"UNFPA WILL CONTINUE TO REACH OUT TO THE MOST VULNERABLE"

UNFPA Mongolia is able to carry out its mandate thanks to the tireless dedication and hard work of its staff. In our newsletter, we feature the wonderful people that make up UNFPA Mongolia, and the vision they bring to the Country Office.

For this issue, we interviewed P. Altantuya, Admin and Finance Assistant, about UNFPA and her work.

How would you describe UNFPA Mongolia in three words?

Inclusive, effective, and innovative.

In your opinion, why is UNFPA’s existence important?

The United Nations is an organization that promotes international peace and security, respects fundamental human rights and freedoms, provides a platform for countries to discuss and resolve their common issues, and facilitates peaceful cooperation. As a United Nations specialized agency, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) focuses on supporting these common goals, in particular for sexual and reproductive health and gender equality. Reproductive rights are the right to a healthy life with universal access to quality sexual and reproductive services and information, the right to be free from physical and psychological violence, to choose one’s spouse freely, and to marry on the basis of our own volition. UNFPA has been focused on these important issues. I am confident that we will continue to work productively and contribute to ensuring these rights.

IN THIS ISSUE

COVID-19 SITUATION REPORT
- Page 2

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT
- Page 4

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
- Page 5

ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
- Page 6

Read more on Page 8
Overall situation: Due to the traditional celebration of the Lunar New Year holiday across the country in early February, Mongolian health officials expected to see a surge of the highly transmissible Omicron variant by mid-February and strongly advised the public to celebrate the holiday only with their immediate family. Thanks to this recommendation of the Government of Mongolia, the number of new COVID-19 cases did not rise as expected but began to decline dramatically from February 10, by 54% as compared to a week before.

With the continued reduction of daily cases, the number of monthly new COVID-19 cases (20,819) and deaths (50) decreased by 38.7% and 15.2% respectively as compared to 53,742 cases and 59 deaths reported in January 2022. As of 28 February 2022, 465,763 PCR-confirmed COVID-19 cases and 2,096 deaths have been reported in the country, according to the Ministry of Health.

Due to a worldwide surge in the Omicron variant, the Government of Mongolia updated its COVID-19 vaccination strategy with regard to the third and fourth dose coverage of the population, with a specific focus on target groups, including people above 60 years old and people with underlying medical conditions. With this strategy, citizens can voluntarily opt for the fourth dose of vaccination three months after their third dose. In addition, citizens affected with coronavirus, who had the third dose of vaccination, can receive their fourth dose 21 days after their recovery.

Vaccination coverage: As of 28 February, 66.8% of the population have received two shots of coronavirus vaccine while 31% have had the third dosage. Moreover, 3.2% of adults in Mongolia have had a fourth dose of the vaccine against COVID-19.

Maternal health: COVID-19 infection among pregnant women has also declined significantly, by almost 90% compared to last month, dropping from 1,385 as of 26 January to 145 as of 28 February. No maternal deaths due to COVID-19 infection were registered in February. The COVID-19 vaccination coverage among pregnant and breastfeeding women has improved, especially in the capital city. As of 28 February, 6,419 pregnant women and 7,983 lactating women received the full two dosages of the COVID-19 vaccines nationwide. Due to the lack of integrated data on the vaccination status of pregnant women in the country, the number of pregnant and lactating women who have been vaccinated is not accurate. Preliminary data collected from the UB City Health Department shows that around 42% of pregnant women had received the full dosage of COVID-19 vaccination as of 15 February.
GOVERNMENT READINESS AND KEY RESPONSE ACTIONS:

1. Taking account of the high vaccination coverage (90%) among the target population in the country and the current status of the spread of infections, the Government of Mongolia approved a resolution to lift the heightened state of readiness and downgrade the level of restrictions from “Orange” to “Yellow” as of 14 February. Under this resolution, a partial heightened state of readiness is declared, and some restrictions on public and private organizations and individuals have been maintained. Mongolia opened its borders to international travellers and has not imposed restrictions on any business operations. However, the government’s advice on personal safety measures, including wearing face masks, keeping social distance, hand sanitizing, and opting for COVID-19 vaccinations, are valid for all citizens.

