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USAID Supports Innovative Camps for Kids

The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has pledged approximately \$240,000 (MK 31.2 million) to support Children in the Wilderness Malawi. This innovative program hosts orphaned and underprivileged children at two of Wilderness Safari's camps - Mvuu Camp and Chinteche Inn. The children are selected from orphan care centers and schools around the camps.

Using environmental education, therapeutic recreation and fun, Children in the Wilderness (CITW) exposes children to new opportunities, increases their self-esteem, builds and strengthens their capabilities to cope with life's challenges and gives them the life skills necessary to achieve success. Campers learn three personal goals designed to be used in village life: Respect, Teamwork, and Challenging Yourself. In addition, there is an educational component that includes good governance and democracy, nutrition, community natural resource management, HIV/AIDS and health, and human rights. Staff from Wilderness Safari lodges and volunteers from local orphan care centers serve as camp counselors providing positive Malawian role models for the campers.

After a week-long camp, Children of the Wilderness continues to provide assistance to campers into their early adulthood. Volunteers from the orphan care centers are employed by CITW to provide the children with regular programming, expanding on the knowledge learned at camp. These volunteers follow-up with specific campers who have special needs such as HIV or a history of abuse. With USAID assistance, Children in the Wilderness Malawi is currently developing the third and final part of its follow-up program: a job mentorship program.

Children in the Wilderness is a joint effort between USAID, Central African Wilderness Safaris, and Association of Hole in the Wall Camps, a US-based organization. The Children in the Wilderness Malawi program launched in 2003 and has hosted 250 children to date.