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Helping Communities Access Safe Drinking Water in Palau

The Republic of Palau's January-to-March dry season often results in drought conditions that reduce the quality and quantity of safe drinking water available to local communities. Following drought in 2016 that affected an estimated 80 percent of Palau, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) supported humanitarian partner the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to conduct disaster risk reduction activities in the archipelago.

In partnership with the Government of the Republic of Palau's Ministry of Education (MoE), IOM provided safe drinking water storage capabilities to rural communities by improving rainwater collection systems at 10 elementary schools in Palau from 2016–2018. The rainwater collection systems, which pipe rainwater from storage tanks into school kitchens, provide a source of safe drinking water to students and local communities throughout the dry season. Water quality management teams—each consisting of four students, one science teacher, and one parent—maintain the rainwater collection systems, conducting monthly water quality tests and sending the results to the MoE.

During recent site visits conducted by USAID/OFDA and IOM staff, school



cooks expressed appreciation for the reliable safe drinking water source and noted the importance of the water storage tanks, which provide a total of 31,500 gallons of safe drinking water storage across the seven school sites. According to IOM, the water sources were designed to be used to sustain local communities in the event of a drought or other natural disaster in Palau.

In addition, IOM installed five community water chlorination systems to treat water drawn from rural streams, which often become contaminated during the dry season. After proper treatment by trained community members, water from the streams now serves as an additional source of safe drinking water for local communities throughout the year.

USAID/OFDA-funded initiatives to provide safe drinking water in Palau demonstrate the importance of local engagement in identifying and implementing unique solutions to significant seasonal challenges.

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