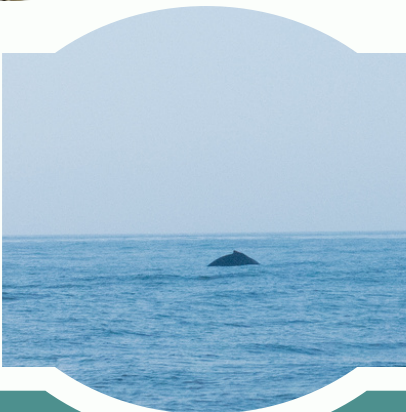


CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY IN PRIORITY LANDSCAPES OF OAXACA AND CHIAPAS



PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Start Date

JANUARY 2018

Period

GEF 6

Implementing Agency

CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

Country

MEXICO

Executing Agencies

COMMISSION OF NATURAL
PROTECTED AREAS — SOUTHERN
BORDER, ISTHMUS AND SOUTH
PACIFIC REGION (CONANP) AND
CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL
MEXICO, A.C

Focal Area

BIODIVERSITY

GEF Grant Amount

USD \$7,219,450

Cofinance Amount

USD \$47,340,000

GEF Project ID

9445

PROJECT MAP

2.6 million hectares

- SIERRA SUR AND ISTHMUS OF OAXACA: **953,000 HECTARES**
- SIERRA MADRE OF CHIAPAS: **806,000 HECTARES**
- PACIFIC COAST OF OAXACA AND CHIAPAS: **857,000 HECTARES**





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PROJECT SUMMARY

In 2018, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) approved the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity in Priority Landscapes of Oaxaca and Chiapas project created by Conservation International Mexico (CI Mexico) and the Mexican government's Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT). CI is the project's implementing agency (IA), acting as a representative for the GEF in creating the project proposal and managing activities. SEMARNAT and the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) are involved in the on-the-ground work with CI to execute this endeavor.

Located in the southeastern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, the project intervenes in an area of 2.6 million hectares that stands out for its rich biological and cultural diversity. This project's objective is to strengthen the conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the National System of Protected Areas and related corridors through integrated management of Oaxaca and Chiapas's culturally diverse coastal and terrestrial landscapes. This project aims to conserve this diversity by protecting 15 key species vital to the area.

The project has three components:

- Component 1: Integrated management of three priority landscapes for strengthening biodiversity conservation through land-use planning and the expansion and management of protected areas.
- Component 2: Mainstreaming models of sustainable production with a market-driven value chain approach in agriculture, fishing, aquaculture, forest, and tourism activities, as a pillar of integrated management of the three priority landscapes.
- Component 3: Increasing financial sustainability in the integrated management of the three priority landscapes.

15 KEY SPECIES PROTECTED BY THE PROJECT



Tapir
(*Tapirus bairdii*)



Green Macaw
(*Ara militaris*)



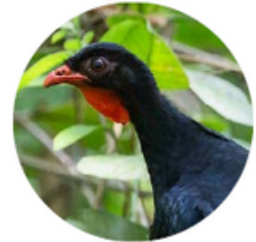
Violet-crowned parrot
(*Amazonas finschi*)



Mangrove
(*Avicennia bicolor*)



Cardelina
(*Cardellina versicolor*)



Pava paujil
(*Penelopina nigra*)



Olive Ridley Turtle
(*Lepidochelys olivacea*)



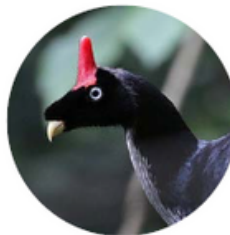
River Crocodile
(*Crocodylus acutus*)



Cicada
(*Cerotozamia norstogii*)



Thorny Palm
(*Dioon merolae*)



Peacock
(*Oreophasis derbianus*)



Jaguar
(*Pantera onca*)



Pine
(*Pinus strobus* var. *chiapensis*)



Laud Turtle
(*Dermochelys coriacea*)



Spider Monkey
(*Ateles Geoffroyi*)



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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT BENEFITS

The project takes place in three priority landscapes: the Sierra Madre of Chiapas, the Sierra Sur and Isthmus of Oaxaca, and the Pacific South Coast. The states of Oaxaca and Chiapas were chosen based on their incredible species diversity but increasing environmental degradation. Oaxaca and Chiapas host some of the country's highest biological richness, with 5,053 animal and plant species in Chiapas and 9,235 species in Oaxaca being recognized of international importance.

