COVID-19 Lockdown Effects on Vulnerable Groups of Umerkot and Tharparkar Districts
May 2020

Report By:
Association for Water, Applied Education & Renewable Energy (AWARE)
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## Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Effects of lockdown, caused by corona virus on the general public</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Effects of Lockdown on Private Factory Workers/ daily wages labours</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The effects of lockdown on donkey cart men</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The effects of lockdown on Farmers and Livestock handlers</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The effects of Lockdown on Masons</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The effects of lockdown on people who have sweet shops</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The effects of lockdown on Women who work of Handicraft</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The effects of lockdown on Chefs</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The effects of lockdown on drought affected people</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Suicide cases reported</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Situation of lockdown has specifically affected women and girls</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Effects on Pregnant women</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lockdown’s effects on Vulnerable People in Umerkot and Tharparkar</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Coping strategies adopted by community to combat with situations</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Quotes by Community</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Challenges, Issue and Gaps</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Immediate needs of community</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Intermediate needs of community</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Any assistance received from Government or any other organization’s:</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Main source of information of affected population regarding Coronavirus risks and preventions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Suggestions seeking to effectively cope with current situation</td>
<td>11-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Coronavirus cases in Umerkot and Tharparkar</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>List of Interviewed Persons</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>News clippings</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rationale:
The people of Umerkot and Tharparkar have always lived a difficult life, always faced water issues, basic rights to education and at present this lockdown situation has completely destroyed them. The epidemic has had a devastating effect on vulnerable people who work in the cities on a daily wage. They are worried about their livelihood; they have no other means to run their household expenses. They have never seen such trouble in their lives before but this unplanned hazard has changed their life-style. They already have many issues in their lives because they have no drinking water, no education, no health care and other basic facilities and now the lock down situation due to COVID-19 has taken away their livelihood source. From the past 60 days they have been spending free time without food and source of income. White-collar people are most affected by this situation because they can't even ask anyone for help, their shops are closed. Their children ask them for basic necessities but they cannot meet their needs due to difficult time. Corona virus epidemic has completely changed their lives, all the schedule of their lives is changed. There is not a single case of COVID-19 in most of the areas but they are all depressed by the fake rumours of media. Due to lock down their all family members are limited to home they can not go out for earning and they all are confined to their homes, "Now it seems that there is danger on both sides, if they stay at home, hunger kills and if they go out, Corona kills". Inflation is rising day by day so they are facing additional charges on groceries in all rural areas of Umerkot and Tharparkar. The shopkeepers who are selling all grocery items at high prices with low quality. The price of flour in the city is 1600 per 40 kg and they are getting in their village on more than 1900 PKR. Most of the people in rural villages face extreme poverty and they took credit on 7-10 %. Due to poverty and lack of awareness their health problem not being properly diagnosed of most of the time. They've revised their meal times, they're eating twice a day, at break-fast they're just having tea. In current situation as the Vulnerable group are mostly affected with some diseases already they are not getting the required treatment due to the lack of money. They are currently facing seven issues at the moment together 1. Lock down (Due to which their work is closed) 2. Severe Drought (They have not any fodder or seed stock for investment) 3. Health issues- Due to the closure of public transport, they cannot go for treatment in any emergency 4. Economic losses- Every household is facing severe financial difficulties which is why we haven't earned a penny in two months 4. Domestic violence increased due to lack of resources and no any earning this time 5. People of both district are suffering a lot due to closing of markets 6. They do not have backup fodder and food stocks for themselves and their livestock and 7. Inflation rate is high due to shortage of things- people from back ward areas purchasing things at higher prices.

In Tharparkar and Umerkot areas- society often responds to the “high prevalence” of food insecurity by resorting to what they call “extraordinary behaviours”—committing suicide, working as bonded labor, selling or killing dependents, and engaging in “antisocial” activities, instead impoverished young people “outraged by chronic hunger” and by the government’s inability to provide services. Currently, in last two month after lock down more than 18 people committed suicide in Umerkot Tharparkar.
Effects of lockdown, caused by corona virus on the general public:

I. Effects of Lockdown on Private Factory Workers/daily wages labours:
Most of the people of Umerkot and Tharparkar districts are working as labourers in a garment factory and other mills and hotels in Karachi. Their business is closed due to lockdown. They have been free for the last 60 days. Their wages are also closed. They are currently worried about their household rations as they have no other source of income this time. Some charity based non profitable organizations supported them and gave them some food but now it is very difficult to survive for them. During the Key Informant Interviews, one person said that: "When I see my little children then I have tears in my eyes that I can not fulfil even the slightest wish of my children," "Yesterday my child insisted me to give biscuits, when i looked in my pocket, I had no money". This situation created hazard for them, even they were not upset in the flood of 2010-11 or continues drought or others hazards but now they are very worried.

