

A new Zipline drone hub in Karongi is expected to cut delivery times for medical supplies to parts of western Rwanda, with the facility due to start operations in early October.

The new base will allow drones travelling to Bugarama in Rusizi District to make the journey in about 20 minutes, compared with roughly an hour from Zipline's existing hub in Muhanga, according to the company.

Construction of the Karongi facility began in June and has now been completed, Patrick Ndayisenga, who heads the hub, said on September 29.

The facility in Bwishyura Sector was visited by Minister of Local Government Dominique Habimana, Western Province Governor Jean Bosco Ntibitura and Karongi District officials ahead of its launch.

The new hub will expand Zipline's drone delivery network to three bases in Rwanda, alongside its facilities in Muhanga and Kayonza.

Officials said its location would be particularly important for communities and health facilities in the Kivu Belt.

Karongi Mayor Gerald Muzungu said the facility was unique because it would be the company's only base from which drones take off over Lake Kivu.

Minister Habimana said the new hub would help shorten the time needed to move medicines, blood and pig semen to districts bordering the lake.

"Zipline has solved the problem of delivering medicines across the country," Habimana said, describing the service as an example that has attracted international attention.

He said the Kivu Belt needed its own hub to improve the speed and efficiency of deliveries to health facilities.

Ndayisenga said the facility was fully built and only final preparations remained before operations begin.

The expansion comes as Rwanda continues to use drone technology to improve the distribution of medical supplies, particularly to facilities where road transport can take longer.

The Karongi hub is expected to improve access to the service for districts in the western part of the country while reducing delivery times on some routes.

Zipline's Rwanda operations currently include deliveries of medical supplies to health facilities, with the new Karongi base adding coverage around Lake Kivu.