The main economic activities are the production of coffee, corn, livestock, timber, non-timber forest products, fishing, commercial agriculture (livestock, oil palm, plantations of fruit trees), the provision of tourist services (a sector on the rise), and the production of subsistence agriculture. The project builds upon established biodiversity conservation in Mexico, by integrating the economic perspective in landscape management and complementing the conventional protected area's (PAs) approach to production landscapes and market linkages. Since 2018, tools, instruments, and inputs have been generated to help the formulation of public policies that help make better decisions in landscapes. CI Mexico staff relayed that historically, there were inefficient public policies to implement integral landscape management and incorporate sustainable use and conservation. The project, CONANP, state governments, and other civil society organizations (CSOs) have worked together to develop procedures and Conservation Agreements (CAs) with long-term goals of protecting ecosystems, their ecological and economic values, and improving communities' well-being.

There are obstacles to sustainable use and conservation progress where the project is currently building systems to strengthen:

- Due to a prior lack of monitoring and evaluation systems at the landscape level, the project is developing monitoring activities and applying practical tools to each protected natural area in the coastal landscape
- Inadequate financing has hindered the promotion of sustainable land use practices. In the case of fishing, it has been possible to have funding from CSOs for the promotion, adoption, and development of good fishing practices in the territory, the management of fishery products, and the assessment of fishery sustainability

- Insufficient public funding and inefficient allocation to support the management of PAs have been constant issues. The main stakeholders are aware of the benefits in biodiversity conservation, and this matter has been strengthened thanks to the joint work with CONANP.
- Weak governance and participation of stakeholders at different levels have also been strengthened, thanks to collaborative work in territorial planning and the accompaniment of the Oaxaca and Chiapas state governments.
- The project's work with the advisory councils of the natural protected areas and alternative councils such as the council and network of wetland has grown significantly

These plans will improve climate mitigation and adaptation goals in Oaxaca and Chiapas. The project's benefits are projected to increase the green infrastructure in these landscapes, support sustainable production activities that are low in carbon emissions, and diversify productive activities, which help build resilience in communities.



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PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the project's inception in 2018, all three components have achieved progress. The project's key results to date:

- Oaxaca and Chiapas state governments have coordinated land-use plans that will cover **3.7 million ha**
- **35,794 ha certified**, with ongoing processes to certify **143,999 ha** by the end of the project (including new protected areas through voluntary community involvement)
- **15 monitoring protocols** are under implementation, including platforms for information sharing
- Two CAs signed, and five additional ones are underway
- **Establishment of Governance Bodies** in Chiapas and Oaxaca - entities that strengthen governance at the local level and improve the coordination among the institutions
- Donation of equipment (Café Capitan); Impact assessments (Luchadores del Castaño de Cooperative and Huatulco fishing cooperatives)
- **16 new** biological monitoring brigades
- **Fairtrade certification** and purchase of 18 T of coffee by Coffee Teams

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Following GEF policy, CI, as the IA, is required to perform supervision visits to evaluate the technical and financial progress of the project and give recommendations that help achieve the targets and adaptive management measures as needed.

Over the course of eight days, the CI-GEF team visited and learned from five producer organizations that are working with the project in tourism, fisheries (Coastal Landscape), cocoa (Sierra Sur Landscape), and coffee (Sierra Sur and Sierra Madre Landscape). The team spoke with and learned from organizations working in the cocoa, coffee, and fish value chains throughout the three landscapes. They met the small business owners and tasted the products these organizations produced with assistance from the project's interventions. Gaining first-hand experience on how these organizations benefitted from project support was crucial to learning the positive impact the project can have on landscape development, socio-political conservation issues, and advantageous income generation for communities.

This section showcases some of those examples.



