UN Women advocates for women in leadership and end to child marriage

Inspired by the global theme “Pledge For Parity”, the 2016 celebration of the International Women’s Day in South Sudan comprised of series of activities including panel discussions, video messages by prominent male leaders in government, civil society and United Nations system as well as drama and music by young people in support of ending early marriages.

UN Women in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; embassies of the Sweden, UK and the Norway; CSOs, media, the private sector and youth and women organized two panel discussions with the focus on ending child marriage and women in leadership to raise awareness, exchange local and global experiences and to forge the way forward on accelerating women leadership, participation and inclusion of women in all spheres of life and to brainstorm on strategies to end child marriage, a harmful cultural practices that reverses the efforts to promote gender equality and women empowerment in South Sudan.

In his welcome address during the panel discussion on the March 07, UN Women Deputy Country Representative, Mr. Lansana Wonneh, stressed the importance to discuss and share best practices in an effort to ending child marriages as it is a big obstacle to the efforts towards promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in South Sudan.

While delivering her Special Remarks, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Margeret Loj, stressed that girls are the most discriminated in a family. Meanwhile when girls are educated, they are most likely to marry later, have fewer children and a better chance to have healthy and educated children. “For each year girls stay longer in school, income will rise by 20%” she said. While calling for lasting peace in South Sudan, she stressed that “female peacekeepers are as instrumental as female peace builders”.

The Minister of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Honorable Awut Deng Acuil, said South Sudan, though the youngest nation has made strides in the area of gender equality and women empowerment. “South Sudan has no issue of equal pay for equal job, all are paid equally, South Sudan has no issue of voting rights, all are allowed to vote” she noted.

UNEP conducts a workshop in preparation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action

The national Minister of Environment, Hon. Deng Hoc Yai, and Arshad Khan, UNEP South Sudan office Country Programme Manager inaugurated a two day workshop from March 21-22, 2016, for preparation of the very first South Sudan’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). The workshop was organized by UNEP South Sudan office in collaboration with the national Ministry of Environment. A total number of 56 senior technical officials from different institutions including government line ministries, South Sudan independent commissions, local authorities, CSOs, academia, private sector, international and local NGOs and UN agencies attended the workshop.

South Sudan acceded to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on May 18, 2014 and accordingly the country is requested to implement the decisions of the CBD Conference of Parties (COP). This workshop
therefore demonstrated South Sudan’s commitment to fulfill its obligations under article 6 of the Biodiversity Convention which stated that each contracting party shall, in accordance with its particular conditions and capabilities: develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or adapt for this purpose existing strategies, plans or programmes which shall reflect, *inter alia*, the measures set out in this Convention relevant to the contracting party concerned.

The workshop’s main objective was to engage the national conservationists to conduct stocktaking and assessment exercise through discussion of the road map for preparation of the NBSAP, provisional outline of the NBSAP, current status and trends, threats/causes of biodiversity loss, current efforts to reduce biodiversity loss, review of biodiversity policies, laws as well as the existing institutional policies, laws as well as the existing institutional arrangements. The training also aimed to discuss the biodiversity valuation and its contribution to national development, plant and animal taxonomy, biotechnology and biosafety, infrastructures development and oil discovery, production and impact on biodiversity and invasive alien species.

UNEP is currently working collaboratively with the office of the national Biodiversity Focal Point, GEF Operation Focal and the relevant senior management of the Ministry of Environment to ensure the timely implementation of the remaining steps in the finalization of the NBSAP is realized by December 2016.

**WHO, UNFPA and MOH initiate the process for establishing Maternal Death Surveillance and Response (MDSR)**

The World Health Organization in collaboration with UNFPA and the Ministry of Health held a half-day workshop with Members of Parliament to officially initiate the process for establishing Maternal Death Surveillance and Response (MDSR) in South Sudan. The workshop which took place on March 22, brought together a total of 34 parliamentarians including dignitaries and stakeholders from UN agencies, NGOs, Juba Teaching hospital and development partners. The main objective of the workshop was to sensitize, create awareness and advocate with parliamentarians for the institutionalization of Maternal Death Surveillance & Response in South Sudan.

During the opening ceremony, the Undersecretary, Dr. Makur Matur Kariom, welcomed all participants and urged MPs to support the Ministry of Health in the fight to reduce maternal and child mortality in South Sudan. “It is a shame for a woman to die from things that can easily be prevented; South Sudanese women die more than any other women in the world” he said. Nevertheless he pointed to the significant progress that have been achieved in the fight against maternal mortality reduction from four digits 2054 in 2010 referencing on the South Sudan Household survey (SSHS) to 730/100,000 live birth according to WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA estimates in 2013. “It is a fight that we must win; with our MPs on board we shall not rest until we get to zero tolerance”. He further went on to encourage MPs to provide the dynamic leadership to generate and ensure necessary actions are taken and advocate for maternal child health.

Speaking on behalf of the WHO representative was the technical officer in charge of making pregnancy safer, Dr. Nancy Kidula from WHO Inter-country Support Team (IST) in Harare, Zimbabwe. In her brief remarks, she commended the progress that has been made so far by government in the area of maternal child health. She reaffirmed WHO support to the people of South Sudan in the reduction of maternal mortality. “WHO remains committed to support the Ministry of Health by providing technical expertise and resources earmarked for maternal mortality and morbidity reduction”.

Globally there were an estimated 289,000 maternal deaths in 2013; 62% of these deaths were from Sub Saharan Africa. The global Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in 2013 was 210 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. South Sudan is among countries in the world with the highest MMR estimated at 730 according to the WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA.
UNESCO, UNICEF, UNEP and ILO commemorate World Water Day

On March 22, 2016, South Sudan joined the rest of the world to mark the World Water Day. In this regard, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNEP, and ILO in collaboration with the national Ministry of Water Resources & Irrigation and the Ministry of Environment organized a public awareness raising event under the theme “Better Water, Better Jobs” to celebrate the World Water Day in Juba.

The event was attended by three national ministers and senior government officials in addition to representatives from the national and international NGOs. The event comprised of speeches by the national ministers, heads of agencies, poems and songs from school children and traditional dances. The function was also attended by children and youth from different schools and colleges, media houses including SSTV, radios and newspapers, and received nationwide coverage.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister of Water Resources & Irrigation, Hon. Jemma Kumba urged the development partners including private sector to support the country in provision of clean and safe drinking water. She stressed the importance of water as it is needed in every sector of the economy. “Water is important in agriculture, health, industry, education and in all sectors, “ she said.

Hon. Deng Deng Hoc, the national Minister of Environment said there is a need to recognize climate change as a significant threat to availability and accessibility of clean water and can increase insecurity and could result into conflicts. The minister also attributed crop failure and consequent food insecurity to scarcity of water in the country.

Spotlighting volunteers in South Sudan

The UN Volunteer (UNV) programme in partnership with Radio Miraya launched a new radio programme, The Spotlight. The exciting new programme explores the lives of volunteers serving in South Sudan. While the initial programmes have featured UN Volunteers, subsequent programmes will include those from other volunteer organizations and individuals who have committed to volunteerism of any kind.

Volunteers are given a platform to share their passions, professional projects, charities, and hobbies as well as uncover the life lessons and the best practices that lead them in their volunteerism journeys. The Spotlight highlights volunteerism and its ability to create positive change, empower individuals and communities as well as enhancing quality of life and social cohesion.

With the current international focus being on The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), The Spotlight also focuses on volunteerism being a powerful means of achieving the SDGs. Through the inspiring stories that volunteers share on The Spotlight, audiences learn about how volunteerism can help achieve the SDGs by providing technical support and enhancing capacity in all thematic goal areas. Volunteers deliver basic services, help transfer skills and foster exchanges of good practices and making their skills to fragile communities which is the case in South Sudan. Volunteers help leave no one behind by reaching out to people, including those marginalized or difficult to reach, to bring people’s voices and knowledge into collective actions. This is crucial to build ownership and localize the SDGs. In the case of South Sudan, volunteers share their stories of how they contribute towards peace and development in the country that is
going through conflict. Through the powerful stories shared by volunteers, audiences learn how each of them can contribute to changing the state of the world.

The radio programme has been developed, written, produced and anchored by UN Volunteers. The spotlight airs on Radio Miraya (101 FM) every Friday, 14:00-15:00hrs and on Saturdays 20:00-21:00hrs and is hosted by Keleobegile Lebogang Maruapula, UNV Communications Officer.

IOM promotes TB testing and treatment at the Bentiu PoC Site

In commemoration of World TB day on March 24 at the PoC site, IOM and health partners held activities to promote awareness among the Bentiu population about TB signs and symptoms, prevention measures and access to testing and treatment. Increasing early detection and treatment is vital to helping those with TB and mitigating the spread of the disease in the congested IDP site.

“We want to raise awareness among the IDP community in Bentiu that IOM is providing TB testing and treatment. TB is a curable disease and the community should not be apprehensive to visit health care providers,” explains IOM Migration Health Programme Manager, Kelsi Kriitmaa.

IOM health care staff work closely with Health Cluster partners and the National Tuberculosis Program at the South Sudan Ministry of Health to address TB needs. Synergistic health and hygiene promotion activities seek to reduce morbidity in the sites through encouraging safe household hygiene habits.

One patient, Mary, was diagnosed with TB in January after developing symptoms while eight-months pregnant with her third child. An IOM health promoter referred Mary to the IOM clinic, where she was tested and immediately started treatment. Shortly after, Mary went into labour and delivered a healthy baby girl.

Since testing at the Bentiu PoC site began in January, IOM has tested 145 people for TB, with 24 people, or 16 per cent, testing positive. This figure is a worrying statistic that hints to a high prevalence of TB among the IDP community.

