

PONT visit may 2008- report

A PONT team has just returned from a most successful visit to Mbale. The majority of the team were university lecturers from the University of Glamorgan, looking at a wide range of projects including slum regeneration, road improvements, environmental projects and carbon offsetting. Accompanying the team were two paramedics from Pontypridd who were looking at establishing an emergency ambulance service to the region of 780,000 people. Julian Newton was amazed at the enthusiastic response from the local directors of health “they seemed so eager for this to go ahead” said Julian, “it fits in so well with the primary care work already developing in the villages”. Unlike in Wales, where members of the public can call out an emergency ambulance for trivial reasons, often overwhelming the service, the Mbale model will depend on volunteers in each village being trained by our ambulance personnel, and using special phones to call out the ambulance for life threatening emergencies only. “Even more incredible was the discovery of a perfectly good ambulance in a storage shed where it had been left unused for 4 years due to lack of trained personnel. We also identified another ambulance that was being used for transport that could be upgraded to an emergency response vehicle, and we are hoping to raise funds for a third ambulance, which will cost about £7,000, so that in the near future we should be able to establish a comprehensive service to the whole region” enthused Julian.

The other key PONT project which came to fruition on this visit was the arrival of the container carrying the Machine tooling workshop donated by Chorus. One of the district councils has provided a building rent free for 2 years to house the workshop. “This is a real find, since this building was erected especially for such a workshop 40 years ago, but has lain dormant since the Ugandan civil war in the 1980’s” stated Howard Smith, the PONT engineer. “The most amazing coincidence was that the items that were too large to export, such as benches, hoists and ramps, had been left in place, so a fully operational workshop should be up and running in the near future, providing jobs and training opportunities for local people.”

Another member of the team was Charline - a local schoolteacher who is currently on a quest to link 80 schools from 40 countries around the world. She was most impressed by the enthusiasm of the Mbale schools, and the warm welcome she received. So far 42 schools from Rhondda Cynon Taff have been twined with schools in Mbale.

The team were accompanied by a documentary crew who were filming the link for a film to be shown at the National Eisteddfod in August where PONT is one of the proposed links for receiving a Gold Star award for community twinning.