



W/O 3/93

Campaigners for Human Rights

21 DAYS LOCKDOWN

"THEIR VOICES MATTER"

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO COVID 19 MEASURES

Week 3 Report



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1.0 Introduction

As the lockdown entered the third week in Zimbabwe, ZimRights members continue to share the experiences of how their communities are dealing with the COVID 19 measures. In this report we document how these measures have impacted women and other marginalized groups. In the context of Zimbabwe, women make the largest number of people working in the informal sector. Since Zimbabwe went on a 21-day lockdown meant to contain the spread of COVID19, it is the informal sector that has been affected most. This is because the income in the informal sector is often too little and leaves no room for savings, meaning that 21 days without any work renders many bust. With 64 percent of women in the informal sector, it is clear that they are the most affected group. In light of that, this week, reports of the continued brutality of the police, shortages, and hunger, dominate and with a focus is on women and people living with disabilities.

Last week, ZimRights documented how communities were affected by lack of adequate information. The lack of information through official channels creates unofficial information channels. This leads to the rise of fake news and misleading conspiracy theories. Most of the conspiracy theories have emerged from church groups, with leading church leaders contributing to the belief in conspiracy theories. This report covers the leadership role of the church in fighting COVID 19 as well as some citizen initiatives in response to COVID 19. The cross-cutting themes that emerge from these voices are gender, inclusion, community leadership and active citizenship. A number of recommendations emerge showing that in times of crisis, leadership is not a monopoly of the state only but also influential groups like the churches as well as ordinary citizens.



The lack of information through official channels creates unofficial information channels.



2.0 Women's Rights, role and the fight against COVID 19

The Gender Justice Question

Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution provides a strong legal framework for the promotion and attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment. Further, Zimbabwe is a state party to key regional and international human rights instruments. Despite the legal commitment to gender equality at the international, regional and national levels, women and girls in Zimbabwe continue to face a myriad of challenges in the political, social and economic spheres as a consequence of gender inequalities and imbalances.

The 2014 Zimbabwe Country Analysis Report notes that the exercise of women's rights is

negatively impacted by power imbalances in all spheres of life, among other factors. Addressing these harmful power imbalances requires proactive steps on such key steps as women's participation in politics and decision making, and women's economic empowerment, while at the same time mainstreaming gender in all other priority areas. In the economic sector, women have been badly affected by the economic upheavals for the last two decades. Hyperinflation, price increases, company closures and the general economic uncertainty rendered many unemployed, and pushed them to the informal sector.

According to a Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries 2017 survey, women are only 20% of those employed in Zimbabwe's manufacturing sector. Of these only 39% are employed full-time. Most of the women in the sector are employed as contract/non-permanent employees, which limits their opportunities for further skills training and capacity development. According to the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA), 67% of people in the informal sector are women. It is this sector that has been affected more by the current lockdown as it is characterised by small profits and constant daily operations, that if stopped, can affect the hand-to-mouth chain.



20%

Women employed in the Manufacturing Sector



39%

Women employed full-time



67%

People in the Informal Sector are Women

In Zimbabwe, cultural values and norms place women at the centre of care giving roles. Without adequate running water supplies in a large number of urban centres, women find themselves having to go and fetch water at public water points. This has put them at the risk of contracting or spreading COVID 19 and more disturbing, this has also exposed them to the heavy-handed state security agents.

The Role of Government

The Government of Zimbabwe is obliged by the constitution to ensure gender equality. This involves putting in place measures that cushion women from the resultant loss of income during the lockdown, ensuring the availability of safe, potable running water, guaranteeing access to affordable sanitary wear, and ensuring that state security agents act with restraint when dealing with the public. In addition, while government is administering the World Bank bailout to the

informal sector, questions remain on the impartiality and transparency of the process, because without that, women will suffer prejudice.

"Women's voices against harassment, deprivation of basic rights"

Throughout the week, members of ZimRights continued to speak out on the issues affecting women during this lockdown. As stated earlier in this report, women make most of the informal traders countrywide, and current as part of the lockdown, the majority of informal traders have stopped operating, and where they are operating, they are subject to the state security countrywide crackdown.

