



## **Transforming South Sudan Through Innovative Partnerships: The Power of Water**

Leaders and experts on South Sudan met on May 28, 2014 at the Rayburn Executive Office Building to discuss water supply, sanitation and hygiene conditions and their relation to the humanitarian crisis and long-term development. The special briefing session was Chaired by Representative Chris Smith. Gregory Simpkins, Subcommittee Staff Director of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, provided opening remarks. Jason Matus, AECOM's Senior Sudan/South Sudan Coordinator chaired a panel of experts that included: Salva Dut, Executive Director and Founder of Water for South Sudan; Buey Tut, Executive Director and Founder of Aqua Africa and Anthony Kolb, Health Advisor for the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The panel presented the importance of water and sanitation in the current South Sudan context. Just as water and sanitation services were a critical part of the independence development dividend, these services are now central to addressing the humanitarian crisis, as emphasized by the current cholera outbreak in the country. Panelists pointed out that water is also very much part of the conflict mitigation process and provides mutual benefits between hosts and displaced people and, perhaps most importantly, transcends inter-communal differences. This is evidenced by the United Peace and Development Project funded jointly by Water for South Sudan and Aqua Africa which took place on the fringe of active conflict areas. Ultimately, clean water and sanitation will be a crucial dividend of a lasting peace agreement.

The panelists discussed challenges around providing clean water and sanitation in South Sudan, highlighting a recently completed household survey that demonstrated the disparity in levels of service between rural and urban areas. This inequality indicates that the Government of South Sudan's policy of 'bringing the towns to the people' is failing. Further, in addition to the destruction caused by the conflict, the international community is losing faith in the GoSS as a development partner.

Within this challenging environment there are also opportunities. Panelists noted results from the household survey that demonstrated people are willing and able to pay for water and sanitation services in rural areas, a strong indicator of sustainability. Additionally, private individuals, organizations and foundations continue to invest in South Sudanese in spite of the conflict. Finally, the biggest opportunity is evidenced by the representatives from Aqua Africa and South Sudan. There are strong, South Sudanese leaders who have proven themselves capable and worthy of investment.

The panel summarized their remarks in three messages for attendees and members of Congress. First, in spite of the challenges, now is not the time to give up on South Sudan. There are stable areas in need of assistance which can serve as models of good governance for the country. This point was highlighted by Salva Dut in his closing statement, "I want the government of the US to not turn away from us. We are good people and we are going to make it...I want the US to invest in South Sudan." Second, beyond the GoSS and the militias there are South Sudanese leaders working to fulfill the promise of nation building. Finally, South Sudanese organizations continue to deliver good services even under the most challenging conditions.