RITO CHOCOLATERIA



In Oaxaca City, the team met with an artisanal shop owner, Flor Heras, whose personal experience has ties to the longstanding history chocolate has had in Oaxaca. Flor is a third-generation chocolate maker, and her family has over 30 years experience of working in this area.

Oaxaca is known as a chocolate capital, but most of the cocoa produced comes from Chiapas or Tabasco. "That's why we wanted to work with the project," Flor said, "it was important to produce chocolate that was all-Oaxacan." Rito Chocolateria buys raw cacao from Oaxacan producers like UCIRI, and produce it in their Oaxaca City shop.

The project has acted as a facilitator in the process of connecting the community and the producers of cocoa with buyers like Flor, who transform cocoa into a variety of products in their shop - everything from bars to ice cream and chocolate drinks. In Oaxaca, most chocolate is consumed as a beverage, but Rito Chocolateria wanted to find a way to add a new variety for the people of Oaxaca to try. Flor also introduced specialty products such as the Reina Negra bars to celebrate the African influence on chocolate's history in Oaxaca.



FLOR HERAS
OWNER

SANTA MARIA GUIENAGATI AND UCIRI



ADVCs, or Area(s) Designated for Voluntary Conservation, are essential to the project. Deep in the Sierra Sur, the indigenous community of Santa Maria Guienagati was the first group to become an ADVC and has the most significant communal certification in the country. A benefit of the project's shift to this mechanism is that ADVCs do not depend on the decreasing budget of Mexico's environmental agencies. Additionally, the ADVC Fund will ensure the ADVCs receive financing, further increasing the sustainability of the project's impacts.

During the CI-GEF visit, the communities expressed their excitement about the project but also the difficulties they had faced, and also their difficulties. They wanted CI and CONANP to address the 15 focused species and those that affected specific regions, like the Coati and the boar in the Sierra Sur. They also spoke about the bureaucracy and the added difficulty that brings to project implementation. Guienagati, with the help of CONANP, hopes to work toward having a document that transcends local governments and the needs of other municipalities, focusing solely on flora and fauna conservation. In the past, regional public policies have hindered the progress of activities, generated confusion, and are sometimes contrary to the proposals of NGOs. These policies have gone on to prevent some activities due to differing viewpoints and interests in community development. Santa Maria Guienagati, CONANP, and CI hope to change that.

One PO in Guienagati, UCIRI, Unión de Comunidades de la Region del Istmo (Union of communities of the Isthmus region), held a wealth of knowledge that made them integral examples of ADVCs to follow. UCIRI's experience, dedication, and close working relationship helped develop one of the two successful CAs of the project. The PO is the oldest of its kind in Oaxaca, with over 30 years of experience in cocoa and coffee production. The leaders spoke about how they were impressed with the projects' ability to find a role for themselves within the already established practices they have shaped. The majority of Uciri's population is 50+, and this project's resources have helped engage the youth to keep this way of life alive in this region as they counter against professions that take young people away from agricultural lifestyles.

CI Mexico's team worked hard to mix the project's goals with the needs of these regions and traditional practices. CI Mexico project technician Eduardo Sanchez said, "in the period of time that we have been in the project, it has allowed us to plant the bases to generate significant changes in the long term. However, these are complicated to develop due to the changing conditions in social and economic issues. In the future, (we) hope the project will be able to generate the capacities so that the communities can manage their territory in the long term."

CAFE CAPITAN AND CASA CAFE



Further south in Chiapas, the CI-GEF team visited Jaltenango de la Paz, home of the Café Capitán cooperative and one of their partners, Casa Café. The cooperative started in 2017, but the 437 member producers have grown coffee in the southern state for over 36 years. This cooperative was particularly impressive in the project because of its diversity, with 34.8% of members being women, and its ability to immerse young people in the production cycle. Café Capitán is led and coordinated by many people under 30. Getting the youth trained in sustainable use practices strengthens project longevity and impacts state conservation.

