Calling out the culture of silence around gender-based violence in Mongolia

For 25-year-old Clémence Gallopin, volunteering is about "bringing people’s voices and knowledge into collective actions and ensuring that no one is left behind". She serves as a UN Youth Volunteer with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in Mongolia, where she has been contributing to a programme to combat gender-based violence.

According to the country’s first national gender-based violence survey in 2017, at least half of Mongolian women are expected to experience some form of gender-based violence in their lifetime, and one in three women had suffered violence in the year prior.

Despite collaborative efforts by the Government of Mongolia, local and international NGOs, and United Nations agencies in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant increase in occurrence of gender-based violence, which threatens much of the progress made. Clémence supported the adaptation of COVID-19 and remote services guidelines for One Stop Service Centres to enable service delivery for survivors of gender-based violence during lockdowns and periods of restricted movement.
Clémence calls attention to a "culture of silence" around gender-based violence, globally, but also in Mongolia, which is a target of the national campaign for the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

She supported the campaign through consultation and technical support for UNFPA’s work to shift the narrative away from "silent consent" and instead frame gender-based violence as a collective community issue. She developed training on the Bystander to Action Approach, which empowers individuals to call out violence, subtle and overt, when they witness it in their daily lives.

Clémence finds motivation in working towards common goals within a team, quoting anthropologist Margaret Mead as a source of her inspiration: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

“We often underestimate the power of people coming together to work towards something they truly aspire to. Empowering people to stand up against problematic behaviours is essential, and I am proud to be volunteering to encourage a change in social attitudes. --Clémence Gallopin, UN Youth Volunteer with UNFPA

Focusing on response mechanisms to support survivors as well as prevention strategies, the programme is essential to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 and improving the lives of women in Mongolia.

“I am blessed to have two great young professional UN Volunteers in my team, who bring international perspectives and innovative ideas. Clémence is a reliable, committed and dynamic volunteer with compassion for others. Together, we are discover new ways of working on our goals and aspirations in the gender-based violence programme. --Ms Oyun Banzragch, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Programme Specialist with UNFPA in Mongolia

Clémence believes that volunteering is a powerful way to connect, motivate and contribute
to something bigger than oneself. By working towards a common goal, and recognizing that no-one works alone, Clémence has been able to find a deep purpose in her work in Mongolia.

“For me, volunteering is about finding our inner voice, what we stand for, and expressing it through our commitment and dedication in working towards a greater goal. --Clémence Gallopin

Volunteering with UNFPA provided Clémence with the opportunity to be challenged by realities outside her own upbringing in Switzerland, giving her many new perspectives of the world. She was able to learn from others and truly felt part of the team. She was treated as an equal and was able to perform at her full potential because of the ‘kind, supportive and empowering’ team she worked with.

“Inspired by my personal interest in sport, I am building bridges between my passions and what I stand for. I proposed a project designed to prevent and heal gender-based violence, and promote self-confidence and healthy emotional expression, with sport as an outlet. Part of the plan is to develop martial arts therapy for survivors, perpetrators and youth. -- Clémence Gallopin

Clémence has also been able to share her passion for sports by providing yoga sessions for her colleagues to support their wellbeing.

As a young woman, Clémence has volunteered her time, energy and enthusiasm, while also learning an incredible amount about herself. She believes her experiences in Mongolia will stay with her throughout her life as she continues to share her passion and vision for a better world.
• 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence • Gender-based Violence • Switzerland

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 3: Good health and well-being SDG 5: Gender equality SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals