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Transforming Social Capital Through Community Education: Strengthening Development Capacity In Iwon Indigenous Village, Papua

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Abstract:

This article examines how social capital within an Indigenous community can be transformed into development capacity through community education in Iwon Indigenous Village, Gresi Selatan District, Jayapura Regency, Papua. Using a qualitative case study, the analysis draws on a 2024 social empowerment feasibility study, participatory observation, interviews, group discussions, and policy documents. The field component involved 16 purposively selected informants: one customary leader/head of clan, four village officials, two women representatives, four youth, and five active community members. Analysis focused on trust, social networks, customary leadership, local knowledge, and collective learning processes. Findings show that social capital does not automatically translate into development capacity. In Iwon, internal agreement and customary leadership supported engagement with government over telecommunications infrastructure, while participatory learning organized local knowledge into shared priorities. Community education therefore functions as a mechanism through which bonding social capital can be converted into bridging and linking capacities. The study contributes by specifying this learning-mediated conversion pathway and underscores the need for empowerment models integrating adult learning, participation, local culture, and institutional capacity building..



Introduction (مقدمة)

Indigenous community empowerment cannot be understood merely as the delivery of programs, assistance, or infrastructure. In communities with strong social structures, value systems, customary leadership, and local knowledge, development is also a process of social learning. Community members need spaces in which to interpret the problems they face, connect local experience with new information, negotiate priorities, and build collective capacity for decision-making. This perspective positions community education as a substantive component of empowerment rather than an additional activity introduced after development programs have already been defined.

Iwon Indigenous Village in Gresi Selatan District, Jayapura Regency, provides a relevant context for examining the relationship among social capital, community education, and development capacity. Jayapura Regency Regional Regulation No. 1 of 2022 on Indigenous Villages explicitly identifies Iwon as one of the Indigenous villages and affirms that Indigenous villages have governance systems grounded in local wisdom and customary practices. The regulation also recognizes the Customary Village Development Planning Deliberation as a participatory forum for agreeing on strategic programs. Accordingly, customary institutions are not merely expressions of cultural identity; they also have the potential to serve as arenas for learning, deliberation, and development planning.

In social capital theory, relationships of trust, norms of reciprocity, networks, and cooperation can generate collective resources that support joint action (Putnam, 2000). Bourdieu (1986) further conceptualizes social capital as resources embedded in relatively durable networks of relationships. However, the existence of networks and trust does not by itself create the capacity to plan development, manage programs, access services, or negotiate with external institutions. Social capital may remain confined to internal ties unless it is connected to knowledge, skills, information, and cross-institutional networks.

This is where community education becomes important. Community education can be understood as a learning process rooted in people's lived experiences, conducted dialogically, and oriented toward developing the capacity to understand and act on shared problems. Freire (2000) rejects educational approaches that position participants as passive recipients of knowledge. Instead, learning should cultivate critical awareness through dialogue and reflection on experience. This principle is consistent with adult learning approaches that treat participants' experiences as learning resources and emphasize the direct relevance of learning to real-life needs (Knowles et al., 2015).

In community-based empowerment, such learning can occur through social mapping, group discussions, the identification of assets and problems, analysis of options, planning, and reflection on the implementation of activities. Chambers (1997) emphasizes participatory approaches that reposition community members from objects of data collection to actors who analyze their own realities. Pretty (1995) likewise shows that participatory learning not only generates information but also develops collective capacity to design actions and institutions that are more adaptive. Community education therefore functions as a mechanism for transforming local knowledge and social relations into competencies for action.

The context of Iwon demonstrates that capacity-building needs are closely tied to access to development. Public information concerning planned telecommunications development in Iwon, for example, indicates that the community had previously experienced limited telephone and internet coverage, requiring residents to travel to

other locations to obtain access. At the same time, the land provision process for the infrastructure involved customary leaders, village officials, and community members through collective agreement. This example highlights two important dimensions: limited external access and existing internal capacity in the form of customary leadership, deliberation, and willingness to engage in collective action. The challenge is to determine how these internal assets can be developed into broader capacities to plan, manage, and evaluate development.