Epworth, for example, is a peri-urban residential place stretching for kilometres on the edges of Harare. This is a community that thrives on informal work, largely driven by women who sell anything from vegetables to

clothing items. Epworth typifies every low-class urban area in Zimbabwe.



"The measure of a country's greatness is its ability to retain compassion in times of crisis"

Thurgood Marshall

A ZimRights member in Epworth believes that the lockdown has affected women most. Like many women, her vending business is greatly affected. Listen to her audio below.

Click to Listen to Audio



A ZimRights member from Epworth affected by the lockdown



Summary of Translation

A ZimRights member from Epworth says her vending business has been disrupted by the current #LockDownZim and she cannot go to hoard vegetables in Mbare because of the restrictive operating times. She says she now lives in fear of soldiers after witnessing people being beaten up. She goes on to appeal to government to provide her with free sanitary pads and family planning medication.



Figure 1.

A woman in Epworth walks home after receiving food aid from a local organisation.

Image by Shepherd Tozvireva

She is not alone, another member from Norton, a cross border trader and a member of ZimRights says she has witnessed soldiers terrorising residents.

"Police and the army are chasing people away. Women who sell vegetables at Katanga and Maridale are being terrorised by the police and the army and we witness that every day, leaving us in great fear...we have a sad incident of a woman who died after being run over by a vehicle that was being chased by the police...we urge the police to protect us within the laws that govern their operations..."

Click to Listen to her Audio



A Member of ZimRights says she has witnessed soldiers terrorising residents.



Melody Kandororo from Hurungwe District in Mashonaland West believes as a vendor, she did not get enough warning to prepare for the lockdown.

"We work from hand to mouth...we are now living on one meal a day..."



Just like Kandororo, women in Kadoma and Mt Darwin are traumatised having to watch their children go hungry as they cannot do their informal work.









Invisible Women and COVID 19'S Rising Compassion Toll

There is a rising compassion toll caused by COVID 19 that is still to be documented in 7 imbabwe. The fact that national focus moves to COVID 19 cases at the expense of other health services, like obstetric and childcare. The most striking statistic from Sierra Leone, one of the countries worst affected by Ebola, was that from 2013 to 2016, during the outbreak, more women died of obstetric complications than the infectious disease itself.ⁱⁱⁱ The unspoken disaster of the lack of attention by government to needs of health care workers in 2019 was the closure of maternity hospitals leading to thousands of women taking care of each other in the backyards. With the furious advent of Coronavirus on the scene, these deficits have not been addressed. Add to this pandemonium the fact that the majority of the healthcare workers are women across the country. After labouring a whole day in an unequipped facility, interacting with death in the most vulnerable ways, they have

to go home where they carry the burden of the family.

For the women in the informal sector, they leave home to visit their vending stalls, only to find them destroyed by the police and at times they get caught up in the ongoing wars with the police. A woman from Norton, speaks to ZimRights of her colleague who got run-over by a car in a police speed chase. Another speaks of the treatment she received at the hands of the soldiers, saying they are treated like animals. One bemoans the destruction of her vending stall stating this is the place from where she expects to feed the family. When the woman in Mt Darwin narrates of suffering hunger, she speaks for the whole family which looks up to her for food. In Epworth, the woman says she has to go and fetch water every day and her fears are

that she will meet the police on the way. For many women, what looks like ordinary violations go to the heart of the roles that society has placed on them as primary care-givers both in the home, in the workplace and in the informal sector.





As Zimbabwe forges ahead with the fight against COVID 19, more women will be consumed and affected by the national

compassion toll which leaves them giving everything, yet receiving nothing. This is the story of Melody Kandororo from Mashonaland West, who leaves in fear of how the family will survive. She sees the hunger coming and looks at her children every day wondering where the next meal is going to come from.

Some Recommendations for Responding to the Needs of Women

Alleviating the burden and damage of national compassion

The government's handling of the COVID 19 situation has far reaching consequences beyond health and the enjoyment of civil and political rights. It affects socio-economic rights and causes disruption beyond the economy, even into homes where gender based violence has been on the rise. As such, the creation of dedicated safety nets for women who suffer disruption of their income generating projects becomes a priority. The Ministry of Women's Affairs must be out in full force, taking care of those who care for the nation, attending to their needs so the burden of national compassion does not crush them.

