

Malawi has launched a testing center for humanitarian **drones**.

The project is intended to explore the best ways to use drones to transport medicine and blood samples.

Malawi's government will operate the testing center in cooperation with [United Nations Children's Fund](#), or UNICEF. It is the first center of its kind in Africa.

Officials from the government and UNICEF held a launch ceremony last week in the capital Lilongwe. Flights are expected to be fully operating by April 2017. The drones will be carrying materials as far as 40 kilometers.

The most immediate use of drones in Malawi will be to help speed up the identification of HIV in babies. HIV is the virus that causes the disease AIDS.



In this file photo, an HIV positive mother holds her sick child at the Thyolo District hospital in Malawi, Nov. 26, 2014.

Malawi has one of the highest HIV infection rates in the world, especially among babies and children. Each year, about 10,000 children die in Malawi of HIV, according to UNICEF.

Currently, it can take up to 11 days to transport blood samples to laboratories by motorcycle or **ambulance**. It can then take another four weeks for blood test results to be returned.

UNICEF officials are hoping the drone flights will save many lives by cutting the time it takes to get HIV test results. It is important for infected children to get treatment as soon as possible to increase their chances for survival.

In March, UNICEF-Malawi successfully completed its first drone test flight. A drone traveled 10 kilometers to **deliver** materials from a community health center to a hospital in Lilongwe.



The Rwandan government is cooperating with a U.S.-based company to transport supplies to medical centers across the country.

Drones also will be tested to see if they can support transportation and collect information. These are important tasks in Malawi, where severe droughts and flooding can make damage **assessments** difficult during emergencies.

Drone aircraft are also being used in other parts of Africa to transport blood, medicine and humanitarian supplies.

Earlier this year, the Rwandan government signed a deal to cooperate with a U.S.-based company to transport supplies to medical centers across the country.

In Madagascar, drones fly blood and laboratory materials from rural villages to a research station for testing. The aircraft help doctors speed up the identification of disease in patients and make quick deliveries of vaccines.

I'm Bryan Lynn.

Lameck Masina reported this story for VOANews.com. Bryan Lynn adapted it for VOA Learning English, with additional material from Agence France-Presse and UNICEF. Mario Ritter was the editor.

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Words in This Story

drone – *n.* a small flying machine flown remotely by a pilot

ambulance – *n.* a vehicle that transports sick people

deliver – *v.* take something to a person or place

assessment – *n.* the act of making a judgement about something