

We are proud of NMS, says health minister

National Medical Stores (NMS) is one of the Government parastatals we are proud to be associated with.

Until 2009, the organisation was struggling, but the Government took a decision to revert a policy that mandated it to give funds directly to the districts for medicine. The funds were invested in NMS to improve medicine availability in the country.

Since then, there has been a steady growth curve. The organisation has evolved into an institution that meets medicine demands of the entire country within the available budget, as well as transporting and distributing them to all the facilities in a timely manner.

NMS has come up with innovative ways to ensure that at any time, health facilities have the medicine that they need. This is extremely commendable.

NMS now has a presence in many regions of the country through their customer care personnel and offices. They now visit health facilities and offer support to the health workers, teaching them to plan for what they need and develop their procurement plans. In all this, NMS has not forgotten those that might not have adequate personnel to order medicines, as occasionally happens at health centre III level.

It offers support through pre-planned procurement that is signed off by district health officers on an annual basis.

This not only saves time, but also addresses the issues of staff shortages and medicine availability. I really must commend the management and the board of NMS for steering the institution to where it currently is.

NMS is now set to expand at the massive warehouse stores they are setting up at Kajjansi.

With this they will be able to cater for all the country's needs in terms of storage of medicines and supplies.

I am looking forward to its opening in mid next year. We will be able to store real bulk, especially of infection control materials, in preparedness, as we are prone to outbreaks on an almost daily basis.



The health minister, Jane Ruth Aceng

I WANT TO APPLAUD THE NMS TEAM ON THE SPIRIT OF TEAMWORK, THANK YOU FOR BEING PASSIONATE ABOUT OUR LIVES

Another commendation I offer NMS is on how it improved and expanded its fleet, including the integration of cold-chain trucks that are able to transport vaccines to various districts and health facilities, on a timely basis.

This ensures not only that the cold-chain is not broken, but also that vaccines are available.

And it is also amazing that NMS is able to distribute vaccines to the entire country within a fortnight on a monthly basis.

This is something we are extremely proud of, and that is why UNICEF awarded NMS as one of the best stores for medicines and health supplies in Africa.

I, thus, wish to congratulate NMS on reaching 25 years and on doing a good job to ensure that the population of Uganda has medicines and receives them in a timely manner.

I also want to applaud the NMS team on the spirit of teamwork, compassion and for being determined to serve the country and see the people of Uganda healthy and ready to contribute to the growth of the economy.

Thank you for being passionate about our lives.



The NMS board members touring the new warehouse in Kajjansi. It is expected to be operational by June next year

NMS at 25: 'We

By Ritah Mukasa

The National Medical Stores (NMS) is celebrating 25 years of dedicated service. Over the years, the organisation has achieved great milestones.

NMS is a statutory corporation that distributes medicines procured by the Government and her development partners, such as USAID, Global Fund, UNICEF, GAVI and World Bank, among others, to all public health facilities in the country.

Moses Kamabare, the general manager and chief executive officer of the organisation, says NMS has come a long way, which is why its achievements have to be celebrated.

Its growth

Kamabare says NMS' mandate has grown over the years. He says the organisation now serves 100% of government health facilities, including the Police, army and prisons.

In August 2012, this mandate was further expanded to distribute all vaccines across the country.

He adds that NMS has enough stock of medicines and vaccines, which it distributes to all government hospitals and health centres on a routine basis, aside from the orders made to the organisation by the health facilities.

"NMS has also opened

THERE HAS BEEN PROGRESSIVE INCREASE IN THE AVAILABILITY OF ESSENTIAL MEDICINES AND HEALTH SUPPLIES FROM 21% IN 2008 TO 64% IN 2014

regional centres as a move to get closer to the people," Kamabare says.

The regional offices are Arua in West Nile; Gulu in the north; Hoima, Kabarole and Fort Portal in the west; and the Kampala regional office. Others are in Mbale, Mbarara, Moroto and Soroti.

"We have concentrated on replenishing the regional stores. This has enabled us to become customer-focused at the regional level," he says.

Bridging the gap

Kamabare notes that among the achievements they are celebrating, is the bridging of the gap with individual health facilities.

Unlike in the past, NMS now interacts with health facilities individually through routine deliveries and customer service staff.

"All the nine regional offices are manned by customer care staff who monitor and evaluate NMS services in the regions," Kamabare says.