Rooting Out Abuse: Justice in Crisis

Apart from providing livelihoods, employment sometimes provides a refuge from abusive relationships. The lock down has unlocked a torrent of abuse for many women. Civil society organisations like the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association and Musasa Project have set up hotlines to assist women report and deal with abuse. What the nation wants is more than just a safe refuge for abused women and girls, but justice for the perpetrators. There is a place for the Zimbabwe Gender Commission to not only document but move to ensure that perpetrators of gender violence are brought before justice. Because gender-based violence during the lockdown exposes the victims to the dangers of the virus as they seek refuge, it thus must be classified as a crime that attracts immediate sanction.

Prioritising Mental Health

Beyond open abuse, COVID 19 is taking a toll on everyone, bit especially women who carry the national burden of care in all spheres of life. Health institutions can provide an additional layer of care for women health care workers but providing psycho-social support. This is an approach that has been used by some civil society organisations for victims of abuse. However, most women do not turn up as victims when invited because the burden of care is normal to them.

The Role for Citizens in Alleviating Suffering for Women

In this report, we document some initiatives by citizens in the fight against COVID 19. Here, we invite ordinary citizens to share ideas on how ordinary citizens can show up for women who care for all of us. What are the simple acts of love that we can do. We will share these suggestions on our social media platforms. Write to myvoice@zimrights.org.zw



3.0 COVID 19 and PLWD

Worldwide, there are over 1.3 billion people living with disabilities (PLWD) and according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), 'they are no stranger to the kind of exclusion the corona virus has forced on the rest of the population.'

During the first week, the government of Zimbabwe announced they were releasing ZWL600 million for vulnerable households during the lockdown. Absent from the government announcement was whether people living with disabilities were going to be recognised as a special group with special needs.

ZimRights members report that they fear the disbursements, which are yet to start as the

Department of Social Welfare is still compiling lists of beneficiaries, will not specifically cater for PLWD. What makes Zimbabwe a uniquely sad situation is that government has all along failed to meet its mandate to provide social protection to PLWD, and as a result, they have resorted to doing informal jobs, and live from hand to mouth.

Masimba Chinake from Chinake Village Murehwa lives with a disability and to make ends meet, he sells airtime at Murehwa Centre



"We have no idea how we are going to resume operating because we are now eating into our capital,"

he said.





Chinake's Audio in Summary

"...we did not get adequate time to prepare for the lockdown and the little capital that we have been holding onto is soon going to be exhausted as we are now using it to buy food...we appeal for assistance.."

In addition to not providing social protection to PLWD, government has not provided assistance to the elderly.

Baba Charmaine, who is over 65, and is living with a disability, is appealing to government to assist PLWD who have been affected by the lockdown. He runs a shoe repair business in Norton but has not worked since the lockdown started.



The Law and PLWD

Persons with disabilities are protected under a number laws and international conventions including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Zimbabwe ratified on 23 September 2013 and which takes a human rights and peoplecentred based approach to the conceptualisation of disability as part of "human diversity and humanity; equality of opportunity; accessibility; equality between men and women".

Section 22(2) of the Zimbabwe Constitution clearly indicates the state's obligation to, "within the limits of the resources ... assist persons with physical or mental disabilities to achieve their full potential and to minimize the disadvantages faced by them". The Constitution further prescribes in section 3 that all institutions and government agencies 'must':

- a) Develop programmes for the welfare of persons with physical or mental disabilities, especially work programmes consistent with their capabilities and acceptable to them or their legal representatives.
- b) Consider the specific requirements of persons with all forms of disability as one of the priorities in development plans.
- c) Encourage the use and development of forms of communication suitable for persons with physical or mental disability.



Persons with disabilities are protected under a number laws and international conventions

The United Nations Zimbabwe recommends the following

- Ensure that persons with disabilities have access to credible information on the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, in accessible formats, including plain text, braille, audio, easy to read, sign language, etc.;
- When restrictions of movements are adopted, ensure that persons with disabilities have appropriate care and services at home;
- Ensure the availability of a substitute caregiver where the primary caregivers are hospitalised, are in quarantine, or die;
- Girls and women with disabilities, because of their specific vulnerability under quarantine and isolation measures, should be protected from gender-based violence, PSEA and discrimination.



