

Upgrade keeps ageing Oryx choppers flying

The air force's workhorse, the Oryx helicopter - often the only lifeline for stranded hikers, and used to service remote polling stations and for border protection - has been given a new lease of life. A multimillion-rand avionics and engine upgrade and general overhaul will extend the working life of the air force's 39 Oryx helicopters by 15 years.



Scott A. Fleming via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

"Without this upgrade operations and missions such as assisting in elections, rescuing people off mountains and transporting our peacekeepers would be impossible," said Brigadier-General Khaya Mtirara. Mtirara is the director of air force acquisitions.

He said the project had taught the air force and the defence industry important lessons. "What we learned on this project we will use in the upgrading of other aircraft, especially the planned upgrading of the Rooivalk attack helicopter."

Airbus last week said it had signed a deal with Denel Aviation to cooperate on enhancing the Rooivalk. "With ever-increasing demands being made on the air force, and in particular on the Oryx helicopter, this work is incredibly important," said major-general Gerald Maling, deputy chief of the air force.

Maling said serious technology backlogs would be corrected and the air force's capabilities would be rejuvenated.

"Everything that was done on this project was done here in South Africa. Those who worked on the project will impart their skills to others who will work on future such projects.

"This project has created an entirely new skills base for the country."

Source: The Times

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