In addition, all ordering facilities can individually

submit their essential medicine and health supplies procurement plans to NMS, which in turn ensures timely deliveries.

Drugs are now also stocked in adequate quantities to avoid duplicate deliveries, expiries and stock deficiencies. Co-ordination of the procurement of drugs has also been enhanced.

Recentralisation of funds

NMS scored highly with the recentralisation of funds for procurement of essential medicines and health supplies (EMHS) for facilities under the health ministry, local governments and uniformed services like the Police, army and Prisons.

Kamabare highlights that because of this arrangement, there has been progressive increase in the availability of EMHS from 21% in 2008 to 64% in 2014, using the 'Availability of Tracer Items' indicator.

Similarly, NMS's accountability to stakeholders has greatly improved.

Delivery to 3,065 facilities

NMS has successfully put in place appropriate systems and developed staff capacity for collection, processing and use of appropriate data for decision making in conducting the needs assessments.

Presently, NMS procures the right type and quantities of drugs to meet customer requirements.

It also delivers door-to-door to all the 3,065 government facilities and other accredited facilities countrywide, following the pre-determined delivery schedule.

The routine delivery is done once every two months for general hospitals and lower health facilities, while national referrals get once every month.

"We make over 19,000 deliveries to facilities countrywide," he notes.

Emergency order generation

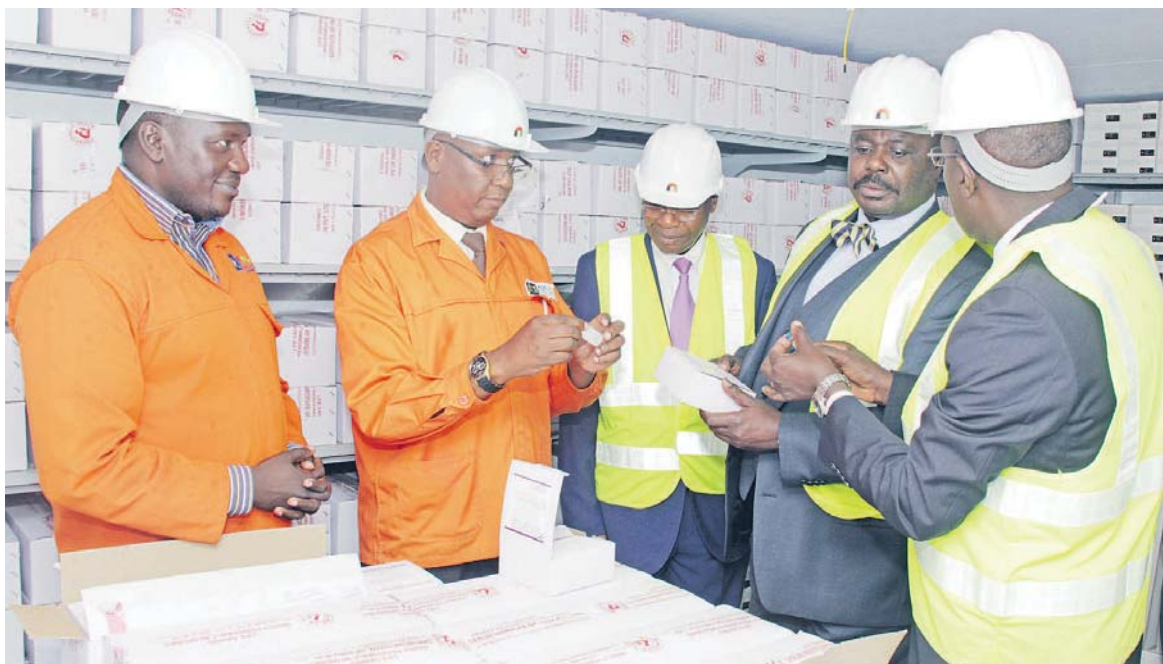
NMS has put in place a system that enables people to process emergency orders within 24 hours.

"We have two shifts that work for eight hours each from Monday to Friday. We also work on weekends and public holidays when the need arises," Kamabare says.

This has helped to eliminate late ordering, non-ordering or erroneous ordering by lower level facilities.

Delivery on time

Medicine is now delivered to all health facilities, including regional referral hospitals, general hospitals, health



Kamabare (second-right) with Deputy Speaker Jacob Oulanyah and other legislators in one of the organisation's cold rooms

have come a long way'



NMS board members

centre IVs, IIIs and IIs, through a system called Last Mile Delivery (LMD).