Studies of Indigenous community empowerment in Papua have emphasized the importance of customary institutions, local wisdom, participation, and capacity building. Silubun et al. (2024) demonstrate the importance of customary governance systems in empowering the Marind Indigenous community. Tambajong et al. (2025) position Indigenous knowledge as an important resource for human capacity development and public governance. Simangunsong et al. (2024) also show that learning and empowerment in South Papua communities need to be developed through stages of observation, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Meanwhile, Wahyudin et al. (2025) found that technical guidance incorporating discussion and practice can improve local institutional administrators' understanding of social mapping, preliminary assessment, feasibility studies, and planning for the empowerment of Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT). Taken together, these studies clarify the importance of customary governance, Indigenous knowledge, staged learning, and technical capacity building, but they do not sufficiently explain how learning processes transform dense internal ties into outward-facing development capacities.

Nevertheless, an analytical gap remains concerning the educational mechanism that links social capital to development capacity. Many studies stop at the assertion that trust, networks, solidarity, and local wisdom constitute important forms of capital. A more operational question, however, is how such capital is converted into the capacity to identify needs, formulate agendas, manage information, build partnerships, and broaden access to resources. Without an explanation of this conversion process, social capital risks being treated normatively as a force that automatically produces empowerment. The research gap, therefore, lies not in demonstrating that social capital matters, but in explaining the mechanism through which it is transformed into development capacity. The novelty of this study is to conceptualize community education as that mediating mechanism: bonding social capital expressed in trust, kinship, reciprocity, and customary legitimacy is activated through participatory learning and extended into bridging capacity with horizontal partners and linking capacity with government and other resource-holding institutions.

This article aims to analyze community education as a mechanism for transforming social capital into development capacity in Iwon Indigenous Village. Specifically, it addresses three questions. First, which social assets have the potential to serve as resources for learning and collective action? Second, through what learning processes can these assets be converted into development competencies? Third, how can these processes strengthen internal community relations while simultaneously enhancing the community's capacity to engage with external institutions and resources? This focus is expected to clarify the place of community education and capacity building within Indigenous community empowerment while strengthening the study's relevance to broader discussions of community education and learning.

**Method (منهج)**

This article employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. The case examined is the empowerment and capacity-building process in Iwon Indigenous Village, Gresi Selatan District, Jayapura Regency. A case study design was selected because it allows in-depth analysis of the relationships among local social structures, community learning processes, and development capacity within a specific cultural context. The study does not seek to measure program impact quantitatively; rather, it aims to understand the process through which social capital is transformed through learning and participatory practices.

The primary material for the analysis derives from documentation of a 2024 social empowerment feasibility study concerning the community in Iwon Village, notes from discussions and field observations, and documentation of activities related to identifying community needs and potential. These data were supplemented by a review of Indigenous village regulations, academic literature on social capital, adult education, participatory learning, and capacity building, as well as public sources relevant to development access in Iwon. The use of multiple source types was intended to provide contextual triangulation and to avoid drawing conclusions from a single form of evidence.

Information gathering during the field study broadly followed a participatory logic. Interviews and dialogue were used to elicit the perspectives of community members and local stakeholders concerning needs, barriers, social assets, and development priorities. Group discussions served as spaces for sharing experiences, clarifying information, and developing a shared understanding. Observation was used to examine relationships, forms of participation, the role of local leadership, and deliberative practices. Documentation, meanwhile, was used to trace institutional rules and the programmatic development context affecting the community. The field component involved 16 informants selected purposively based on their knowledge of and involvement in village social life and development: one customary leader/head of clan, four village officials, two women representatives, four youth, and five active community members.

Thematic analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the data were organized into categories of social assets, development needs, learning processes, and forms of capacity. Second, social assets were differentiated according to their functions as bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Third, learning processes were analyzed using a community education framework encompassing experiential dialogue, participatory mapping, knowledge exchange, reflection, problem-solving, and action planning. Fourth, the relationships between learning processes and changes in capacity were synthesized to explain pathways through which social assets may be converted into development capacity. The analysis is interpretive and is not intended to claim causal change unsupported by quantitative data.

Analytical credibility was strengthened by comparing field information, institutional documents, and relevant literature. Context-specific findings were distinguished from conceptual propositions. In this way, the article seeks to ensure that its emphasis on community education does not artificially recast field activities as a

formal training program. Community education in this study is understood more broadly as a collective learning process that takes place through participatory facilitation, deliberation, reflection, and shared decision-making.