Persons with disabilities have access to credible information on the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19



4.0 The Church and COVID 19

Traditionally, there has been an intense struggle between the Ministry of Health and some religious sects that for long have been rejecting conventional medicine. Apostolic Church sects in Zimbabwe require members to seek healing via prayer and faith and completely reject conventional medicine. This trend has likely contributed to a growing rate of maternal mortality.



In other cases, the sects have been implicated in human rights abuses like child marriages and denial of women and children from accessing health services like immunization. This has led to thousands of deaths from such diseases as Cholera in the past.

There's been little research done on the sects. In 2011, UNICEF estimated that 2.5 million people are part of Zimbabwe's Apostolic movement. That number may have doubled by now. Over the years, a number of campaigns have been launched to convince the religious sects to embrace modern medicine especially for the benefit of vulnerable groups like women and children. Significant gains have been made. But a new threat to these gains emerged in the third week of the lock-down as some church leaders started spreading conspiracy theories about COVID 19, including threatening to reject any vaccination against the disease.

In times of crisis, the church plays a critical role in being a source of hope and information.

Reports of church leaders disseminating conspiracy theories about COVID 19 raise a real danger of the return to those early days of religious defiance to medical health facilities, raising fears that these may lead to people undertaking dangerous behavior, like treating COVID 19 as a myth. While the constitution guarantees freedom of worship, ZimRights further believes that church leaders have a role to play in helping protect societies against disinformation. It is dangerous to disseminate information that is likely to place people in danger. If because of dissemination, lives are lost, leaders must be held accountable for such loss.

Despite the few outspoken leaders who threatened defiance against medical interventions, a huge body of Church leaders has spoken out condemning such use of conspiracy theories. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference have been involved in COVID 19 response in very encouraging ways. For COVID 19 responses to work, non-state actors, including church leaders have a role to play in dissemination of the right information.

In this report, ZimRights highlights this important partnership with church leaders to encourage congregations across the country that it is not all about conspiracy.

Bishop Ambrose Moyo of the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum is one such leader who has encouraged his congregation to heed the message of the World Health Organisation to avoid humanity being wiped out by COVID 19.



"What is being asked of us is not difficult, but if we follow carefully, many lives will be saved. This is a call to national dialogue.

To promote national unity in the fight against COVID 19."



Rev. Useni Sibanda; Zimbabwe Christian Alliance

The COVID19 is a medical crisis that also has got humanitarian crisis that has developed around it. We as the (Zimbabwe) Christian Alliance have realised that there are a few key issues that need to be done to prevent this crisis from getting out of control. First, we realised that medical facilities are collapsed and will not be able to take at all any pressure on them and will not be able to assist anyone.

If we talk of Bulawayo, these hospitals - Thorngrove, Mpilo, Ekusileni, and UBH - are not ready to take any COVID19 patients. We are part of teams trying to raise resources to make sure that these facilities are prepared. The key issue is to prevent, and we are working on an aggressive awareness campaign.

The campaign involves letting people know that they must stay at home, and they must keep social distance, and also, they must wash their hands.

We worked with church leaders and made sure that churches were closed, and that churches could find alternative ways of meeting virtually online, via Facebook and other networks. We also let people know that there is no cure for this virus, so the best way is to prevent it. So, we have been using social media platform's, creating posters to ensure that people are aware of what COVID19 is all about and how to prevent it.

We have been talking to people on what to do if one contracts the virus. We also shared toll free numbers to call in case of emergency. Our church leaders in different cities and localities have been working with taskforces that have been set by councils.

We have set assisted these frontline pastors with protective wear....in some areas like Chegutu, our pastors have been assisting the police by transporting them to roadblocks and providing them with protective clothing...we have provided food aid and we have started in Bulawayo where we expect to give out 160 000 food packs...we have recorded human rights violations.





Rev. Masango, United Baptist Church, Bulawayo District

Religious leaders during this pandemic have the role of giving hope to the panicking people and hopeless ones. Psalms 50: 15 says, "And call upon me in the day of trouble I will deliver thee, and thou shall glorify me."

