

How Government of Japan is transforming Regional Referral Hospitals in Soroti, Jinja

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Uganda has made commendable strides in improving key health indicators over the past decades, with notable reductions in maternal, infant, and under-five mortality rates. Yet, these gains are under constant strain from a rapidly growing population, which has placed immense pressure on the country's healthcare infrastructure. This pressure is felt more acutely in Regional Referral Hospitals (RRHs) in Uganda.

Designed as pillars of specialised care, many RRHs have long struggled with outdated, insufficient, or non-functional medical equipment. This has compromised the quality of care, led to long patient waiting time, forced costly referrals to distant facilities, and demoralized healthcare workers. The gap between the mandate of these hospitals and their capacity to deliver has been widening, until now.

A strategic intervention from

the government of Japan (through Japan International Cooperation Agency - JICA) is poised to change this narrative, particularly for the Soroti and Jinja RRHs in Eastern Uganda.

The Project for the Improvement of Medical Equipment at Regional Referral Hospitals

On March 26, 2024, the Governments of Japan and Uganda, signed a Grant Agreement worth USD 6.2 million (approximately Shs24 bn) for The Project for the Improvement of Medical Equipment at Regional Referral Hospitals.

The project aims to strengthen the diagnostic and treatment capabilities of Soroti and Jinja RRHs by providing state-of-the-art medical equipment, thereby revitalizing healthcare service delivery for millions in Eastern Uganda.

The scope includes the procurement, installation, and

commissioning of a wide array of essential equipment to various departments within the hospitals ranging from diagnostic, treatment, monitoring to assistive and laboratory equipment. The project also encompasses consulting services to ensure the equipment is used correctly, effectively, and sustainably.

With procurement complete and equipment being installed, the Ministry of Health's Department of Infrastructure is preparing for official handover ceremonies at both hospitals on 12 and 13 February 2026, marking the start of a new chapter in regional healthcare.

Strengthening Health Service Delivery in Eastern Uganda

Through a detailed needs assessment conducted jointly by the Ministry of Health, the RRH staff and JICA teams, equipment was strategically allocated to departments where gaps were most acute.

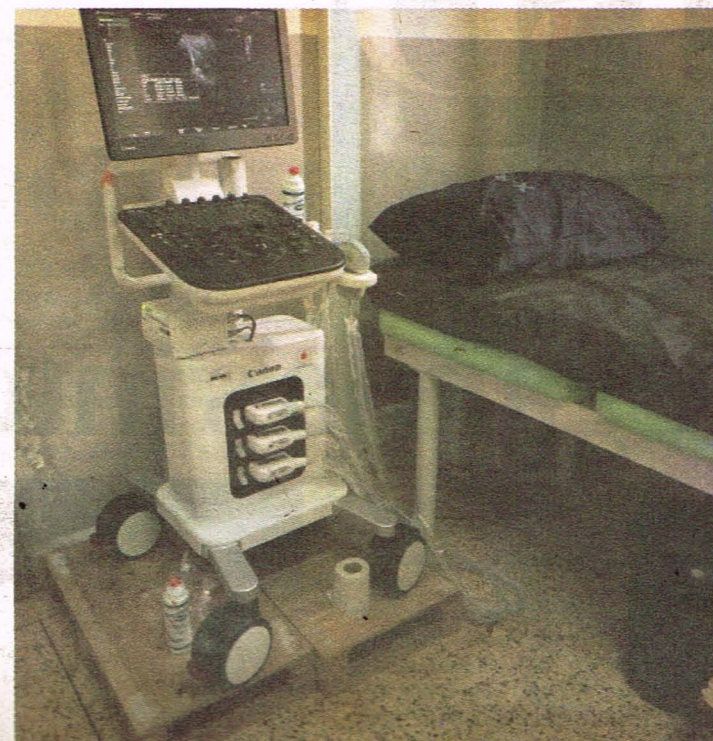
Soroti RRH

According to the Soroti RRH's Senior Executive Consultant, Dr. Benedicto Watmon, the Main Operating Theatre is one of the biggest beneficiaries.

"Previously limited, the theatre now boasts modern oper-

STRATEGIC

The medical equipment project, funded by the Government of Japan, is a strategic partnership investing in the health sovereignty of Eastern Uganda, by equipping Soroti and Jinja RRHs with the tools they need to fulfill their mandate, hence building a resilient, efficient, and dignified healthcare system for Ugandans.



Both hospitals have received advanced equipment.

ating tables with suction apparatus and monitoring systems, better lighting, and a full suite of surgical and anaesthetic equipment," he explains. "Endoscopy procedures will be done for the first time. This will reduce referrals of patients and out-of-pocket health expenditures."

The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) has received new incubators and warmers, promising better survival chances for newborns. The Dental Department now has three modern dental chairs, an X-ray machine, and surgical equipment, enabling procedures like fillings and polishing on-site.

In Ophthalmology, a modern operating microscope will allow for advanced eye surgeries, including procedures on the posterior segment of the eye. Even the newly established Accident and Emergency Unit, which was operating from a single improvised room, is now being properly equipped.

"Soroti RRH will see increased diversity of procedures and surgery, productivity, reduced waiting time, reduced referrals, improved teaching capacity, better patient ambience, and staff motivation," Dr. Watmon noted.

Jinja RRH

At Jinja RRH, which serves a catchment area of 11 districts in Busoga and Jinja City, totaling about 4.6 million people, the new equipment is equally transformative.

The Senior Executive Consultant, Dr. Alfred Yayi, shared that the hospital has received a suite of tools specifically designed to strengthen areas that had previously been identified as weak links:

- Diagnostic services are revolutionized with a new digital X-ray machine, four ultrasound machines, and a gastroendoscopy machine.

- Surgical capacity is amplified with five anaesthesia machines, two new operating tables, and an electro-surgical unit.

- Critical support services are bolstered by 17 oxygen concentrators, 20 patient monitors, and new mortuary refrigerators.

The strengthening of Jinja's core capabilities instills "better confidence and certainty in referral" for lower-level facilities, Dr. Yayi emphasized.

Investing in the Health Sovereignty of Eastern Uganda

The project transcends physical tools. It includes crucial user training for operation, maintenance, and safe use of the equipment. For healthcare workers, this is a great morale booster and a catalyst for professional confidence.

Additionally, at both RRH, biomedical engineers have received training in Japan, with the knowledge set to be transferred locally.

For patients, this project translates into tangible, life-altering differences. Specialized treatments like endoscopy, advanced dental work, and eye surgery are now available locally, saving families the immense cost and hardship of traveling to Kampala or beyond.

Additionally, improved comfort and outcomes are expected: new beds, mattresses, patient trolleys, and reliable monitoring equipment contribute to a better healing environment and better health results.

Acknowledging that advanced equipment requires advanced care; both hospitals have outlined robust sustainability strategies. Strengthening these RRHs has a ripple effect that empowers the entire healthcare pyramid. District hospitals and lower-level health centres will now refer complex cases with confidence.

They will also benefit through structured mentorship programs, staff attachments at the RRHs for specialized training, and the assurance that the referral system is backed by stronger diagnostic and treatment capabilities.



JICA Uganda Chief Representative, Mr. INOUE Yoichi and Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development; Hon. Matia Kasajja after signing a Grant Agreement. PHOTO/COURTESY