Result (نتائج)

3.1 Social Capital as Infrastructure for Community Learning

The analysis indicates that social capital in Iwon Indigenous Village can be understood as social infrastructure for community learning. This infrastructure primarily consists of customary leadership, deliberative mechanisms, relationships of trust, kinship networks, shared norms, and local knowledge. These elements enable information to circulate, decisions to be negotiated, and collective action to gain legitimacy. From a community education perspective, these assets are important because learning does not take place in a social vacuum. Learning occurs through relationships, recognized authority, shared experience, and the community's own social language.

Regional regulations governing Indigenous villages strengthen the position of these institutions. The head of an Indigenous village is held by the *ondoafi*, and the Indigenous Village Council serves as a customary deliberative body. The regulation also defines the Customary Village Development Planning Deliberation as an annual participatory forum for agreeing on strategic programs. Institutionally, therefore, there is an existing space that can function not only for administration but also for social learning. Deliberative forums can provide opportunities for community members to assess previous development experiences, compare needs across groups, examine new information, and formulate collective decisions.

Within Putnam's (2000) framework, these internal relationships can be categorized as bonding social capital because they strengthen solidarity and coordination within the community. Bonding is crucial for building trust, a sense of belonging, and willingness to cooperate. However, bonding has limitations when it is not connected to external networks. A community may be highly cohesive while still facing limited access to services, information, technology, and development resources. Capacity building must therefore extend the function of social capital beyond internal cohesion so that it becomes a bridge to other forms of knowledge and institutions.

Iwon's experience with telecommunications needs illustrates this logic. Limited telephone and internet access demonstrates that internal social cohesion cannot substitute for external connectivity. At the same time, the community's ability to articulate its needs, involve the *ondoafi*, reach agreement on land, and communicate with government authorities illustrates the potential transformation of internal social capital into linking social capital. This process is more than an administrative interaction. It involves learning how needs are formulated, which actors hold authority, what requirements must be met, and how the community can negotiate with larger institutions. More concretely, the collective agreement on land for telecommunications infrastructure illustrates how trust and customary authority operated together. Existing relations of trust supported internal consensus, while the *ondoafi* provided customary legitimacy and linked local decision-making to formal communication with government actors. The process also became a practical learning arena in which community members

clarified authority, requirements, and negotiation procedures, thereby converting internal bonding resources into linking capacity (Janggo, 2023).

Accordingly, the strength of social capital lies not only in the existence of relationships but also in their capacity to function as a medium of learning. Kinship networks can accelerate the dissemination of information; customary leadership can legitimize learning processes; deliberation can serve as a method of reflection; norms of reciprocity can support collaborative work; and local knowledge can provide the basis for designing relevant programs. When these elements are deliberately facilitated, social capital shifts from a latent asset to an educational resource that strengthens community capacity.

Table 1. Social capital and community education functions in Iwon Indigenous Village

Social asset	Initial function	Community education process	Capacity strengthened
Customary leadership and ondoafi	Legitimacy for decision-making and social regulation	Dialogue, facilitation of deliberation, mediation between new knowledge and local values	Capacity for consensus-building and community representation
Kinship networks and trust	Cohesion, support, and internal mobilization	Experience sharing, peer learning, and information dissemination	Capacity for coordination and collective action
Customary deliberation	Collective decision-making	Problem identification, reflection, prioritization, and formulation of options	Participatory planning capacity
Local knowledge and wisdom	Understanding of the environment, resources, and social rules	Asset mapping, knowledge documentation, and integration with external information	Capacity to design context-sensitive programs
Relationships with government/partners	Access to programs and services	Learning procedures, institutional communication, negotiation, and advocacy	Bridging and linking capacities for accessing resources

3.2 Community Education as a Mechanism for Converting Social Capital

The principal finding of this article is that transforming social capital into development capacity requires an educational process. This transformation does not occur automatically simply because the community possesses solidarity or customary structures. Community education provides a sequence of activities through which social capital can be mobilized to produce new competencies. This sequence can be understood through five main processes: experiential dialogue, participatory mapping, knowledge exchange, action planning, and reflection and evaluation.