UNDP presents its country programme to support early recovery and stabilization in South Sudan

The United Nations Development Programme hosted representatives from major development partners resident in South Sudan to present its 2016-2017 Country Programme Document and proposed programme portfolio. UNDP advocated for rolling out early recovery and stabilization initiatives in South Sudan as part of the assistance package to support the implementation of the peace agreement.

The delegates reviewed UNDP’s proposed programme which is centred on building more resilient communities, reinvigorating local economies, and strengthening peace and governance to help the young nation transition from crisis to recovery, stabilization and development.

The meeting brought together representatives from the Norwegian, Dutch, Japanese, Swiss, European Union, German, French and Chinese Embassies, as well as representatives from DFID, USAID, IMF and the World Bank.
Civil society partners, government officials, local students and representatives from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan gathered on stage and danced together to local traditional songs at a cross-cultural event, “UNMISS World Flavours,” showcasing the importance of respecting diversity through sharing from different cultures all for the sake of peace and unity.

The UNMISS World Flavours which was organized on March 05 at the Nyakuron Cultural Center in Juba by the mission in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports brought together some 600 participants. The goal of this event was to bridge the gap between UNMISS and the South Sudanese society through face-to-face interactions and enhance mutual understanding between the mission and the people of South Sudan.

The event featured diverse cultural performances made by UNMISS military contingents from China, Ethiopia, Japan and Nepal while South Sudan was represented by the Acholi local dance group. The UNMISS civilian sections such as Child Protection, Civil Affairs, Conduct and Discipline, Gender Affairs, Human Rights, Public Information, UN Police and Women Protection also explained their activities to the local guests.

Moustapha Soumaré, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Political), described the event as a true example of the “unity in diversity which the UN stands for,” reiterating the Mission’s commitment as South Sudan’s “Partner for Peace.”

UNESCO is providing women and youth in the rural areas with access to information, equal representation and participation in decision making through promoting radio listener clubs.

With the generous financial support from the Swedish Government, four radio listeners clubs have been established in collaboration with the Southern Sudanese Women General Association, the Catholic Radio Network Voice of Hope radio station in Wau and Good News radio station in Rumbek while 4 more in Awerial and Pibor are currently being established.

Angelina Inheim Akheich the chairperson of the Rumbek Women Radio Listening club said that in their listening club discussions, they are interrogating subjects once considered a taboo, such as sexual violence and early child marriages. It is through radio listener clubs that we can strengthen their capacity to listen to the opinions of other actors, both men and women, with a view to finding home grown solutions for eliminating these negative vices in their communities.

Members of the radio listener clubs have been equipped with basic journalism skills including community participation in listening, providing feedback, gathering information and producing pre-recorded programmes to their community radio stations. To facilitate communication between the listener club members and the radio stations and ensure mobility in gathering, packaging and reporting, UNESCO has donated bicycles, handheld radio sets, smart mobile phones, digital audio recorders and rechargeable batteries to Wau and Rumbek Radio listener clubs.
FAO brings fuel-efficient cooking to communities in South Sudan

In order to address the cooking energy needs of vulnerable families, particularly women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and partners have recently distributed over 2,000 fuel-efficient stoves and trained 820 women on how to use them in Lainya County near Juba. A further 15,000 stoves will be distributed in 2016 as part of the Emergency Livelihood Response Programme.

The fuel-efficient stoves being distributed by FAO use 50 percent less firewood for cooking and in turn reduce the burden and time spent collecting it — which can take on average four to six hours, covering distances of up to 25 kilometres. Traditionally, women are responsible for collecting firewood in often isolated areas, so the fuel-efficient stoves are also helping to reduce the exposure of women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence.

Louisa Kamisa, a displaced mother who arrived in Lainya in September said the community is not happy with their arrival and often direct them to far off places to collect firewood. “Walking all that way takes a lot of time and also it is not safe since men are around and attack us,” she said.

“With the fuel-efficient stoves, we are now seeing a more positive impact on the lives of women,” said Serge Tissot, FAO Representative in South Sudan. “They spend less time looking for firewood, giving them time for other things such as income-generating activities, and therefore strengthening their livelihoods.”

Other activities in pictures

A cultural performance at the Let Us laugh Festival organized by UNMISS on March 19 in Juba. Audience members participated in a live quiz with questions on the key pillars of the mission mandate. Winners took home prizes such as wind-up radios. © UNMISS

Intended Nationally Determined Contributions to climate change workshop was organized by UNEP in Juba. On March 18, 2016, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of South Sudan in its sitting chaired by the President of the Republic of South Sudan, His Excellency Salva Kiir Mayardit endorsed South Sudan Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) to United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). © UNEP

WHO Country Representative, Dr Abdulmumini Usman, delivering a speech during the launch of Meningitis preventive campaign on March 22 in Yei. The aim of the introduction of the new conjugate meningitis A vaccine (MenAfriVac) is to protect about 5 million South Sudanese youths against the most dangerous form of meningitis called Meningitis A. © WHO