Annual National Women Leaders Conference Concludes with Concrete Recommendations South Sudan women leaders have joined the rest of the world in commemorating the 21st anniversary of the UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security which is celebrated in October every year. EVE Organization, Plan International, HealthNet TPO, PAX, and AMA, the Alliance Partners under Leaders of Peace Project jointly with JUST FUTURE project and its partner Cordaid and the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare convened a two days’ conference with support from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 19th – 20th October 2021. In attendance was the Minister of Defense, Hon. Angelina Teny, the Chief Whip Reconstituted Transitional National Legislative Assembly (R-TNLA) – Hon. Rebecca Okwaci, Hon. Members of the R-TNLA, the Council of States, representatives from the organized forces (Police & Prisons), representatives from the diplomatic corps, UN agencies, the National and State Government line ministries, gender focal persons, CSOs, youth, academia, the media and women leaders in their different capacities who hailed from the 10 states and administrative areas. The women took stock of the progress made in the women peace and security agenda including past gains and challenges faced; deliberated on the implementation of the R-ARCSS and identified areas that need strengthening for effective women’s participation in nation building. The women acknowledged the strides made in peace building and agreed on the need for collective efforts to re-strategize for a better future. Hon. Angelina Teny officiated the conference and spoke on the different aspects that are needed to complete the peace process, noting that women lay in the center of it. She emphasized on the importance of broadening our definition of peace to include more than just physical security stating that “Security has evolved and has become holistic to include human security and that WPS is central to all this”. Plan International Country Director, Mr. George Otim appreciated the presence of women in the conference. He acknowledged the progress made so far giving an example of the affirmative action and was excited to see the voices of women being amplified. He noted that Plan International stands ready to work with South Sudanese women in implementing the WPS agenda. In his opening remarks, he further emphasized on government and partners to enforce and support the implementation of the recommendations of the annual women gathering and ensure that women’s voices are heard at all levels. The representative from the Netherlands Embassy in South Sudan, Ms. Imme urged all to continue pushing for a gender transformative process and work toThough it was noted that there have been positive strides made, women expressed disappointment concerning the realization of the 35% affirmative action and raised concerns about the underrepresentation of women at decision-making processes /levels. “Women need to have a unified voice and continue to advocate for women participation and issues that affect women in South Sudan,” said Hon. Esther Ikere, the undersecretary from the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare. The Co-founder and Executive Director of Eve Organization Mrs. Rita M. Lopidia urged the parties to the agreement to expedite the implementation of the R-ARCSS for genuine stability to be realized. “We are concerned with the increased insecurity, inter-communal violence in some parts of the country and the continuous displacement due to floods which have created humanitarian emergency.” Women in South Sudan desperately want to see the dividends of peace. It is high time that we see improved security, better health facilities, improved social economic status of women, better education and realistic inclusivity in the transitional government”, said Ms. Rita. Women discussed the environment and climate change and its impact on women peace and security. They expressed concerns about the floods and the high rates of the ongoing deforestation. Consequently, the lack of legislation to address environmental issues directly impacts women and children. Points were also raised on the importance of the economic empowerment of women through trainings in business planning and management; allocation of funds and diversifying of business opportunities so that livelihoods are not majorly centered on practices that can be harmful to the environment. As put by Dr. Kinga Komorowska, Country Director of Cordaid, “We cannot afford to not indulge half of the population in social economic development. Because it would mean losing half of the potential to this country.” Cognizant of the importance of mental health of women, the conference acknowledged the gap in information about mental health and mental health services that are offered to the public. There is a need for awareness-raising on importance of good mental health and breaking stigma about seeking mental health services. The conference concluded with the following recommendations: On the implementation of the R-ARCSS 2018 1. Call on the parties to the agreement to recommit to the implementation of the R-ARCSS in letter and spirit. Women urgently call for R-TGONU to expedite the implementation of chapter two – Transitional security arrangement i.e. the graduation of the unified forces and their deployment 2. Ensure that the full RTGONU is reconstituted – in particular the state legislative and observe the minimum 35% affirmative action. 3. Call on the parties to the agreement to ensure that the 35% is fully implemented 4. On the permanent constitution making process, ensure that women fully participate in all the phases and a minimum 35% representation in the R-NCRC, the drafting committee and the National Constitution Conference 5. Urge RTGONU to urgently establish the Women and Youth enterprise funds 6. Urge donors and partners to improve funding for WPS particularly in the transition period to enhance mobilization and advocacy efforts of women for peace. On environment and climate change issues 1. Raise awareness on Environmental protection and effective citizens participation 2. As per the R-ARCSS, call on the establishment of the Environment Management Authority 3. Call on the R-NTLA to pass the pending Environment protection bill. 4. Call on partners to support women groups on issues of environmental protection and providing alternative economic opportunities to reduce deforestation 5. Call on equal development of roads infrastructure among the states in order to create business friendly environment for women as well as improve security on roads while transporting goods 6. Ensure that 2% of the oil proceedings should be allocated for women economic empowerment in the oil producing states 7. Urge the government to protect the environment around the oil fields and oil operation companies should be mandated to clean their areas of operations and ensure protection of the environment 8. Urge Oil operation companies to allocate funds to address health risks and issues caused in their areas of operation. 9. Urge the Disaster and Risk Management body in the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs to ensure that women affected by floods receive support to help them recover the lost livelihood On mental health 1. NGOs and CSOs to raise awareness on the importance of mental health to normalize discussions about the mental wellbeing of women 2. Improve services and increasing population scope that the services reach to include leaders, security sector and victims of trauma at large 3. Partners to support special counselling services for women leaders 4. Donors and Partners to fund women organization working on mental health issues