



## UMZI WETHU VILLAGES FOR DISPLACED CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Working with our close associate and partner in South Africa, the Wilderness Foundation, we are piloting a new concept to address the tragedy of AIDS orphans and displaced youth in Southern Africa. Wild nature can help!

**Imagine a South Africa with one third of its children orphaned and on the streets.** That's the vision of South Africa in 10 years if we don't take action. South Africa is a world conservation leader and celebrates a decade of democracy. But beneath this huge success lurks potential social devastation that may quickly overwhelm South Africa's capacity to sustain its achievements. The AIDS death toll is steady and increasing, wiping out the most productive generation and leaving behind only the elderly and dependent children. The epidemic disproportionately impacts Sub-Saharan Africa, which has 10% of the world's population but 70% of the HIV-infected and 92% of all children orphaned by AIDS (UNAIDS/WHO, 2001).



The result of AIDS is political, social, economic and environmental instability. The loss of food security, human capacity, traditional knowledge, and community-based natural resource management are all exacerbated by the disparity of wealth. Social networks are stretched so thin they are collapsing.

United Nations Food Program director, James Morris, exclaims: "If a Boeing 747 crashed every hour there would be an outcry. That's the death toll we're facing in this region, but there is inadequate outrage. The result is that people are dying on a horrific scale and victims are not getting the help they need."

The victims include orphaned children, although only 35% are themselves HIV positive. It is estimated that they currently number nearly a million – parentless and displaced. Traditionally orphans join extended families, but more deaths of breadwinners means more youngsters turned out into the streets. On any day in any weather, you can see them in city centers, begging, often stealing, and sleeping rough. They have little or no schooling, low self-esteem and generally just the clothes on their backs. Reflective of the demographics of poverty and HIV, most of them are black and the majority are girls.



**uMzi wethu is a highly-innovative, community-based solution to these problems** of displacement, vulnerability, and poverty faced by AIDS orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in South Africa. A Xhosa word for "homestead," an uMzi wethu is not an orphanage but a school with a residential option established just outside game reserves and parks that will create a safe home base with sustenance, nurturing, and guidance, formal education, and life and vocational skills development for OVCs, training for people from local villages, and partnerships with community organizations and others.

Designed by the Wilderness Foundation (WF) in South Africa in partnership with The WILD Foundation in the United States, uMzi wethu will utilize their 30 years of experience running social programs for black South African youth in South African national and provincial parks. The uMzi wethu project will undergo three phases over 10 years and is launching the feasibility study that will provide a cost-effective business plan for the establishment of two pilot uMzi wethu in the coming year. The first-year budget is \$339,000. WILD and WF seek initial funds from the private sector to leverage financial support from public sources to raise the \$259,000 not yet sourced.

No other effort to address the issue of AIDS orphans and vulnerable children in South Africa:

- is tied to environmental ethics and successful ecotourism;
- has ready access to the community base and cultural resources of retired black game rangers; and
- can as effectively leverage the support of top-level government officials committed to conservation.

WF and WILD invite you to join the stakeholders in this project.