Café Capitán's post-production improvements have helped create a unique taste, which allows them to increase the price, leading to improved livelihoods of the cooperative members. After the project supported the certification with fair trade, partnerships with USAID and Root Capital were formed to ensure Café Capitán continued to receive financing. Enhancing CI's relationship with USAID and their project in the Sierra Sur has complemented the funding, expedited project objectives, and assisted in exposure to new markets that have allowed Café Capitán to increase profits by exporting part of their coffee production to Belgium.

Because of these industry demands, many of the best Mexican coffee beans get exported, so locally consumed coffee is usually not of the best quality. Casa Café was created to teach the consumer what good coffee is, give the beans an origin story to communicate their traceability, and, most importantly, share exceptional coffee with residents.

The partnership came about by both organizations wanting to share fairtrade-certified and internationally recognized coffee with their home communities. Like Rito Chocolateria, Café Capitán and Casa Café wanted to keep activities local, and the project has helped procure equipment for the cooperative to process their coffee in Jaltenango.

Casa Café and Café Capitán attribute the project and its resources to their growth and visibility. CI-Mexico regional manager Eri Ortiz said, "currently, the biggest challenge [has been] the presence of interested markets in the project's value chains." The project has "strengthened [local producers] with managerial and leadership skills, supporting [product] promotion and ambitions in the search for new markets." Café Capitán hopes the project continues to foster opportunities that improve regional quality of life through the continued development of value chains and accessible markets.

LUCHADORES DEL CASTAÑO COOPERATIVE



The Luchadores del Castaño cooperative is a fishing community located in the La Encrucijada Biosphere Reserve in Chiapas. The region is home to the largest mangrove forest in North America.

Over the last four years, the cooperative has worked with CONANP to make fishing practices more sustainable. Fishing is the main activity in this region, and fishers have been using methods passed down for generations. The community began to recognize that the production was suffering even during times of large volume. To combat this, the project and fishing cooperative established fishing refuge zones, similar to nurseries, where nobody would fish until the catch reached a specific size, matured, and laid eggs. If the production of a particular variety is low, the cooperative agreed to stop fishing it entirely, so it has a chance to repopulate.

The goal of Luchadores del Castaño fishers is to be able to process catch locally and keep all production in the community, which would lower costs and increase profits. CI, CONANP, and regional partner Smartfish have helped move towards this dream of a community processing plant. People are interested in the product being fished here because of the cooperative's story and the network of partnerships they have built. The current problem is the remote location of the mangrove and the lack of infrastructure necessary to prepare the catch for the long journey to major cities in Mexico and beyond.

CI, CONANP, and Smartfish have taught the cooperative monitoring techniques to improve their catch and production while keeping the mangrove healthy. Every 20 to 30 meters, fishers will check the water quality, observe what species thrive in which area, and around what time of the year that species flourishes. Throughout communities in Chiapas, you will find different catching techniques are encouraged for specific breeds because the fishing method can determine the taste and, therefore, the price.