2. International travellers must present a negative COVID-19 (PCR) test result taken within 72 hours of departure from their first flight point. No quarantine on arrival is required. The wearing of facemasks remains mandatory for travellers. In case of a positive PCR test, the passenger must present proof that they have recovered from COVID-19 within the last four months.

3. Starting from 14 February, all levels of educational institutions, including schools and kindergartens, in Mongolia resumed classroom lessons and the Government of Mongolia launched a new training on “Parental Engagement in COVID-19 Prevention in Schools” with support from UNICEF and the Red Cross. This training aims to improve parents’ knowledge of COVID-19 prevention and how to support their children’s immunity and health during the pandemic and encourage parental engagement in school and kindergarten activities.

4. During the reporting period, the Prime Minister of Mongolia had a meeting with UN Secretary-General in Beijing, while they were participating in the Winter Olympics opening. During the meeting, Prime Minister L.Oyun-Erdene highlighted the UN’s valuable contribution to Mongolia’s development and continued support to the Government of Mongolia in preventing and combating the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as providing much-needed vaccine assistance under the COVAX programme.

5. The Ministry of Health organized an online training on “COVID-19 and Waste Management” for health care providers and introduced WHO’s recent recommendation for waste management using eco-friendly packaging and shipping, safe and reusable personal protective equipment, and other medical supplies.

UNFPA RESPONSE:

1. To support the Ministry of Health’s response actions, UNFPA provided technical support for the development of a vaccine conversation guide based on commonly asked questions by pregnant and lactating women related to COVID-19 vaccines.

2. To support the post-pandemic recovery of sexual and reproductive health and maternal health services in rural areas, UNFPA organized a joint mission with the Government to Khuvsgul Province, where maternal mortality and near misses have not decreased for the last two years. During the mission, the new guidelines for pandemic preparedness and response, and global midwifery strategy were introduced to further strengthen the human resource capacity in sexual and reproductive health service delivery. The mission resulted in the development of a provincial action plan to reduce preventable maternal mortality and morbidity with improved local crisis responses and coordination in health care settings.
The National Committee on Gender Equality (NCGE) will be leading the organization of a month-long nationwide campaign combining International Women’s Day and Mongolian Soldier’s Day with support from the Combating Gender-based Violence project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and implemented by the Government of Mongolia and UNFPA. The preparation of the campaign started with a series of consultations and communication among the project’s Technical Committee members to agree on the theme and message “Equal Respect: Respect our love, refresh our attitude, respond together”. The campaign will encourage and call on the public to respect others equally, to help create equal rights and equal opportunities for all, and ensure equal contribution from both men and women to their families and society based on their knowledge and experience. The launch press conference of the campaign was organized online to allow the attendance of local media on 28 February. Dr. Stefanie Burri, Head of Swiss Cooperation in Mongolia, and L. Oyunaa, Assistant Representative and Officer-in-Charge at UNFPA Mongolia, delivered opening remarks. It was attended by around 100 representatives from Ulaanbaatar and provincial media outlets, ministries and agencies, governors’ offices, civil society, UN and development partners. The campaign will run from March 1 to April 1 and will include various activities, such as podcasts, TV programmes, discussions, and the production of short videos and posters.
UNFPA is providing support to conduct the "Survey on Availability of Modern Contraceptives", with funding from the Government of Luxembourg. The findings of the survey will be used to determine future interventions to reduce stock-outs of contraceptives for the most vulnerable population groups. The research team of the National Center for Maternal and Child Health finalized the survey questionnaire with technical assistance from UNFPA. The data collection will start in March 2022.

TELEMEDICINE PROJECT TO CONTINUE

UNFPA organized a national consultative meeting with key stakeholders on the project proposal "Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services among women in Mongolia: Towards zero preventable maternal mortality" on 22 February. The project will be the next phase of the well-known Telemedicine for Maternal and Newborn Health project, executed by UNFPA Mongolia with funding from the Government of Luxembourg, and focused on improving sexual and reproductive health services in select locations of Mongolia. The participants of the meeting discussed and defined the key interventions of the project. The project proposal will be submitted to the Government of Luxembourg, which has supported and funded the previous phases of the project since 2007.
INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL GUIDANCE ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION TO BE PUBLISHED

In accordance with the updated International Technical Guidelines for Sexual Education in 2018, health education content was developed to include gender-based violence prevention and other key concepts. One of the six core contents is sexual and reproductive health. In 2019, UNFPA and UNESCO introduced the International Guidelines for Sexual Education. As a result, Mongolia became the first country in the region to include sexual education in its health curriculum. In 2020, UNFPA with contributing agencies UNESCO, UNICEF, UNAIDS, and WHO developed the International Technical and Programmatic Guidance on Out-of-school Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Informed by evidence and grounded in a human-rights approach, this out-of-school edition provides concrete guidelines and recommendations to ensure that the most vulnerable young people receive information that enables them to develop the knowledge and skills they need to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health.

