A major boost to healthcare services in Ngoma District is set to ease the burden of long-distance travel for patients seeking specialized treatment, following the launch of a new surgical complex at Kibungo Hospital.

The facility, officially inaugurated on Friday, March 19, features a fully equipped surgical complex comprising a 10-bed Intensive Care Unit (ICU), a High Dependency Unit (HDU), four modern operating theatres, and a dedicated teaching space. The investment, valued at over Rwf500 million, is expected to significantly enhance the hospital's capacity to deliver safe, timely, and high-quality surgical care.

The inauguration ceremony brought together officials from the Ministry of Health Rwanda, partners from Operation Smile, and local government leaders, underscoring a collaborative effort to strengthen Rwanda's healthcare system.

Now operating as a Level Two Teaching Hospital, Kibungo Hospital is among eight facilities selected nationwide to benefit from targeted upgrades aimed at building a connected surgical network. This initiative seeks to improve referral systems, reinforce district-level surgical capacity, and ultimately reduce the need for patients and their families to undertake costly and time-consuming journeys in search of care.

The new complex is expected to play a critical role in decentralizing specialized medical services, bringing life-saving interventions closer to communities across Rwanda's Eastern Province and beyond.

"This facility is more than just a building; it represents hope, progress, and our shared commitment to provide safe, timely, and quality surgical care for our community," said Jean Marie Vianney Ndayizigiye, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, at the official inauguration.

He urged healthcare workers, students, and other beneficiaries to leverage the facility for honing their skills to be able to cater to the community in need of care.

Residents of the Ngoma district welcomed the facility and expressed hope that it would cut travel and long waits for surgical care far from their homes.

"The need for surgical care has been prevalent here in Ngoma district. and our surrounding areas. We could travel a distance to Kigali to seek surgical care." Said a

local community health worker.

According to Dr. Jean Claude Munyemana, the Director General of Kibungo hospital, having the facilities and becoming part of the hub-and-spoke network strengthens their ability to serve the community.

“With enhanced infrastructure, new equipment, and continued training, we can provide safe surgery and be closer to home and reduce the financial burden on families who previously had to travel far for care. ” he said.

Though Kibungo level two hospital gradually increases its capacity, Ngoma district authorities expressed the need for construction of a district level hospital to assist the existing hospital.

Andrew Karima, Country Manager, Operation Smile Rwanda emphasized continuing commitment to help Rwanda’s health sector build systems that last.

“By working hand in hand with the Ministry of Health of Rwanda and our hospital partners, we are ensuring that patients in Rwanda can access high-quality surgical care closer to home today and for generations to come”. Karima said.

Increasing the number of surgeries

Despite significant gains in health outcomes, Rwanda continues to face a critical surgical gap. Rwanda currently delivers approximately 1,788 procedures per 100,000 people. However, the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery recommends 5000 procedures per 100,0000.

Additionally, the country counts 0.9 operation rooms (OR) per 100,000, while the standard is a minimum of 5 OR per 100,000 people.

Surgeons stress that there is still a need to put more effort into training surgeons for bridging the gap between the workforce and number of patients in need of surgical care.

“Surgery is unique, with multiple specialties. It means that no single surgeon can operate from toe to head.

“As both surgeon and educator, I see the power of integrating training with service delivery.” Said Faustin Ntirengana, a professor of plastic and reconstructive surgery and director of Global Surgery Research Hub at the University of Rwanda.

While the abundant surgical workforce and services are concentrated in the cities, with Kigali having around 70%, Ntirenganya proposes that surgery should be decentralized towards lower-level hospitals, including level 2 teaching hospitals.

Over the next five years, partnership with Operation Smile, alongside other partners, will increase investment in surgical training, mentorship, and infrastructure to strengthen surgical systems through the Operation 100 initiative.