

Research Paper

AI-Enabled UAV–IoT Framework for Autonomous Diagnostic Data Acquisition, Medicine Inventory Monitoring, and Telemedicine Support in Resource-Constrained Rural Healthcare Systems

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Abstract—Access to timely and quality healthcare remains a significant challenge in rural and resource-constrained regions, where hospitals often lack advanced diagnostic infrastructure, real-time monitoring systems, and efficient medical supply chains. Recent advancements in Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies present promising opportunities to address these limitations. However, most existing solutions focus on isolated functionalities such as drone-based medical delivery or IoT-based patient monitoring, without offering a unified and intelligent healthcare support system.

This research proposes an AI-enabled UAV–IoT integrated framework designed to support autonomous diagnostic data acquisition, medicine inventory monitoring, and telemedicine services in rural healthcare environments. The proposed system utilizes IoT-enabled medical devices deployed at rural health centers to collect patient diagnostic data, which is transmitted through UAV-assisted communication or edge gateways to centralized healthcare facilities. UAVs equipped with autonomous navigation capabilities are employed not only for medical supply delivery but also for on-demand data collection and emergency response.

Artificial intelligence techniques are incorporated to enable intelligent decision-making, including optimized route planning, priority-based medical delivery, and predictive analysis of healthcare demands. Additionally, the framework introduces a drone-based medicine inventory monitoring mechanism that tracks stock levels at rural hospitals and automatically schedules replenishment using optimized multi-drone coordination strategies. The proposed architecture is being evaluated using simulation tools such as ROS, Gazebo, and network modeling platforms to validate system performance in terms of latency, delivery efficiency, and data reliability. Preliminary results indicate that the integrated approach can significantly enhance healthcare accessibility, reduce response time in emergencies, and improve the efficiency of telemedicine services.

Keywords—UAV, IoT, Telemedicine, Rural Healthcare, Artificial Intelligence, Drone Delivery, Medical IoT, Autonomous Systems, Healthcare Logistics, Smart Healthcare System

I. INTRODUCTION

The delivery of quality healthcare in rural and remote regions remains one of the most persistent global challenges. Approximately 3.5 billion people — nearly half of the world's population — reside in areas where healthcare infrastructure is critically underdeveloped [1]. These regions frequently face acute shortages of trained medical personnel, limited access to diagnostic equipment, and inefficient medical supply chains. The consequences include higher morbidity and mortality rates, delayed emergency response, and a widening health equity gap between urban and rural populations.

Emerging technologies, particularly Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT), have demonstrated remarkable potential to transform healthcare delivery in resource-constrained environments. UAVs have been successfully

deployed in sub-Saharan Africa for blood and vaccine delivery, while IoT-based systems have enabled remote patient monitoring with measurable improvements in chronic disease management outcomes. However, existing deployments are largely fragmented, addressing single problem domains without integrating capabilities into a cohesive, intelligent system.

The central hypothesis of this research is that a unified AI-enabled UAV–IoT framework — capable of simultaneously addressing diagnostic data acquisition, telemedicine support, and medicine inventory management — can yield significantly superior healthcare outcomes in rural settings compared to isolated technology deployments. Such integration reduces redundant infrastructure investment and enables synergistic AI-driven optimization across all three functional domains.

This paper presents the architecture, design rationale, and preliminary simulation results of such a framework. Section II reviews related literature; Section III describes the proposed framework architecture; Section IV details the AI methodologies; Section V presents simulation results; Section VI discusses findings; Section VII outlines limitations and future work; Section VIII concludes the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. UAV-Based Healthcare Delivery Systems

The application of UAVs in healthcare logistics has witnessed exponential growth over the past decade. Rwandan blood delivery operations by Zipline (2016–present) have become the benchmark case study, demonstrating delivery times reduced from several hours to under 30 minutes [2]. Haidari et al. (2016) modeled UAV delivery networks in Mozambique, showing potential to eliminate up to 98% of vaccine stockouts [3]. Eichleay et al. (2019) validated that UAV delivery systems can reduce last-mile healthcare delivery costs by 40–65% depending on terrain [4].

However, most implementations operate as standalone delivery platforms without intelligent integration with on-site healthcare systems or predictive demand modeling, resulting in reactive rather than proactive healthcare logistics.

B. IoT-Based Remote Patient Monitoring

IoT-enabled remote patient monitoring (RPM) has emerged as a transformative paradigm in chronic disease management. Studies by Patel et al. (2012) and Istepanian et al. (2011) demonstrated that continuous monitoring of vital parameters via wearable IoT sensors reduced hospital readmission rates by 30–50% in diabetic and cardiac patients [5, 6]. In rural healthcare contexts, connectivity remains the primary bottleneck, prompting investigation of UAV-assisted data relay and LPWAN technologies [7].

C. AI in Healthcare Logistics and Telemedicine

Machine learning techniques have been extensively explored for healthcare demand prediction, diagnostic assistance, and resource optimization. Beam and Kohane (2018) provided a comprehensive review of deep learning in medicine, while reinforcement learning approaches have demonstrated superior performance in dynamic multi-depot delivery scheduling problems [8, 9]. Telehealth utilization in the US increased by 3,700% during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring telemedicine's transformative potential [10].

D. Integrated UAV–IoT Systems

Recent research has explored integrated UAV–IoT architectures. Motlagh et al. (2017) proposed a UAV-based IoT platform with multiple UAVs acting as mobile edge computing nodes [11]. Gupta et al. (2016) proposed using UAVs as aerial base stations to provide IoT connectivity in remote areas [12]. However, these works lack the multi-functional integration — combining supply chain, diagnostics, and telemedicine — that characterizes the present research.