The first stage is experiential dialogue. In Freire's (2000) approach, community experience is not merely an illustration used to support content predetermined by a facilitator; rather, it is the starting point for knowledge construction. Dialogue enables community members to describe problems in their own terms, interpret their causes, and connect individual experiences with patterns experienced collectively. In Indigenous communities, dialogue also creates space to ensure that externally introduced

development concepts do not simply displace local systems of meaning. Facilitators need to begin by listening rather than instructing.

The second stage is participatory mapping. Mapping functions as a learning activity because community members do not merely provide data to facilitators; they jointly identify actors, resources, access to services, geographical barriers, patterns of relationships, risks, and opportunities. Chambers (1997) emphasizes the importance of processes that enable communities to analyze their own realities. When social maps are prepared participatorily, knowledge previously dispersed among individuals or groups can be consolidated into collective knowledge. This is a critical point at which local knowledge as a form of capital begins to be converted into analytical capacity. A second concrete example emerged from participatory discussions and social mapping in the 2024 feasibility study. Community members identified relevant actors, local resources, service-access constraints, geographic barriers, risks, and existing networks. This process reorganized dispersed experiential and local knowledge into shared information that could be used to discuss priorities and possible interventions. In this sense, local knowledge did not remain tacit; through community learning it became an analytical and planning resource for development (Dinas Sosial Kabupaten Jayapura, 2024).

The third stage is knowledge exchange and transfer. Transfer is not understood as a one-way flow of knowledge from experts to community members. In adult education, participants' experiences must be brought into dialogue with relevant new knowledge (Knowles et al., 2015). Information concerning public service procedures, program planning, administration, the use of technology, or partnership opportunities needs to be related to village conditions. Conversely, facilitators also learn from customary structures, local history, and social boundaries that determine whether an intervention is acceptable. This two-way process produces knowledge that is more contextually appropriate.

The fourth stage is action planning. Learning becomes capacity when knowledge can be used to make choices. Community members therefore need opportunities to translate problems into objectives, activities, indicators, role allocation, resource requirements, and timelines. At this stage, social capital in the form of trust and networks no longer merely sustains cohesion but becomes a resource for distributing responsibility. Customary leaders, village officials, women's groups, youth, and other actors can be assigned roles suited to their positions and competencies. Joint planning also reduces the risk that programs will be perceived as belonging solely to government agencies or external facilitators.

The fifth stage is reflection and evaluation. Capacity building does not end once community members are able to produce a plan. Sustainable capacity requires the ability to assess whether actions are working, why obstacles emerge, and what needs to be changed. Reflection transforms implementation experience into new knowledge. From a learning organization perspective, the experience-reflection-improvement cycle makes communities and their institutions more adaptive. Community education is therefore not a one-off activity but a learning cycle embedded in the development process.

These five processes demonstrate that community education bridges social assets and development capabilities. Social capital provides relationships and legitimacy, whereas education provides the process for organizing experience, generating knowledge, developing skills, and expanding options for action. When either element is absent, the

conversion process is weakened. Technical training without social trust may be difficult to apply, while solidarity without learning may remain limited to internal support and fail to generate new competencies. These findings both confirm and extend previous studies. Silubun et al. (2024) identified customary governance as an institutional foundation for Indigenous empowerment; the Iwon case adds that customary authority can also function as learning infrastructure that legitimizes collective interpretation and negotiation. Tambajong et al. (2025) emphasized Indigenous knowledge as a resource for human-capacity development; the present findings show a concrete pathway through which such knowledge is organized through mapping and dialogue before being connected to external information. Simangunsong et al. (2024) described observation, planning, implementation, and evaluation as stages of community learning; this study specifies how those learning stages can shift social capital from bonding toward bridging and linking functions. Finally, Wahyudin et al. (2025) demonstrated the value of discussion and practice in technical guidance; the Iwon case extends this insight beyond formal guidance by locating learning within customary deliberation and real development problem-solving.