Yes, meeting places for worship are under lockdown yet the gospel is not under lockdown, so let's make use of social media platforms. Only God alone will deliver is from this pandemic. We should stay indoors by doing and following the precautions of washing our hands, sanitizing, maintaining social distancing and also practising highest cleanliness. We are encouraging everyone to adhere to these measures.

This is a global pandemic which calls for a collective action by everyone.

However they are ignorant individuals who continue to loiter in the streets, this is worrisome... (We are also worried about) the waterless taps yet people must wash their hands over running water. The council should provide such needs and the Ministry should have testing kits...together we shall overcome.





Church and State in Protection of the Right to Life and Health

There is a possible and growing partnership for life between the State and the Church in the fight against COVID 19. This is stronger than the conspiracy theories that encourage people to defy measures meant to combat COVID 19.

As communities navigated these messages, it becomes more important for the government to provide accurate information on the situation in health centres. Without access to health facilities, many fall to the deceiving tongues of faith healers. Strengthening partnerships with progressing church leaders is important to ensure that communities that maybe outside the reach of the government will find themselves under the stewardship of progressive church leaders. The Church, since Gukurahundi, has always been a refuge for the people in times of crisis. This is why Rev. Kenneth Mutata affirms the solidarity of the church with people suffering under







lockdown. "Covid 19 is with us; the number of infections according to the statistics of those tested positive has increased lately, and this means we are all in danger. People are encouraged to take the preventive measures like staying at home, washing hands with soap or sanitizers, maintain social distance, taking nutritious foods to boost our immune system. We will continue to share correct information and should not peddle conspiracy and false information. As Christians we should continue to pray that God provides us with a breakthrough from this pandemic. We also continue to support the vulnerable they must be provided with food and water. Also, we continue to seek a broad base participatory process for the post COVID19 national recovery. We also continue to support those that have been made vulnerable by the lockdown..."

Church infrastructure across the country can provide much needed support to the government in fighting COVID 19. Churches like the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, Reformed Church in Zimbabwe have health facilities across the country. Saint Annes Hospital in Avondale is one of the designated COVID 19 institutions with capacity to take over 100 patients. Such response by the church community is exemplary of the kind of leadership needed in times of Crisis.



5.0 Citizen Initiatives Against the Crisis

There is a place for citizen activism in the fight against COVID 19. In every crisis, especially where there is a government that does not have adequate response mechanisms, people emerge to fill the gap.

They do this out of the need to serve humanity. In the face of COVID19, where the government of Zimbabwe has shown little capacity to deal with the crisis, a number of citizen initiatives have emerged.

"A Time for Hope and Compassion."

In Bulawayo, an initiative, "I Am for Bulawayo Fighting COVID-19" Initiative has been championed by the Bulawayo community. The initiative which was launched on 11 April at the Ekusileni Medical Centre in Bulawayo and seeks to raise US\$10 million to help curb the spread of the virus.

The initiative is a multi-stakeholder platform that brings together individuals, the business community, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), churches, health experts and institutions.

The official figures indicate to the danger of Bulawayo becoming the epicentre of the virus in Zimbabwe.

Thando Nkomo, a member of the initiative told local media that Bulawayo was vulnerable

"Having multiple access points with high numbers of Zimbabweans in neighbouring countries and an international airport, Bulawayo has a higher chance of being adversely affected by this pandemic," she said.

Another member of the initiative Nkosana George Mazibisa reports that the initiative has made progress, responding to the needs of vulnerable communities. A number of corporates came up to assist in alleviating the situation

Another initiative, Zimbabwe Covid-19 Citizens Healthcare Support Fund, ivled by United States based Freeman Chari, has also come to the aid of communities. Launched on 23 March 2020, the fund has been supporting the well-being of Frontline Healthcare professionals including doctors, nurses and allied workers.



Writing in the online fundraising page, Freeman Chari writes, "We believe they need protective gear. We want their food needs while at work taken care of so they don't have to leave the hospitals which could increase chances of transmission. Funds permitting we will also work with authorities to support extended stay with minimal commute to their homes so we reduce the risk of transmission. This would also involve supporting the families with food if need be."

