



The new warehouse under construction at Kajjansi. The facility will have 32,000 pallet positions and the cold-room capacity shall be over 1,000 cubic metres

By Ritah Mukasa

By June 2019, Uganda will have the biggest Government-owned medicine and medical supplies warehouse in the world.

This comes after, National Medical Stores (NMS) put up a modern pharmaceutical and medical equipment warehouse which is about to be completed.

Located in Kajjansi on Entebbe Road, the mega facility will also have a spectacular office complex.

When launched, NMS will be in position to handle Uganda's medical demands even if the population increases by ten-fold.

According to Moses Kamabare, the general manager and chief executive officer of NMS, the facility will have 32,000 pallet positions and the cold-room capacity shall be over a 1,000 cubic metres.

The capacity is above that of the current warehouse at the NMS headquarters on Nsamizi Road in Entebbe which has 12,900 pallet positions and cold-room capacity of 811 cubic meters.

The warehouse is iconic

Paul Okware, the NMS chief stores and operations officer, explains that the warehouse will have a vaccine workshop, a quality control laboratory and offices for more than 200 staff.

It will also have cold storage rooms, garages and space to accommodate 30,000 pallets of medication. In comparison, the storage in Entebbe can accommodate a maximum of only 12,980 pallets.

The facility, which sits on 10 acres of land, will be mounted with solar panels capable of generating 300kw of electricity, providing 50% of the energy needs of the project.

The 69.5b complex shall also include basement parking for 90 cars.

Also, a lot of its expectations will be automated and it shall largely be a 'green' building, because it is designed to let in as much natural light as possible. The building will have solar with an electricity load of 300kva, therefore, promising tremendous savings in energy.

By November, the progress of the project was standing at about 50%, inclusive of design.

"We are confident that with the quality of work that is being done by the constructor, completion remains on track for 2019," Okware discloses adding that this is in spite of a few challenges.

NMS modern warehouse to ease service delivery



A section of the NMS warehouse in Entebbe

Funding

The iconic warehouse is partly funded by the Global Fund, which committed \$7.6m (about sh27.4b) towards the project and \$6.4m (about sh23.1b) has been disbursed, while GAVI, a Global Vaccine Alliance, committed \$1.5m (about sh5.4b). The Government is expected to top up.

In November 2018, GAVI approved \$5.6m (about sh21b) and the Government committed sh20b (equivalent to \$5.4m) to pay for the construction of the facility.

On the issue of finance, Okware says about sh40b is still needed for completion of the building.

The project is estimated to cost sh69.9b once completed by June 2019.

When the Global Fund Country Co-ordinating Mechanism (CCM) team toured the facility early last month, they pledged additional funding.

The CCM team was led by Dr Maggie Kigozi, the vice-chairperson.

After touring the extensive site, Kigozi gave the assurance that

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the Global Fund would avail the additional resources necessary, which amount to approximately sh21.56b. "We are happy with the progress of the project and we will ensure that it is successfully completed," she said.

According to Abubakar Ibrahim, the finance specialist at Programme Finance and Controlling, the Global Fund, NMS is required to have absorbed all the Global Fund money by this month.

Meanwhile, the Global Fund provided an initial \$7m and the CCM team was on hand to check the progress and explore opportunities to provide additional funding.

Ease service delivery

While speaking at the breaking of the ground ceremony for the construction of the warehouse last year, Kamabare said NMS has storage capacity constraints at its current stores in Entebbe, which has forced them to build new premises to accommodate the increasing demand for medicines from the growing population.

Since the warehouse, sitting on a 10-acre piece of land, will have 30,000 pallet positions compared to the current 8,000, Kamabare said this would enable NMS to have at least two months buffer stock at all times. "We are a landlocked country and

in case there are tensions in Kenya, we would have supplies for at least two months," he said.

On the other hand, the state minister for health, Sarah Achieng Opendi, said the construction of an ultra-modern warehouse would enhance the ministry's efforts in ensuring that the country has adequate vaccines in stock.

"The ministry will remain committed to disease prevention. For example, Rotavirus vaccine will become mandatory," she said.

The rotavirus vaccine protects babies against viruses that cause of severe diarrhoea which can result in death.

She said apart from the rotavirus vaccine, other vaccines such as the one for malaria would become mandatory.

The Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, commended the Government partnership with development partners, particularly the Global Fund and Gavi, saying they have been reliable in supporting Uganda's health programmes.

"The partners have been with us through thick and thin. They have helped us to fight against tuberculosis and malaria and immunisable diseases. The ultramodern warehouse will now be a forever living monument for this kind of partnership," he says.

He also commends NMS for the initiative to construct its own home and challenged other the government agencies to emulate it.

"The Government agencies should stop complaining and seek solutions to solve their problems," he said.

That, the warehouse will have advanced technology which will help in co-ordinating all people, who supervise service delivery including MPs, district health officers, resident district commissioners, and chief administrative officers. If someone is claiming that NMS has delayed to deliver, they will be able to check and see where the problem originates.

Kamabare says this will improve service delivery and transparency in the delivery of medical supplies across the country.