Table 2. Pathways for converting social assets into development capacity

Learning stage	Main activities	Expected change	Development implications
Experiential dialogue	Discussion of problems, needs, experiences, and local values	Individual problems are understood as shared issues	Development agendas become more responsive to needs
Participatory mapping	Mapping actors, services, resources, risks, and networks	Local knowledge is organized into shared data	Priorities and strategies become more evidence-informed
Knowledge exchange	Information on services, procedures, technology, and local experience	Improved development literacy and communication capacity	Access and intervention options expand
Action planning	Objectives, activities, indicators, roles, timelines, and resources	Capacity to translate needs into operational plans	Implementation readiness and accountability improve
Reflection and evaluation	Monitoring and discussion of achievements, barriers, and improvements	Experience is transformed into new knowledge	Programs become more adaptive and sustainable

3.3 From Bonding to Bridging and Linking Capacity

Community education also plays a role in expanding the forms of social capital available to the community. Bonding social capital is important for maintaining solidarity, but contemporary development requires the capacity to engage with actors beyond the community. Bridging social capital connects groups to different networks, whereas linking social capital connects communities with institutions that possess authority or resources. For Iwon Indigenous Village, such expansion is essential because needs related to education, health, telecommunications, productive economic activities, and administration cannot all be met through internal resources.

Expanding networks requires competence. Community members need to know whom to contact, what information to prepare, how to communicate their needs, and how to ensure that partnerships continue to respect customary decision-making. This is

why network strengthening cannot be separated from institutional literacy. Community education can help translate the technical language of policy into locally understandable terms and, conversely, help the community articulate local needs in formats that can be understood by government agencies or partner organizations.

The community's communication with government authorities regarding telecommunications infrastructure needs illustrates the importance of linking capacity. The community did not simply state a need; it also developed internal agreement and provided the social preconditions for cooperation. This process shows that the capacity to access external resources is supported by internal organization. However, if this pattern is to be applied in other sectors, it needs to be institutionalized as knowledge that can be learned and replicated rather than remain dependent on particular individuals or isolated experiences.

Capacity building therefore needs to include the documentation of procedures, allocation of roles, strengthening of communication skills, and learning about rights and service mechanisms. These elements are important for reducing dependence on external facilitators. Facilitators should help communities develop the capacity to perform these functions independently. When a community can map stakeholders, prepare data, formulate proposals, manage meetings, and follow up on decisions, social capital has moved from internal relationships toward institutional development capacity.

This perspective also helps avoid romanticizing social capital. Trust and solidarity can produce exclusion when access to forums is controlled by particular groups. Community education must therefore attend to the representation of women, young people, less influential families, and groups that may not hold strong positions within formal or customary structures. A participatory learning process should not be assessed merely by the number of people in attendance, but by the extent to which diverse voices can influence decisions. In this framework, capacity building is simultaneously an effort to deepen the quality of participation.

3.4 Implications for the Design of Indigenous Community Empowerment

The analysis above has several implications for program design. First, empowerment activities need explicit learning objectives. It is not enough for a program to state that the community is involved; it should specify which competencies are to be strengthened. These may include the ability to conduct social mapping, establish priorities, interpret program information, facilitate deliberation, prepare work plans, document decisions, build networks, and conduct basic evaluation. Clear learning objectives make changes in capacity more systematically observable.

Second, learning methods should be appropriate to adult learners and the cultural context. One-way lectures should not be the primary method. Case discussions, peer learning, visual mapping, simulations of deliberation, practice in preparing plans, learning visits, and reflection on experience are more appropriate because they connect learning content with lived realities. Andragogical principles emphasize that adults learn more effectively when content is relevant to the problems they face and when their experience is valued as a source of knowledge (Knowles et al., 2015).

Third, capacity building should connect individuals with institutions. Knowledge held only by training participants may be lost when those individuals are no longer active. Learning outcomes therefore need to be converted into organizational

instruments, such as social maps, stakeholder lists, records of deliberations, action plans, monitoring formats, and simple databases. These documents function as organizational memory, enabling knowledge to be used and updated by others. In the context of Indigenous villages, such instruments should be designed in simple formats that are compatible with local deliberative mechanisms.

Fourth, local culture should be treated as a pedagogical resource. Customary structures should not only be respected as context; they can also be used as educational media. Local stories, the experiences of customary leaders, resource management practices, and local problem-solving mechanisms can serve as learning materials. At the same time, the educational process should create space for critical dialogue so that tradition can interact with emerging needs, including technological change, government administration, and economic relations. Culturally responsive community education does not freeze communities in tradition; rather, it helps them adapt while retaining the capacity to determine the direction of change.

