



IOM MICRONESIA

Republic of the Marshall Islands

El Niño Drought Response

Situation Report #9

September 29, 2016

A Drop in the Bucket : Jerry cans bring safe water to Marshallese



Martha Binejal outside her home in Bekarej, Arno. © IOM 2016

Republic of the Marshall Islands—Martha is no stranger to disaster. In 2013, Martha and her family survived the RMI drought. In 2014, Martha’s outer island home on Bekarej, Arno burned down displacing Martha, her husband, and their children. A year and half later, Martha was faced with a familiar challenge- an El Niño induced drought that NOAA has reported to be “the strongest... in recorded history.”

Life in the outer island/atolls is not easy. Despite being surrounded by ocean water, fresh drinking water can be hard to come by. There are no taps with infinite flowing water, and there are no supermarkets that continuously stock bottled drinking water. All fresh water is collected from rainwater catchment systems or ground wells supplied by a small freshwater lens. When the affects of the El Niño induced drought began to be felt in the Marshall Islands in early 2016, outer island and atolls that rely on household water collection methods were hit especially hard, making already scarce resources even harder to acquire. Catchment systems ran dry, and groundwater wells became brackish as the fresh water lens depleted due to the additional stress on the natural system.

During times of drought, the spread of diseases typically increases due to a scarcity of freshwater for daily hygienic needs. In response to the drought, IOM Majuro began a WASH promotion campaign with funding from USAID/OFDA to distribute five gallon jerry cans to households in 19 outer island/atolls. Each household received two five-gallon jerry cans in order to provide a safe way of collecting and storing drinking water during the drought. In the populous urban center, Ebeje, households received one jerry can each. To date, 4,357 jerry cans have been distributed to 19 atoll/islands, reaching 22,209 beneficiaries in 3,171 households, approximately 42% of the population living in the Marshall Islands.

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Martha Binejal was one of those beneficiaries. On a recent distribution to Arno atoll, Martha sat down with an IOM Response team member and reflected on her experience during the drought. Martha is a wife and mother of four. She collects all of her family’s drinking water from their family’s well daily. The well used to be on the same land as their house, but after the fire claimed their home in 2014, the Binejal’s rebuilt on their relative’s land nearly one mile away. Prior to the USAID/OFDA jerry can distribution in 2016, Martha would walk to and from the well with a one-gallon container five times in order to fill a five gallon cooler that she would store the drinking water in. After receiving her family’s two jerry cans, Martha reported that she can now make only one trip to the well with the two jerry cans and store twice the amount of drinking water for her family in a safe way. When asked what she thought about the jerry cans, Martha said, “Emman. Ejipan” which translates to “They are good. They are helpful.”

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IOM RESPONSE

Outer Island Clean Up Contest

The Outer Island Clean Up Contest, funded by USAID, is part of the ongoing 2016 drought response activities, and is off to a very successful start. The IOM Response team was in Arno, Rearlaplap September 16th and 17th for the third distribution of one month rations of USAID supplemental food assistance, and for the kick-off of the Outer Island Clean Up contest. A total of 87 bags of trash were collected between the four communities serviced (Malel, Kilange, Tinak, Longor). Each community receiving USAID supplemental food assistance will be competing individually in the competition. Winners will be decided by dividing the total number of bags collected by the community population. The remaining islands will participate in the clean up contest during the upcoming two-month supplemental food assistance distribution in early October. Winners will be announced in November.



Ebeye Radio and Jerry Can Distribution

On September 13th, IOM charter Indies Trader arrived in Ebeye for the distribution of goods from two IOM programs. First, was the IOM distribution of USAID funded solar powered radios under the PREPARE program in close partnership with the Youth Services Bureau and the Marshall Islands Youth Congress. Second, was the distribution of USAID funded five gallon jerry cans as part of the IOM drought response. IOM was honored to have Iroojlaplap Imata Kabua, Deputy Chief Secretary Ebeye Abacca Madison and Kwajalein Atoll Local Government attend the public handover ceremony on September 16th. Kwajalein Atoll Youth Council (KAYC) in coordination with Kwajalein Atoll Local Government (KalGov) and Office of the Chief Secretary (OCS) Ebeye have since distributed all jerry cans and radios to beneficiaries. IOM would like to extend a warm thank you to the KAYC, KalGov, Kwajalein Atoll Joint Utility Resources (KAJUR), OCS Ebeye, and Stevedore for their active participation in the project.



IOM's activities are funded by and conducted in partnership with the following Organizations:

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