



MALAWI RESPONSE MISSION

TEXT BY **CITYHOPE DISASTER RELIEF**
CULTURE MAGAZINE **ISSUE #67**

On Friday 8th March 2019 the Government of Malawi declared a State of Disaster in the country following relentless, heavy rains and flooding associated with Cyclone Idai, which later hit Mozambique on Thursday 14th March. The Cyclone resulted in major flooding across Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. As a direct result, close to 60 people lost their lives, and approximately 90,000 were left without vital basic needs such as shelter, food and safety in Malawi alone. In addition, livestock, infrastructure and sanitation facilities were destroyed. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, there were serious ongoing risks for the people displaced from their homes, including dangerous waterborne diseases such as cholera.

It was at this point that CityHope Disaster Relief identified the significant need to support the Malawian citizens who had been most desperately affected. The organisation rapidly made contact with the Crown Ministries team based in Blantyre, whose mission is to lay the foundation for life and sustainable development by imparting agricultural and business skills to the local farmers. Since inception, CityHope has built many strong relationships within the country of Malawi, as the organization has previously responded to flooding in 2015 as well as to the droughts and food shortages experienced in 2016.

CityHope, in partnership with Crown Ministries, identified the regions and communities that were most desperate for assistance and food relief following the devastation that had been caused in their villages. With the financial backing of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) in the States, plans were made to locally procure twenty tonnes of food relief, consisting of maize flour, rice and beans.

Upon the South African response team's arrival in Blantyre, they immediately set to work in loading the 20 tonnes by hand onto the truck destined for the southern districts of Malawi. After a scenic three-hour drive down towards Bangula, the CityHope team followed the laden truck through the gates of the Iris Relief Missionary Base, where the sound of harmonious singing was heard from the ministry team of local joy-filled ladies. The 48 hours that followed were led by these voices as they tirelessly sang praises over the land and the people as we travelled from village to village.

Iris Relief works very closely in the communities of Southern Malawi and, in partnership with local government and community leaders, was able to direct the team to those that had not yet received the aid they required to survive. Upon arrival at the first of three distribution locations, the team was welcomed by a community of over 2,000 men, women and children who were lifting their voices and hands in praise for the blessing that God had delivered to their village through CityHope. As each family came forward to receive their 20 kg portion, they were individually blessed by the powerful prayers of the ministering team of ladies from Iris Relief. On the outskirts of the crowd there were smaller groups of community members casually forming around response team volunteers as they began to hear about and experience the grace and faithfulness of God.

As the three organisations – CityHope, Crown Ministries and Iris Relief – continued through all three distribution locations the essence of the setting endured as they were consecutively welcomed with the joyful sound of praises on arrival. The instant that the drone was flown up and over the crowd was the moment that consistently brought a brief distraction to the daily battles of life as crowds of inquisitive children flocked to try and identify the object hovering just out of arm's reach. The pilot of the drone was accordingly nicknamed "The Pied Piper" as this tactic was commonly used to relocate the children out of the crowds.

Once the distributions had been completed it brought a great sense of joy to each individual that had played a part, as it was a privilege to be able to be involved in making a significant difference in the lives of so many individuals. But at the end of the day, it was not the short-lived impact of the maize, rice and beans that made all the difference, it was the realization that each person had used an opportunity to be a light in the darkness, to bring hope to the hopeless and to impart joy to the faint of heart.