This system ensures that medical supplies reach the end user safe and on time.

Before LMD, medicine that NMS would deliver at district headquarters would delay to get to lower health facilities. The reasons advanced by district health authorities included inadequate staff and budget coupled with breakdown of district vehicles, among others.

Currently, NMS trucks deliver to the district headquarters and NMS contracts private transporters to deliver the medicine to individual

lower health facilities.

Kamabare says the in-charges of lower health facilities receive the cartons containing medicine accompanied by delivery notes specifying medicines in each carton.

The in-charges, community representative and security organisation confirm the medicine received if it is in good condition, then they sign and stamp the delivery notes.

The LMD system helps ensure effective management of stock so that health facilities do not run out of medicines and other medical supplies.

Drugs can be monitored

Today, drugs' supply can be monitored thanks to the NMS's new system which allows for online placement of supply orders and tracking of deliveries.

This comes after USAID gave NMS \$3m (about sh11b) to install new computer software called Enterprise Resource Planning. The system enables all stakeholders and interested parties to monitor orders and deliveries.

NMS also has effective and efficient drug information inquiry platforms that enable health centres and the general public

to obtain information on drug availability.

For example, through the NMS Smart Care, public health facilities and the general public can give and receive feedback on the medicine and medical supplies delivered by NMS in real time.

Basic kit innovation

NMS, in partnership with the health ministry and other stakeholders, came up with a basic kit innovation.

This kit contains the basic medicines that are supplied to all health centre IIs and IIIs across the country.

Best central vaccine store in Africa

Kamabare says there has been successful transfer of procurement and handling of vaccines, a move that was initially opposed by many, including government officials and stakeholders in 2012.

However, later, Ticky Raubenheimer, the author of the 2013 *Uganda Vaccines Management* report for the World Health Organisation (WHO), observed that Uganda's central vaccine store is the best in Africa.

This significantly increased vaccine coverage in the country. For these reasons, NMS scooped the 2016 and last year's UNICEF award for improvement in effective vaccine management and infrastructure capacity.

The kit is revised every year to make it relevant to the local situation and it is done once in every two months for health centre IIs and IIIs.

Health centre IVs and hospitals submit their medicine orders which are supplied to them bi-monthly, as per the delivery schedule.

NMS has also ensured continuous distribution of pharmaceutical products in a financially viable and sustainable manner.

It distributes various drugs which include Uganda Essential Drug Kits, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) drugs, family planning products and vaccines.

Ultimate disposal

Since 2012, NMS has been retrieving and disposing of expired drugs and freeing facilities of dangerous waste.

The organisation used its representation on the National Drug Authority (NDA) board to advocate alternative affordable means of drug destruction for health units.

NMS then took up the responsibility of retrieval and subsequent destruction of expired drugs delivered by them to health centres as an act of corporate social responsibility in line with their core values.

They utilise their available transport system (return trip on delivery) and their proximity advantage to Nakasongola incineration point. This remedies the logistical difficulty in accessing the only facility in the country, located in Nakasongola.

Distinct warehouse

NMS has put up a modern pharmaceutical and medical equipment warehouse in Kajjansi on Entebbe road. The modern facility, which is worth sh69.5b, will also have an office complex.

It is expected to be operational by June next year and will have 32,000 pallet positions and the cold-room capacity will be over a 1,000 cubic metres.

This is bigger than the current warehouse at the NMS headquarters on Nsamizi Road in Entebbe, which has 12,900 pallet positions and a cold-room capacity of 811 cubic metres.

Upon its launch, NMS will be able to handle Uganda's medical demands even when the population increases by ten-folds.

Other key achievements

Kamabare says NMS managed to put up an oxygen plant for Mbarara Hospital that was a precursor of oxygen plants for all other regional referral hospitals in the country.

NMS spearheaded a campaign to eradicate jiggers in Busoga, Karamoja and Kigezi sub-regions.

The mass free yellow fever vaccination in Kampala has benefitted over 90,000 people.

The organisation has offered support to children suffering from nodding syndrome in northern Uganda.

NMS helped provide oral morphine for palliation through public private partners. Currently, there is supply of free morphine to all palliation centres in Uganda, both public and private.

NMS has also constructed sanitary facilities for Police primary schools in Wakiso, Masaka and Mbale.