Before lockdown, they worked as a day labourer in small town. In the evening they were buying daily rations to cover the daily household expenses. This lockdown situation has made their financial situation worse.

II. The effects of lockdown on donkey cart men:
Due to complete lock down: Most of the people of Umerkot are labouring hard on donkey carts to meet their basic needs of HH who are suffering most. They were already living in extreme poverty, but for the past two months, they are facing double troubles. During conversations with this population, it has been noted: One donkey cart man quoted that:

Before lockdown, we were earning about 400 to 500 hundred rupees a day and we lived our lives happily, we never asked anyone for help in our life but this lockdown situation directly affected our income, "even we don't have money to feed the donkey".

III. The effects of lockdown on Farmers and Livestock handlers:
They all are totally dependent on agriculture farming. Most of the people of desert areas are daily wage and labour and every year in the season of wheat crop they with their wives and children use to go barrage areas for harvesting of wheat and each year they receive sufficient amount of wheat and wages. This year due to COVID-19, they had unable to go for harvesting due to unavailability of transport and lock down imposed by the government and there is no any work. Nowadays their family has no income and sometimes they sleep without food, they are helpless. They are selling their livestock to meet the food requirement in this COVID-19 situation.

I Thar areas, they doing farming on rain fed water. Lockdown situation directly affected them. It will start raining in a few days, but they don't have that much money to buy seeds. They need a lot of money to grow the land but at the moment their situation is such that they do not have a single rupee to buy seeds for the coming rains. They suffered financial losses last year due to the locust attack and this year the lockdown pandemic is destroying. They have already taken out loans that they have not yet paid due to their financial troubles. Local retailers are setting their own prices due to this they are getting very expensive seeds. Due to lockdown situation in drought affected areas, livestock is also affected in all the desert areas. The prices of fodder have been increased about 30% during last lock down days and poor families have not purchasing capacity and they are compelled to sell out their livestock on low prices. The prices of goat and sheep also have been decreased up to 30% and 40% due to closing of Mandi. Most of the families having big ruminants (Cow and Camel) before the
lockdown situation, they were moving cattle to the barrage areas for survival, but due to this panic situation livestock is also suffering because we can not move to wards cities/barrage areas in such situation.

Due to the drought, they have no fodder at home and no money to buy fodder for their livestock and there are a lot of health problems which is bothering them more than hunger if a child is sick in their houses or in village they can not even go to the hospital for their treatment.

IV. The effects of Lockdown on Masons:
They all are daily wage masons before lock down; they were doing labour in construction of different houses or buildings in town, cities and used to earn 300-400 per day to run their house hold. But after lock down, Govt has imposed ban on Govt building constructions and people have also stopped building, repairing or constructing their houses because their sources of income has closed. Completely. I am unemployed since last one and half month, my only source of income Labour work has stopped.

V. The effects of lockdown on people who have sweet shops:
Many people of daily wage labour, they were working on sweets shop and used to make sweets and were paid on daily wages of Rs 400/day. Due to Corona Virus, the shop where they worked for a daily wage are closed since one and half month and their income has completely stopped. And current time, they don't have the single penny to buy rations. During the Key informant interview, one labour shared that: “My pockets are empty” and I can’t buy medicine for my wife. It never happened in our life that we are sitting at home”. our shops are all closed, because of which we can’t even bring our home rations. I don’t know when this difficult time will get resolved. Lock down has taught us a deep lesson, our souls tremble”.

VI. The effects of lockdown on Women who work of Handicraft:
They have been affected very much, They used to earn their bread and butter by sewing clothes at their homes but due to non delivery of raw material they are unable to carry this process in this time in lock down. Their husbands are also free at home from last 60 days. The lockdown has mostly affected them in accessing health facilities as the there is no any health facility in most of the villages. If there is an emergency, then it is difficult to go without any money. The lockdown has placed an extra burden on women & girls, who already perform 3 times extra as much unpaid care work at home, compared to men. Due to lock down they are suffering from mental disturbance.

VII. The effects of lockdown on Chefs:
Due to the lockdown situation, the government banned on marriage halls. Majority people who were working as a chef in wedding halls but from the last two months they have not earned a single penny and they have no other source of income now a days.
VIII. The effects of lockdown on drought affected people:

This lockdown situation directly affected them because the things they are buying at a higher price due to limited quantity, even they are using low quality things with very expensive rates. According to the people, indirect impact of COVID-19 have also devoured the pastures of their livelihood which will result in severe crisis in the region. As per community “We are facing a double whammy. First, we suffered from long years of drought and now COVID-19 attack, our markets are closed we have no any other source to meet our daily expenses.

