



## **Mike Zywina – LCD’s Education in Zimbabwe Conference – and how you made it happen**

### **Events Manager Mike Zywina reflects on LCD’s successful recent conference about education in Zimbabwe – and how your fundraising efforts made it possible.**

Last week I was lucky enough to attend both days of our Education in Zimbabwe Conference, organised in central London.

This is something I want to share with you for two reasons: firstly, it was a fascinating event to be part of, and secondly, it was something made possible by each and every one of you who have taken part in the Hitch and raised money for LCD over the years.

Our conference brought together representatives from over 50 international organisations, NGOs, teachers’ unions, embassies and diaspora groups in order to discuss how to rehabilitate education in Zimbabwe under the coalition government established in 2008.

It was attended by Hon. Senator David Coltart, Minister of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe, who flew to the UK specifically to participate. As well as speaking at the conference, Senator Coltart had a busy media diary, including appearances at the Houses of Parliament and on BBC’s HARDtalk.

Due to the recent political and economic instability in Zimbabwe, the country’s education system, formerly among the best in Africa, is now failing millions of children. Textbook shortages, poor infrastructure and underpaid teaching staff have affected a generation of Zimbabwean children. 976,000 Zimbabwean children who have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS are living without the support needed to be able to focus on their education.

The conference focused on addressing these issues and began on an overwhelmingly positive note. Steve Blunden, Chief Executive Officer of LCD, said of education in Zimbabwe: “There are some people that observe it, some people that talk about it, some people that write about it, and some people that try to change it.”

Following a presentation by DFID, the World Bank and the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education on the state of education in Zimbabwe, the conference broke into separate working groups to discuss different aspects of the education system.

In keeping with LCD’s usual approach to improving the quality of education in Africa, the conference aimed to create the space for open discussion, and lend LCD’s expertise and support to those who can make a difference, but without trying to impose our own views on what change should be made.

The conference was undoubtedly a huge success, and the majority of people I spoke to were full of praise for LCD’s efforts. They left feeling positive about the initial steps planned to bring about improvements in the education system in Zimbabwe, and very pleased to have had the chance to contribute their own thoughts and expertise. Without doubt there remains a huge amount of work to do, but LCD has started a process that should lead to real change in the country.

Of course, none of this would have been achievable without the money raised by our fundraising events, and especially the Hitch. Whereas much of our funding is tied to specific, carefully-planned projects, the money you raise by doing the Hitch generates unrestricted income that allows us to be innovative and creative in our approach, and bring about change where it is most needed.

This conference was the best possible example of such innovation – it brought people together to begin rebuilding the future of a country which desperately needs support, but has often been shunned by the international community due to its troubled past.

We are so grateful to all of you for making this conference possible, and for supporting LCD with your fundraising. In the words of Cris Bowora, from the Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe: “For all you have done, on behalf of 3.3million Zimbabwean children, 140,000 children and their parents, and the Ministry of Education, thank you.”