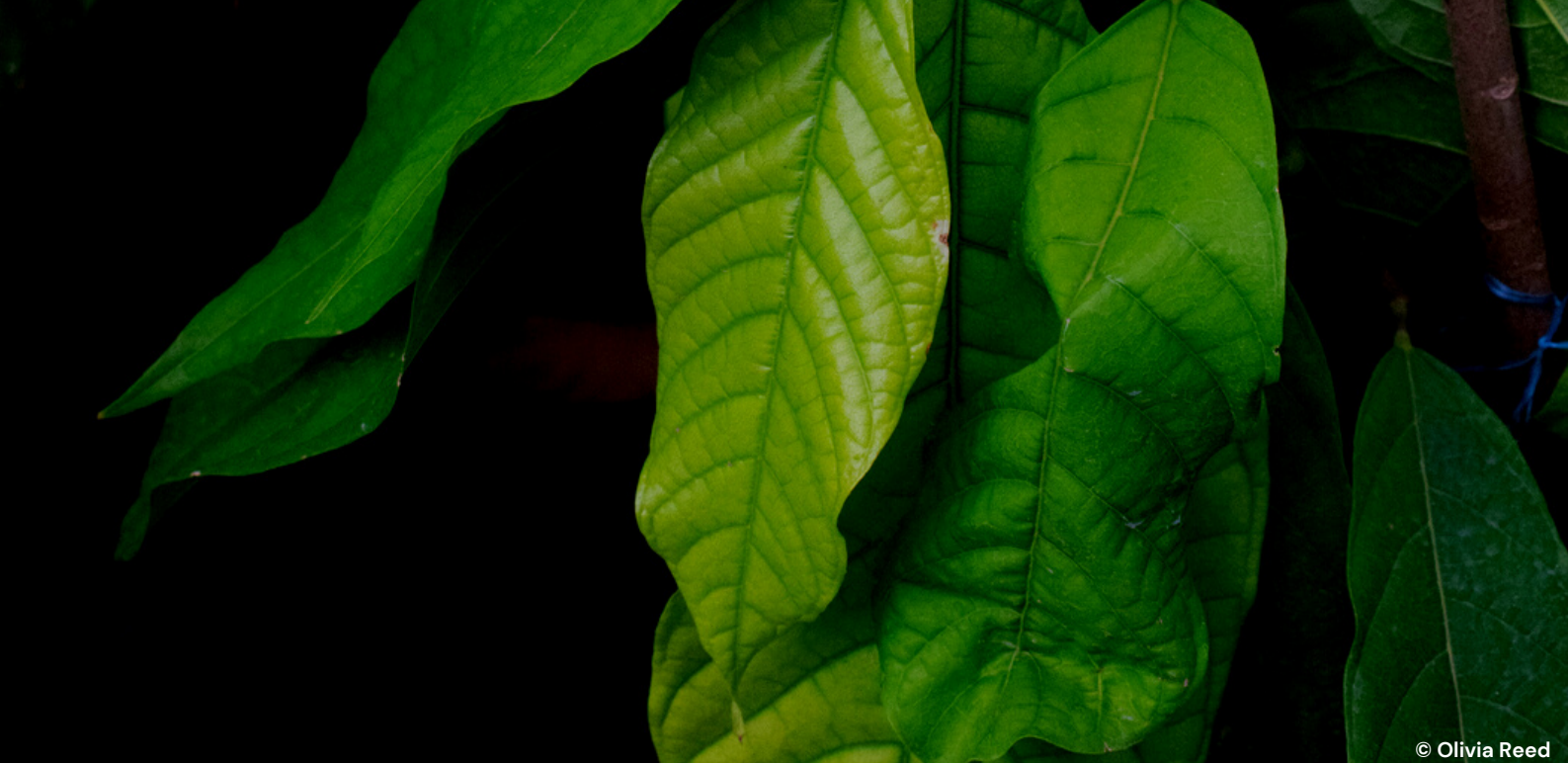
The community can only produce 100 kilos a week; they have looked toward the project for ways to still be productive, increase their profit, and keep the mangrove healthy with sustainable practices.

For Luchadores del Castaño, the next step in their development is a cold processing plant. For the catch to reach the consumers, cold chain infrastructure, such as freezers, cold containers, and vacuum sealers, are necessary installations for the Luchadores del Castaño supply chain. The community already has the space, and the project's resources look to get a processing plant set up within the year. The project is helping them access markets with Smartfish and has given funds to purchase equipment to ensure an accurate cold chain of products coming from El Castaño.

Because of their drive for sustainability, the uniqueness of the mangrove, the cooperative, and the network of partnerships they have built, the Luchadores del Castaño cooperative has amassed a base of interested parties in the products here. They want to become a model in this area since several fishing communities will catch fish too early before the species can replenish or use techniques considered cruel, like drowning the catch.

This year, the Luchadores del Castaño cooperative hopes to start formulating a brand for their product and processes that significantly impact the families that live here, all while being more sustainably conscious. The project has helped coach the community on the importance of selling under their brand and the value in potential consumers understanding how their sustainability makes them different from other fisheries in Mexico. As the CI-GEF team spoke with the community, they reflected on how the project has changed their perspective; how they think more big picture about the health of the whole mangrove and what that means for their futures.





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LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSIONS

During project implementation, major lessons have been learned that will shape the future of this project.

Lesson 1

COVID-19 produced significant challenges in the past few years. The value chains were impacted as the distribution and storing processes were halted during the pandemic. The trust created between the project and the communities was also jeopardized when the project's staff could not visit the communities.