UNFPA published the Guidance in February 2022 and will hold a launch event to introduce the Guidance on Out-of-School Comprehensive Sexuality Education, jointly with the Ministry of Education and Science, in March 2022.

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE SHARED ON PERIOD PRODUCT LEGISLATION

UNFPA Mongolia Assistant Representative, L.Oyunaa met with Parliamentarian Ts.Munkhtsetseg on 17 February 2022 to discuss the legislation for the provision of free period products to girls and women, which has become a topic of discussion among the public. In addition, the Assistant Representative shared the experience of some UNFPA Country Offices in the Asia and Pacific region in procuring and distributing menstrual products as part of Menstrual Hygiene Management kits for adolescent girls and Dignity Kits for different vulnerable populations groups as part of humanitarian response. In addition, the Assistant Representative discussed UNFPA’s planned support for the Ministry of Education’s initiative to hold an annual anti-bullying campaign for adolescents.
UNFPA Mongolia implemented and jointly funded the Integrated Support Programme for Women and Young People’s Health (ISP) in Umnugobi province in partnership with UNICEF, WHO, Australian Embassy, Gobi Oyu Development Fund, and the Umnugobi Provincial Government during the period 2018-2021. The ISP aimed to address the critical and emerging health and social issues in Umnugobi province, including the sexual and reproductive health of women, adolescents, and youth; non-communicable diseases; communicable diseases; youth empowerment, and gender-based and domestic violence. In addition, crosscutting issues of the programme were to strengthen local governance with community engagement and build the capacity of hospitals and health centres in delivering sexual and reproductive health services.

UNFPA conducted an independent evaluation of the ISP, which assessed the implementation of the programme in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, reliability, and sustainability. The findings of the end evaluation were disseminated at the ISP Technical Working Group consultation meeting, held in Ulaanbaatar on 29-30 September 2021, where the participants were consulted on the logical framework of the second phase of the ISP and agreed on the next steps forward. Accordingly, UNFPA developed a proposal for the second phase, which was approved at the ISP Steering Committee Meeting on 22 December 2021.

On 28 January 2022, UNFPA Mongolia Assistant Representative L.Oyunaa, together with the National Consultant and Youth Programme team, visited Dalanzadgad to meet with the management of the Umnugobi Governor’s Office and its relevant agencies to introduce the second phase of the ISP. This time the activities of the ISP are aimed at providing equal access to health care services to the population of Umnugobi province, improving access to health care, and supporting health education for children, adolescents, and youth.
What made you join UNFPA?

I first joined UNFPA’s regional office in Khovd Province in 2009. The aim of the regional office was to reach out to the local population and to provide technical assistance to the western provinces in a timely manner. At the time, I was very proud to work for a large organization called the United Nations, but I was also a little scared. I feel very fortunate to have begun working for the UN in Khovd Province, which is home to many ethnic groups.

Can you share with us a great memory you have from your time at UNFPA Mongolia?

My most memorable time was when I worked in the Western Region. Because while working there, I learned what UNFPA is all about. It was also inspiring and extremely gratifying to immediately see how UNFPA’s programmes and support are benefiting and impacting local communities.

Where do you see UNFPA Mongolia heading in the future?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2012 at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro with the participation of heads of state and is being implemented from 2016 to 2030. I’m confident that UNFPA will continue to support the Government of Mongolia in implementing this program and achieving progress. I’m convinced that UNFPA will continue to reach out to the most vulnerable groups in society without leaving anyone behind and contribute to ending all forms of discrimination and inequality, and their root causes.
STAY TUNED WITH UNFPA MONGOLIA

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FOR UPDATES ON COVID-19 IN MONGOLIA, PLEASE VISIT:

 Ministry of Health daily report on COVID-19:

The State Emergency Committee's decisions:

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