By the time of the compilation of this report, the Fund had raised over USD32,000 of the targeted USD50.000.

The new initiative by Freeman Chari comes on the heels of a similar intervention to assist victims of Cyclone Idai that raised over USD106,000. During the strike by the doctors and nurses, Freeman also ran the Citizwean Clinic, mobile clinics that helped more than 4000 people across the country with healthcare during the 2019 health crisis.

ZimRights spoke to Freeman Chari on his motivations. While he is based in the United States, he says many of the basic rights that people enjoy around the world, appear like luxuries for Zimbabweans. This has motivated him to be involved.



Click to Listen to Audio

Chari shares his personal Motivations



People Taking Leadership

Addressing a democracy conference in Cape Town in 2019, Graca Machel said the quality of democracy today depends on the quality of our citizenry. In her impassioned keynote address she said societies today are paralysed because they are expecting too much from leaders who can deliver nothing. She said the concept of sovereignty residing in the people means the people must lead. Many times people stand and swear at leaders for their failures and yet they (the people) absolve themselves of any responsibility. It is this attitude that is leaving societies in a state of paralysis. The quality of our leadership depends on the quality of the citizenry.

Machel said, "We are going to be paralysed if we do not take responsibility as citizens who know how to organise. Citizens who know of that big principle in each one of our constitutions which says, sovereignty resides in people. ... we have to internalise that it cannot be those few who are called leaders. It has to be us, as organised. We have in our veins that legacy of caring for one another."

In the fight against COVID 19, ZimRights has encountered many stories of citizens stepping forward and leading their own redemption. In highlighting these stories, ZimRights wishes to show that it is not all gloomy. There is love and hope and compassion that keeps societies going, even in difficult times.



Click to Listen to Audio

Listen to Graca Machel speak on active citizenry



The quality of our leadership depends on the quality of the citizenry.



6.0 Conclusion

Summary of the Recommendations

It will remain a futile situation for any government to continue to ignore the voices of the communities, for it is these communities that the same government is meant to serve. Stories of people living without social protection, women not affording basic things that allow them to enjoy their dignity as people and the continued general police brutality cannot go unsolved.

Below we summarise the recommendations affecting the aspects covered in this report:

a. The government of Zimbabwe must take urgent measures to improve the lives of women and those in the informal sector. This must include and not be limited to, providing sanitary wear and

access to contraception, ensuring a transparent provision of social safety nets to those in the informal sector, who, as noted, are mostly women.

- b. As espoused in the Constitution, government should provide adequate social cover to people living with disabilities, during the lockdown, and beyond as this is a key group that if often left out on its own, yet government has a mandate to provide for their special needs.
- c. Rural health centres must be given adequate attention, ensuring that all isolation facilities are up and running, staff in training and all the necessary equipment is delivered on time. A snap survey by ZimRights in this report showed that most rural isolation centres are still under construction.
- d. Non-state actors including Church are encouraged to provide leadership in countering conspiracy theories that may encourage people not to take seriously COVID 19. A partnership with church institutions that have adopted a progressive stance is critical in avoiding a major disaster.

End Notes

i. Zimbabwe's Annual Manufacturing Survey features a Gender Analysis component, UN Women, 2017, available here https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2017/10/gender-analysis-in-zimbabwe-industries.

ii. Women Drive Zim's informal sector, NewsDay, 2015

https://www.newsday.co.zw/2015/04/women-drive-zimbabwes-informal-sectors/

iii. Quoted by Helen Lewis, Coronavirus is a Disaster for Feminism, the Atlantic, 19 March 2020, Available on the link,

https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302

iv. The fundraising page for Citizen Initiative is available on the link https://www.gofundme.com/f/covid-zimbabwe

v. The Democracy in Central and Southern Africa Conference was convened by the Mandela School and the Kofi Annan Foundation in Cape Town from 4 to 6 September 2019. Proceedings of the conference are available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifElXwc0yuc&fbclid=lwAR0DiDzAXy_X7dYwFvflc3VfrRY9dQooyih_-7y7J4GkdFfruayQAs9kqOQ



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