The project developed a mitigation and adaptation strategy to keep the project alive and combat some of these challenges. For example, it used non-conventional communication channels such as WhatsApp groups with key local stakeholders and CONANP staff to calm community fears of abandoned project activities.

Lesson 2

There is essential value in relationships built with CONANP, the Project Management Units, and community members, which facilitates trust, expedites the authorization of the assemblies and unifies CAs. It establishes solid communication channels between the parties and allows for collaboration in activities. Historically, public policies were inefficient in implementing integral landscape management and incorporating the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity. However, the deliberate involvement of consultants, technicians, and local NGOs during the implementation phase has strengthened trust between the productive organizations and the operational team, allowing effective management to move forward.

Lesson 3

The socio-political diversity of the landscapes (eg. organizational, management, logistics, unintended favoring of some productive groups from public policy, etc.) was not considered in the initial project design. Understanding these dynamic conditions meant a more significant investment of time in the team to understand the context of each territory and define the appropriate processes for each case.

The CI Mexico staff expressed that with or without the project, looming institutional interests are always present. They hope it is possible to establish synergies through sustainable development initiatives, creating social participation spaces where the producer organizations are directly involved, and agreements can be validated between all interested parties.

Establishing communication within and between teams to create concrete definitions of operational processes would have assisted with differing opinions at the beginning of implementation. This was addressed by having meetings with relevant stakeholders and defining the roles among partners, allowing for better cooperation within the implementing teams and engagement of relevant local actors. Learning from this, it was expressed that sessions could take place at the beginning of the project to better understand the particular context of the sites and stakeholder interests.

Lesson 4

The project has placed significant efforts to ensure the information and knowledge collected, such as those raised by the Landscape Assessment Framework, returns to the local stakeholders. Technical Manager Ramon Flores said, “The project's future depends on the strategies that can be given by the POs revolved around strengthening dialogues and training.” This project ensures that long-standing initiatives are founded on local knowledge and collaboration.

For example, during an economic and financing consultancy for fisheries on the coast, an instance had occurred where there had been widespread confusion and distrust as to why the consultants had asked for information viewed as intimate or irrelevant. When the consultancy returned the results, community members were put at ease, because the results helped many contextualize the reason behind the questions. Thanks to the work with the territorial planning and the governments of Oaxaca and Chiapas, this helped boost trust between the fishers and agencies, creating positive dialogue in future activities.



Lesson 5

The likelihood of the project's impacts being sustainable long term has been significantly secured by several decisions taken during the implementation phase. For example, the project pushed for the Land Use Planning (POET) methodology that will be applied in the States of Oaxaca and Chiapas to use a more inclusive landscape perspective. This allowed the POETs to shift to evaluating the environmental, social and economic impact of the landscape as a whole, extending from the original 2.4 million ha to 3.7 million ha, to comprehensively evaluate the landscape's full range.

Another surprising factor that has facilitated long-term project sustainability was the market incentive. For example, in the Coast, fishing communities are carrying out legislative processes to establish legally-binding Fishing Refuge Zones to improve their fishing catch in the long term. Field technician Karla Bazan stated that "having generated strategic alliances and innovation processes through the project, the connection of markets with the productive projects that are in the territories has set the tone and allowed allies to understand these processes differently. Now it is understood that production and markets must go hand in hand to achieve real integral sustainability within the territories. The future of the project I see in the adoption in the way of doing things, we have all trained and I believe that most of the allies have realized where the trends are going and what is the route to continue strengthening together."

For CI Mexico and the communities, these projects mean an opportunity and a model to show positive changes in sustainable land use and conservation. This project "means possibilities to generate solutions for conservation through the association with different actors within these territories. We have understood ourselves as part of a DNA that cannot be one without the other. What impacts within a site affect the entire biological corridor or landscape. We must work in partnership to be able to preserve these landscapes collaboratively," says Bazan. "[This project means a] great love for nature and culture, also a great responsibility to continue working on conserving all the biodiversity that exists in Oaxaca and Chiapas."



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