Suicide cases reported after lock down:

District Umerkot and Tharparkar are said to be one of the most dangerous regions of the country in terms of people’s survival. Poverty is one of the most significant factors affecting the lives of the people in this remote part of the country. More than 60 percent of population lives in extremely poor conditions and suicide ratio is also high. The impact of the Corona virus has been especially effective on those who are daily labourers. They used to earn their daily income but now a days they have not their source of livelihood, these are the people who are still in need. We have always heard that one disaster gives rise to another disaster, recently more than 25 people committed suicide in last few days in District Umerkot and Tharparkar.

Situation of lockdown due to Corona has specifically affected women and girls in Umerkot and Tharparkar Districts:

They belong to a deprived area, and more than 80 % women and girls in rural and backward villages are uneducated. The women in villages and other backward areas are not smart enough to understand the intensity of virus and its affects. Women are weak hearted, so they believe in the words of other people or fake rumours that a calamity is near. Some of the women of rural and drought affected areas have health problems. They can not even go out side to visit a doctor for check up due to an unavailability of transportation.

In Umerkot barrage areas, most of the women work in the crop fields and live on daily wages, nowadays they are completely free and due to unavailability of local transport they cannot go for field harvest. Majority women from barrage and Thar areas are doing handicrafts- They were exporting their goods (i.e. Topi, Gajj ) to Karachi and Hyderabad But the lockdown has also disrupted their business.

Most of the families have school going young girls, since last two months’ schools are closed and their education have badly affected, women of community were working embroidery work and sale it to market, since markets are closed and they are also affected.

Majority of Women and girls in rural and drought affected areas are being affected because they are not having the proper diet due to the lack of food and just because of that they are being suffering mentally as well as they don’t have anything to do at home.

Ever since the males were restricted to their homes due to lockdown situation there have been a cases of domestic violence and other violence recorded and noticed in these area. One lady shared a true story that: Some days ago, at night, there was an fight in a house near my house, the husband had beaten his wife, and we heard the sound of her beating very clearly that we have never heard such voice before.
Due to lock down, poor women taking more stress. When she arrives with her other fellow girls to withdraw money from the GoP funded Ehsas program and when her thumb impression doesn't match or doesn't work, she gets psychologically upset that everyone's money came, why didn't my money come? Then she starts beating and crying in the crowd, these are real examples - One of women died due to a heart attack at the age of 75 in the Manganhar community Umerkot due to not receiving money from the Ehsas program There are many examples of women suffering from anxiety and blood pressure.

Most of women are worried because they don't have money in their houses to run the expenses. Most of working women women have been greatly affected by the lock down situation. They have become economically weak. And they have become frustrated and mentally affected.

The district authority is restricting the movement of people and from last 60 days they are restricted to their houses even they can not go out side for the minor health treatment- There has been a culture in our Sindh that if any woman guest comes, she hugs all the family members, shake hands with love etc and these days due to social distancing and lockdown, it has disproportionately affected us more than the men. The lockdown affects women the most and older women and young girls the most affected by the current lockdown. For the majority of housewives, the "workload" increased. Many women are struggling due to the unemployment of their husbands and brothers.

Women and girls are facing many difficulties in Thar and umerkot, they used to work at home by sewing bed sheets, caps and cloths but these days they are not making any earning due to unavailability of material from the supplier and as they were earning on daily basis but due to lockdown they all are facing issues and they all mentally disturbed nowadays.

**Effects on Pregnant women:**
The Women and girls of many families in Umerkot and Tharparkar are affected specially those whose pregnant and in current situation they are not be able to maintain their proper diet which they require- In this condition the women are taking the pressure mentally as well as they are worried about how are they going to get rid of this situation.

The women of many houses have a fear in their minds that’s this virus will have a greater effect on the women compare to men, because they heard some fake rumours that the virus will directly affect pregnant women so that they are worried about their upcoming babies and some are worried because of that they don’t know when the lockdown will end when the situation returns to normal as they can go for their antenatal check-ups.

