Saba have been realized;
- A disaster proof and sustainable building code has been defined and carries the consensus of the government and the community.



Support for economic development and sustainable reconstruction of disaster-stricken communities in the High Atlas

Where
Morocco
When
2023-2026

The AVERDHA project (Appui à la Valorisation Économique et la Reconstruction Durable des communes sinistrés dans le Haut Atlas) is build from the global solidarity of 39 Dutch municipalities collecting 4.1 million euros to provide economic development and sustainable reconstruction to affected communities in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco, in direct response to the 2023 earthquake. The project focuses on four municipalities in Al Haouz province. Two of these municipalities were severely affected because they were in the middle of the epicenter of the earthquake. The project is part of a decentralized cooperation program for the reconstruction and socio-economic recovery of the affected areas. As the earthquake represents an emergency situation, VNG International collaborates with the Red Crescent (through the Dutch Red Cross) to provide the emergency relief, contributing notably to winterization - preparing the population for winter in the high Atlas Mountains.

Since the start of the AVERDHA project, exploratory talks have been held with locally elected officials, representatives of government departments and civil society organizations. These interviews aim to properly identify the specific needs of the municipalities of Asni, Ighil, Aghbar and Talat N'Yaaqoub. A detailed action plan was prepared to support the reconstruction of public facilities (communal buildings and infrastructure), promote the use of local and sustainable materials and practices of (re)construction, promote socioeconomic development and strengthen the capacities of locally elected officials and municipal agents. These actions aim to ensure sustainable reconstruction while reviving the local economy through micro-projects implemented by civil society organizations.

Local Governments Response, Recovery and Reconstruction following the Earthquakes

Where
Türkiye
When
2023-2025

The objective of the project is to support the municipalities of Adana Seyhan, Kahramanmaraş and Osmaniye in their post-disaster response and recovery capacity. Central to our support is the **Participatory Task Force method**. By integrating smaller grants, technical assistance, and capacity strengthening, these efforts ensure that local government responses to post disaster situations are well-informed and futureproof, facilitating strategic decisions that lay a solid foundation for sustainable redevelopment.

Key results of the project :

- Preparatory work, identification of emergency needs and selection of pilot municipalities;
- Establishment of **Participatory Task Forces** to steer recovery initiatives;
- Emergency grant support including Disaster Greenhouses, diverse search and rescue equipment, equipment for soup kitchen;
- **Post-disaster scenario planning** for Participatory Local Recovery Plans including Implementation Strategy Workshops, urban planning and strengthening municipal capacity and service provision.



Support to recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction of local governments and communities

Where

Ukraine

When

2022-2025

The project overall objective is to strengthen local governance and capacities of local authorities in action planning and implementation for (early) recovery, reconstruction and development processes following full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The project consists of two phases.

Phase 1 (2022 – 2024) focused on assisting the development and implementation of local recovery plans for four de-occupied Ukrainian territorial communities in Kherson and Mykolaiv region.

Key activities included:

- Supporting the development and implementation of local recovery and development plans
- Using participatory processes to ensure local ownership and sustainability

Phase 2 (2024 – 2025) focuses on supporting 15 frontline communities from 6 regions in establishing the foundation for a sustainable post-war transition. This phase centers around three strategic pathways:

1. Safety, Security, Resilience: Strengthening the resilience of local communities and the rapid responsiveness of local governments to the needs of the citizens in order to mitigate the risks and damages.
2. Local Economic Development and Project Management: Creating an ecosystem that fosters local economic development, project management capabilities, and access to funding. This pathway aims to boost local recovery, economic well-being, and quality of life, encouraging citizens to return and sustain local recovery efforts.



3. Decentralization and Democratization: Increasing citizen participation, encouraging inclusiveness of vulnerable groups (such as war veterans, IDPs, women, youth) in citizen participation, promoting transparency and accountability in local governments during recovery processes.

Key achievements to date:

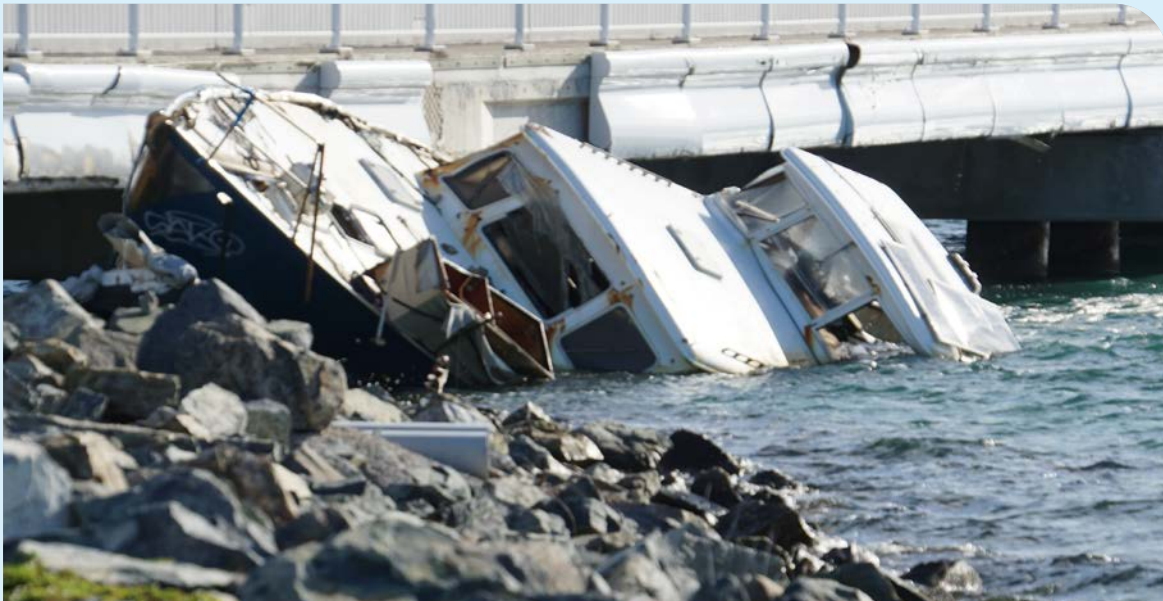
- 4 local communities designed their own local recovery and development plans, and corresponding project pipelines, based on inclusive, participatory processes.
- Guidelines of developing local recovery plans are developed and presented to local communities and Ministry of Restoration
- More than 500 representatives of local authorities increased their capacities through coaching, training, webinars and organizing exchange visits.
- 15 communities are working on revising and upgrading their policies, programmes and strategies for three pathways of phase 2.
- Training and capacity building activities for phase 2 are currently underway.

DANWADAAG: Improving the social contract through inclusive and transparent Disaster Risk Management

Where
Somalia
When
2021-2026

The DANWADAAG programme works to enhance efficient and effective Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in Somaliland and Puntland state of Somalia, with the aim to enhance the social contract between communities and public authorities. Work is based on four pillars: community-level contributions to DRM; strengthened engagement of civil society organisations; enhanced capacity of public authorities; and support to media organisations for information sharing and creating spaces for dialogue.

The project includes capacity strengthening at all levels on crisis management. This includes the support for creation of dedicated DRM units at local government level with the mandate to manage crises; redeveloping and strengthening national and state-level crisis coordination mechanisms; enhancing community-level capacities on early warning in the onset of crises; strengthened capacities of Mayors and local government staff on crisis communication and leadership; and enhanced capacity of media actors on information sharing in times of crises.



Fostering Resilient Crisis Management

Where
St. Maarten
When
2022-2024

St Maarten is frequently affected by various types of crisis such as hurricanes and floods, and has a high risk of earthquakes and tsunamis. This project contributed to enhancing information sharing between government entities; established self-sustaining crisis management training and education capacities; strengthened crisis management capacity with clear standard operating procedures (SOP) for various types of crises; and endorsed shared principles for crisis coordination among regional actors.

The project implemented a multi-level support trajectory that worked towards self-sufficiency by enhancing individual, institutional and regional capacities. It had specific attention for embedding results by ensuring strategies and policies were adopted and ownership of what has been achieved lies at the Government of St Maarten.

Local Government Resilience Programme for the Middle East and North Africa (LoGOREP)

Where

Jordan
Lebanon

When

2015-2019

The aim of the LoGOREP programme was to alleviate pressures on both the host and Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon and Jordan by strengthening the resilience of the municipalities serving them. The project brought knowledge and experience of Dutch, Jordanian and Lebanese municipal staff together and, following the specific needs on the ground, complemented it with national and international expertise. This colleague-to-colleague approach with training courses and exchange programmes between municipalities was complemented with concrete investments in infrastructure and service delivery. The project builds on experience working with refugees and their home communities from the earlier International Municipal Assistance to Al Za'atari Refugee Camp and Local Governments in Al Mafraq Governorate (2014-2016).

The LoGOREP project included support on crisis management at various levels. Examples are trainings on crisis communication and leadership for Mayors from Lebanon and Jordan; support to the revision of the SPHERE handbook for humanitarian actors from the perspective of urban environments and coordination with local government; supporting crisis management with a longer term municipal perspective through scenario planning; contributing to the development of a framework of engagement between local governments and humanitarian actors; and peer exchange between Jordanian and Lebanese Mayors on crisis management.

A sample of VNG International's key products on crisis management and recovery:

- Guidelines on the development of recovery and development plans
- Procurement manuals for post-disaster or crisis situations
- Dilemma games for public leaders on decision making in crisis situations, to enhance crisis management leadership
- Crisis communication trainings for public leaders on addressing the public when crises strike
- Scenario planning tools to inform decision-making and enhance crisis preparedness
- Simulation exercises to enhance capacities of local governments in crisis management and working with humanitarian actors
- Capacity assessments of local governments on crisis management and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms





**Vereniging van
Nederlandse Gemeenten International**

Nassaulaan 12
2514 JS Den Haag
+31 70 373 84 01

vng-international@vng.nl
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