Fifth, program evaluation should assess processes and capacities, not only physical outputs. Telecommunications towers, roads, facilities, or economic assistance are important outputs; however, from a community education perspective, it is also necessary to ask whether the processes associated with them enhance the community's capacity to plan, negotiate, manage, and evaluate subsequent development initiatives. Capacity indicators may include improvements in the quality of deliberation, the availability of regularly updated social maps, the ability to prepare data-based proposals, broader group participation, decision documentation, and the expansion of collaborative networks.

These findings are consistent with capacity-building practices for Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT), which demonstrate the importance of combining conceptual explanation, discussion, and hands-on practice (Wahyudin et al., 2025). This article extends that argument by positioning learning processes as mechanisms for converting social capital. From this perspective, social capital is not treated as a static background variable but as a resource that can be activated, expanded, and institutionalized through learning. This approach also bridges community empowerment studies with the fields of non-formal education and adult education.

For program managers in Papua, this orientation is particularly important because geographical and cultural contexts are highly diverse. Uniform models risk producing irrelevant content and instruments that are difficult to use. By contrast, a community education framework allows learning content to be built from the needs of each village. Facilitators can use a general structure consisting of assessment, dialogue, practice, reflection, and follow-up, while adapting content and examples to local social systems. This approach creates a balance between capacity-building standards and cultural flexibility.

Ultimately, sustainable empowerment requires communities and local institutions that can learn. Development continually introduces change, whether in the form of policy, technology, environmental risks, or economic opportunities. The most important capacity, therefore, is not merely the ability to implement a single project, but the ability to continuously identify change, acquire new knowledge, assess options, and make collective decisions. Community education provides a foundation for this adaptive capacity.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

Social capital in Iwon Indigenous Village is an important development resource, but it does not automatically translate into capacity. Customary leadership, kinship networks, trust, deliberation, shared norms, and local knowledge acquire developmental value when activated through collective learning processes. Community education functions as a conversion mechanism through experiential dialogue, participatory mapping, knowledge exchange, action planning, reflection, and evaluation. Through these processes, the community can not only maintain bonding social capital but also strengthen bridging and linking capacities for engaging with actors, services, and resources beyond the village. The study's main contribution is to demonstrate that community education is not merely an accompanying activity in empowerment, but the mediating mechanism that converts social relationships into development capacity. Through experiential dialogue, participatory mapping, knowledge exchange, action planning, and reflection, internal trust, customary legitimacy, and local knowledge are translated into analytical, organizational, communicative, and negotiating competencies. This explains how bonding social capital can be extended into bridging relationships with horizontal partners and linking relationships with government and institutions that control resources.

These findings affirm that Indigenous community empowerment should be designed as a continuous process of education and capacity building. Community education needs to be explicitly embedded in program objectives, methods, outputs, and evaluation. Success should therefore be measured not only by the number of activities implemented or facilities provided, but also by improvements in the community's ability to understand problems, organize knowledge, set priorities, build partnerships, and independently evaluate development.

It is recommended that local governments, facilitating organizations, and Indigenous village governments develop simple community education modules based on local cases. Content may include social mapping, participatory planning, public-service literacy, institutional communication, documentation, monitoring, and evaluation. Implementation should employ andragogical and culturally responsive learning methods and involve the *ondoafi*, the Indigenous Village Council, women, youth, and other community groups. Learning outcomes should also be institutionalized in the form of social maps, action plans, records of deliberations, and evaluation instruments so that knowledge does not remain confined to individuals. Further research is needed to measure changes in capacity longitudinally and to compare community education models across Indigenous villages in Papua. In practical terms, Indigenous community development programs should organize empowerment around a repeatable learning cycle: use customary forums and the *ondoafi* as legitimate learning spaces; map assets, actors, and access constraints with residents; involve women and youth in priority setting; translate local knowledge into social maps and action plans; document procedures and decisions; and evaluate changes in planning, negotiation, networking, and monitoring capacity rather than relying only on physical outputs. Government

agencies and facilitating organizations should support these processes without replacing customary decision-making.



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