Press release
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Oxygen generation plant at Kitwe teaching hospital handed over to the Government of Zambia

The facility which has been constructed by UNOPS with financial support from Sweden and UNICEF valued at $US1.6 million symbolizes a milestone in health care delivery in Zambia.

The Ambassador of Sweden to Zambia, H.E. Johan Hallenborg, and UNICEF Representative, Dr. Penelope Campbell, today handed over to the Government of the Republic of Zambia, represented by the Provincial Minister for Copperbelt Province, Hon. Elisha Matambo, MP, a medical oxygen production plant at Kitwe Teaching Hospital which will serve more than 1.8 million people. This achievement represents a significant advancement in strengthening Zambia’s healthcare infrastructure and improving access to life-saving medical oxygen across the region.

The construction of the oxygen generation plant, initiated with a ground-breaking ceremony a year ago, has been realized through the generous financial support from Sweden and UNICEF. UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services), managed the procurement and construction of the facility, which will enhance healthcare services in the region by providing reliable access to medical oxygen, which is essential for treating a range of respiratory and emergency conditions.

This facility will support five Districts in Copperbelt Province, including Kitwe Teaching Hospital and 42 health centers in the Kitwe District, among which 16 are designated for basic emergency obstetric and newborn care, ensuring access to high-quality oxygen.

"Today's handover ceremony symbolizes a crucial step forward in our commitment to improving healthcare outcomes and saving lives," said the Provincial Minister for Copperbelt Province, Hon. Elisha Matambo, MP. "Access to medical oxygen is essential for saving lives, particularly in the management of respiratory illnesses and emergency care. We are grateful for the collaborative efforts of our partners Sweden and UNICEF in realizing this critical project. This plant will significantly bolster our capacity to respond to patient needs and reduce preventable deaths."
The oxygen plant is a Pressure Swing Absorption (PSA) system designed to produce a minimum of 120 oxygen cylinders (50-litre cylinder capacity each) per day, operating continuously, under optimum conditions. Medical oxygen is a life-saving therapeutic gas used for the management of hypoxaemia – an abnormally low level of oxygen in the blood that is caused by disease, trauma or other health conditions, and especially respiratory conditions and diseases like pneumonia and COVID-19. Medical oxygen is also a critical requirement for the management of emergency obstetric and new-born care.

Dr Penelope Campbell, UNICEF Representative in Zambia, reaffirmed the commitment to improving child health outcomes through access to essential medicines, including oxygen. "This plant will significantly enhance our capacity to address respiratory illnesses, such as pneumonia, which continues to be a leading cause of under-five deaths in Zambia. UNICEF is proud to support Zambia in strengthening its healthcare infrastructure to ensure that oxygen is readily available to those who need it most," she said.

The partnership between Zambia, UNICEF, UNOPS, and Sweden exemplifies the shared commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to health, infrastructure, and partnerships. This collaborative approach underscores the importance of international cooperation in advancing healthcare delivery and saving lives.

"Sweden is proud to support Zambia in securing access to medical oxygen for all, regardless of their location or resources. Medical oxygen has a critical role in reducing preventable deaths, particularly among mothers and children," stated H.E. Johan Hallenborg, Ambassador of Sweden to Zambia.

In addition to constructing the plant, UNICEF and UNOPS have provided comprehensive training to plant operators on maintenance and operational procedures. This capacity-building initiative ensures the sustainability of the oxygen generation plant and contributes to strengthening Zambia’s healthcare system.

“We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this project which will enhance medical oxygen delivery in Zambia. UNOPS remains committed to supporting the Government of Zambia and development partners to invest in health infrastructure that makes health services more easily available to all people in all places,” stated Rainer Frauenfeld, Director of UNOPS Multi-Country Office in Kenya.

As Zambia moves forward with its National Medical Oxygen Strategic Plan (ZNMOSP), launched last year, the completion of the oxygen plant signifies a critical step towards achieving healthcare goals and improving health outcomes for all Zambians.
“Today's launch of the PSA plant at Kitwe Teaching Hospital is a huge milestone that signifies the power of partnership and collaboration. When PATH supported the development and commissioning of the Zambian National Medical Oxygen Strategic Plan (NMOSP) 2022–2026, we envisioned collaboration with strategic partners as a critical cornerstone to addressing objective number of the strategy, which is, strengthening medical oxygen supply systems in 60 percent of public hospitals in Zambia. At PATH, we are committed to continue nurturing this collaboration with all the key partners as we all work towards increasing the proportion of health facilities receiving high-quality medical oxygen in Zambia”, said Dr Earnest Muyunda, PATH Country Director in Zambia.

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