**Lockdown’s effects on Vulnerable People in Umerkot and Tharparkar Districts:**
All Vulnerable People (i.e Old Age, Disable persons and Widows) are affected because they all depends on single earning person- They all are suffering from different diseases, i.e. Blood pressure, Sugar, hypertension etc. Due to the lockdown, they cannot go out of the houses and there is more stress while their health condition is also being affected while lying in bed all the day and night and they all are living physically quite near to each other so this is putting some physiological pressure on them as well. The oldest people in many village are most affected due to lock down because an old men or women have to see a doctor. Many of such group people, their eyesight are weak but they could not visit doctor in this situation and
same is happened with old women they mostly have had a serious Knee pain but due to unavailability of local doctor they can not visit. Most of them are suffering from health problems because they are not able to go to the hospitals for check ups due to lock down. Due to lack of income, they are not able to take medicines properly.

Coping strategies adopted by community to combat with situations:

- They have limited their already needs and very worried for coming days and to deal with the situation, they are washing their hands with soap
- Maintaining social distance, no one is allowed to come to their houses in most of the villages
- Since the government and other NGOs have guided them to keep their homes and the environment clean, they follow the instructions and wash their hands with soap 8 to 10 times a day.
- They don’t move away from their homes
- They don’t shake hands with outsiders
- In the current situation, we all are doing their best and taking precautionary measures guided by NGOs/Government, most of the time they are not able to follow them because they have to go out to find work because that is their bread and butter and they have no other option to survive.

Quotes by Community:

- As, I have a baby girl of 1 year and I used to feed her milk. A few days ago my wife was sick with malnutrition issue and her milk was not enough to feed our baby so the doctor advised me to buy market milk for my baby. Due to lock down my family (My little girl and my wife are suffering) And I can't help my family because my daily income is off and” I am worried for my upcoming bad days” (Sarwan Kumar from Chelhar, District Tharparkar)

- Five months ago we have been helped by Benazeer Income Support Programme 2000 per month, but since my wife died, this card was blocked because of her thumbprint. A few days ago I re-applied to send a message to 7181 for the new Ehsas (Care) Emergency Cash Program but they responded me that you are not eligible for this scheme because your wife is registered here and eligible for this programme but currently (Pehlaj Rai from city, District Umerkot)

- One month ago, my wife, who had been battling cancer for the past five months, she died during the lockdown days. And after her death the other women in my house were very upset and embarrassed because there was nothing to eat in my house. Many women were coming to my house to offer condolences, we had a very difficult time. My family and I are currently facing a similar situation and are waiting when this hazard will go and when situation return to normal. (Loono mal from Umerkot city, District Umerkot)

- My two sons who used to work in Karachi but now a day they are also sitting free without any job at home, my house was run by both of them but at the moment we are facing difficulties to run the HH expenses. We have never seen such a difficult time in our lives. “I have also remembered the war of 71 we were not as upset in those days as we are now”. (Malhar Juenjo from Ahro Juneja, District Tharparkar)
Since lock down has imposed, I only got labour work two days and rest of the days I spent idle at home without any work; there is no any way. I have two children; one 12 year boy and a 15 years girl and my wife is old age and most of the time she remains sick and due to joint pains and old age she cannot do any work of embroidery or any other work. My son reads in 8th and his education has also affected due corona virus and his focus on education has totally diverted due long holidays. After completing the cooking and other routine work of home, my 15 years daughter does the work of embroidery in free time and she earns only 1000 to 1500 per month and now it is the only income of my home. (Phuloo from Chelhar, District Tharparkar)

As due to lock down my contribution of run the house has stopped and my daughter has to work more on embroidery, due to that her health has affected and she cannot sleep properly. And my wife remains ill most of the time and due to less income her medicines have stopped and she has more pain in joints than earlier. (Phuloo Samejo from Ahmed ji Dhani, District Tharparkar)

There is no hand pump in my house. The women of my house were fetching water from outside. But due to the current situation, they cannot go out in groups for water and they are now most affected as they cannot go for water individually. When they have to cook they are become late in cooking due to unavailability of water and then they got upset and that’s why the fights are escalating. They are beating our children in anger. The situation in our houses is also deteriorating after sitting idle at home all the day. (Rajesh Mahraj from Umerkot city, District Umerkot)

Challenges, Issue and Gaps:

- If any have an emergency at their home, they don’t have the money to use this in any emergency situation, they can’t even get help from my other siblings because everyone is in the same situation during the lockdown.
- Many old age women in these area whose fingerprints have been erased and they are deprived to get support from the Ehsas Program
- DDMA is not functional in all the districts
- Lack of contingency planning @ District level
- Availability of emergency pool funds @district level to support the most affected persons i.e. Carpenters, Masons, Donkey cart men, small sweat shops and other daily wages labours
- Since there is a lockdown situation nominated MPAs, MNAs and other elected representative never asked for any help.
- NADRA is closed and they are unable to change their cards
- Suicide cases increased due to lack of proper planning @district level
- Thar faces issue of water and other basic rights
- Fire Incidents are happening in Thar in these lock down days due to dusty winds
- No any Policy @ district to cope up the issue
Immediate needs of community:

Food Security & Livelihood
- Now they have severe need of food for their children and family members. 1. Daily Wages labourers 2. Most Vulnerable People
- Hygienic and nutritional food for pregnant and lactating women
- Medicine and support in cash to meet the daily expenses
- Boost up of their business.
- Provide the people with alternate income sources so that they may stand on their own feet and plan strategy of post corona situation
- Seeds for upcoming rain in drought affected areas
- Food supplement through providing energy biscuits to school children
- Potential to patronize can be explored a handicrafts as a source of livelihood support to purchase output and sales in urban areas might be needed

WASH
- Water at door step for drought affected people
- Proper healthy diet and clean water are the basic needs of community contemporarily.
- Antiseptic soaps
- Masks for unhealthy persons
- Disinfection, sanitizers or other chlorine spray @village Level
- Spray for locust
- Hygiene kits for schools.
- Provision of Solar Powered Reverse Osmosis plants for desalination/de-fluoridation
- More focused on remote areas particularly in Chachro, Dahli and Nangarparkar
- Long and short term strategies – PHED, Health and other relevant departments must be onboard
- Introducing Solar Powered Mobile RO service for Thar and Umerkot to receive sweet water at door step (Mostly Diesel Operated RO are non functional)
- There is a need to introduce Water Safety Plans at Village level in Thar
- Provision of WASH Kits

Health
- Provide comprehensive medical and social maternal health care for women and Girls
- Support in Referral
- Health services and counselling through professional physician. The consultant should be hire to provide counselling in each of village on the COVID-19 and other health related issues.
- Health services contain medicines for all the ill persons in affected areas

Education
- There should be virtual education system through this they can get education.
- Education for children are the immediate needs of the time
- There is a need of provide and promote sports to inculcate the children working at brick kilns so that child labor/child abuse can be demised
Intermediate needs of community:

**Personal Safety and Awareness raising**

- Moral support
- Mass awareness session in community through Pesh imam of mosque or local teachers
- The government or other stakeholders should take necessary steps/actions to deal situation like COVID-19
- They should be provided with personal safety
- Create awareness in the groups to maintain social distances and comply with the decisions taken by the government to deal with COVID-19.
- Their business/source of earning which has been closed for a month and a half
- Affected population y should be taken care with necessary health care by government.
- Govt should take the measures to provide the girls education and women shall be provided basic health facilities on their doorsteps
- Awareness raising session of COVID-19 prevention measures
- Women and girls should be given with equal access to health care necessities and should be provided with equal rights.

Any assistance/support received from Government or any other organizations:

- Only few families have received Rs. 12000 from Govt; rest of the families are still helpless
- Very few NGOs have reached and helped them and they got some food and money from them

Main source of information of affected population regarding Coronavirus risks and preventions:

- Friends and family members and somewhere through newspapers
- TV and from some mutual friends
- Social Media
- Government created web portals to keep knowledge regarding Coronavirus risks and preventions

Suggestions seeking to effectively cope with current situation:

- First of all, rations should be given to each needy and vulnerable family and then steps to be taken by the Govt or other stakeholders so that every individual should earn himself/herself.
- Government should compensate to all daily wages workers as they can meet their daily needs
- House hold survey support the actually needy persons through food items.
- There should be transparency in the selection of beneficiaries and distribution of humanitarian assistance
- In the current situation, nutritious food to women and girls needed.
- Protection cell for the working women who afraid from situation during these difficult days.
• Women and girls to be provided with equal healthcare and employment opportunities and should be supported with basic needs from government so that they can run their houses.
• Effects of COVID 19 lock down on women and girls need equal attention and response from government authorities.
• Sessions to be conducted by the local govt/NGO to make public awareness regarding COVID-19
• Virtual sessions of Media campaign on TV cables, FM radios etc
• FM Radio messages
• The Govt should guide the people how to face the situations like COVID-19 by arranging on-job awareness sessions at door step

Coronavirus cases in Umerkot and Tharparkar:

<table>
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<th>#</th>
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<th>Women</th>
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<th>Girls</th>
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## List of Interviewed Persons:

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<td>Chelhar, Tharparkar</td>
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<td>Umerkot</td>
<td>Rajesh Maharaj</td>
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<td>Maharaj Paro Punhal Nagar Umerkot</td>
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<td>Umerkot</td>
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<td>Primary</td>
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