TABLE I. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EXISTING SYSTEMS VS. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

System / Study	UAV	IoT	AI	Tele-med.	Inventory	Rural
Zipline (2016)	Yes	No	Limited	No	No	Yes
Haidari et al.	Yes	No	Sim.	No	Partial	Yes
Patel et al.	No	Yes	No	No	No	Partial
Motlagh et al.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Proposed	Yes	Yes	Adv.	Yes	Yes	Yes

III. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK ARCHITECTURE

A. System Overview

The proposed AI-enabled UAV–IoT framework is structured as a three-tier hierarchical architecture comprising: (1) the Edge/IoT Layer at rural healthcare facilities, (2) the UAV Communication and Transport Layer, and (3) the Cloud/Central Processing Layer at urban or district medical centers. The architecture enables bidirectional data flows across all layers, supporting both real-time emergency response and scheduled supply chain operations.

TABLE II. SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE – LAYER SUMMARY

Layer	Key Components	Primary Functions
Cloud / Central	AI Server, EHR, Telemedicine Portal	AI decisions, analytics, remote diagnostics
UAV Transport	Autonomous UAVs, Base Stations, Edge AI	Delivery, relay, emergency response
IoT / Edge	Medical Sensors, Gateways, RFID Tags	Vitals collection, inventory, local AI

B. IoT Layer: Diagnostic Data Acquisition

Rural health posts are equipped with a standardized Medical IoT Node (MedIN) integrating ECG (12-bit, 500 Hz), SpO₂ ($\pm 2\%$ accuracy), non-invasive blood pressure (± 3 mmHg), digital stethoscope, blood glucose monitoring, body temperature sensing, and RFID-based medicine inventory tracking. Each MedIN node operates on an ARM Cortex-M7 microcontroller with dual-mode LoRaWAN and BLE communication. An edge gateway co-located at each rural health post aggregates sensor data, performs initial AI-based triage, and manages communication with the UAV transport layer.

C. UAV Transport Layer

The UAV fleet serves three primary functions: medical supply delivery, communication relay, and autonomous emergency response. Four UAV types are deployed, differentiated by payload capacity and operational range.

TABLE III. UAV FLEET SPECIFICATION MATRIX

Type	Payload (kg)	Range (km)	Endur. (min)	Function
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A – Heavy Lifter	5.0	80	45	Bulk delivery
B – Standard	2.0	50	60	Regular supply
C – Scout/Relay	0.5	120	90	Comm. relay
D – Emergency	1.5	60	50	Specimen transport

UAVs are equipped with ROS-based autonomous navigation stacks integrating GPS, barometric altimeter, optical flow sensors, and obstacle detection LIDAR. Each UAV includes a 4G LTE communication module with LoRa backup for degraded connectivity scenarios.

D. Cloud Layer and Telemedicine Integration

The central cloud layer hosts the AI Decision Engine (AIDE), EHR integration platform, telemedicine consultation system, and supply chain dashboard. Telemedicine is enabled via WebRTC-based synchronous video consultations and DICOM-standard asynchronous diagnostic image review. The system maintains a patient digital twin — a continuously updated computational model providing longitudinal health trajectories to consulting physicians.

IV. AI METHODOLOGIES AND ALGORITHMS

A. Autonomous UAV Route Optimization

UAV route optimization is formulated as a multi-objective Vehicle Routing Problem with Time Windows (VRPTW) with healthcare-specific priority constraints. The objective function minimizes a weighted composite cost:

$$\text{minimize } Z = \alpha \cdot T + \beta \cdot E + \gamma \cdot P$$

where T = delivery time, E = energy, P = priority violations

The optimization is solved using a hybrid Deep Reinforcement Learning (DRL) approach combining Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) with Graph Neural Network (GNN) state representation. Priority scoring incorporates medical urgency (0.5 weight), inventory criticality (0.3), and patient volume (0.2).

B. Diagnostic AI and Patient Triage

The diagnostic AI module employs an ensemble architecture including: (1) 1D-CNN for ECG arrhythmia classification trained on PhysioNet MIT-BIH data; (2) Gradient Boosted Decision Trees for vital signs risk stratification using NEWS2 criteria; (3) LSTM networks for temporal pattern analysis; and (4) Random Forest for differential diagnosis support. Model outputs are aggregated via a meta-classifier producing a composite risk score (0–100) and triage category (Green/Yellow/Orange/Red).

C. Predictive Inventory Management

Demand forecasting employs a SARIMAX model augmented with a neural network correction layer to capture non-linear seasonal and epidemiological demand patterns. Replenishment scheduling uses an Ant Colony Optimization (ACO) metaheuristic adapted for UAV operational constraints. Safety stock levels are dynamically updated using a Bayesian inference framework that revises demand

uncertainty estimates as new consumption data becomes available.

D. Edge AI for Local Processing

Critical AI inference tasks are deployed to NVIDIA Jetson Nano edge modules using quantized and pruned model variants. Edge-deployable tasks include real-time ECG arrhythmia detection, SpO2 desaturation alerts, and local inventory depletion prediction. A federated learning protocol continuously improves edge model accuracy through synchronized updates with the central AI engine.

V. SIMULATION ENVIRONMENT AND RESULTS

A. Simulation Setup

The framework was evaluated using: (1) ROS Noetic with Gazebo 11 for UAV flight simulation, (2) NS-3 for IoT network modeling, (3) Python-based AIDE for AI evaluation, and (4) SimPy for supply chain simulation. The scenario models a rural district with one hub and 12 sub-centers across 2,400 km², representative of South Asian and Sub-Saharan rural districts. Each simulation covered a 30-day period with Monte Carlo analysis ($n = 200$ runs).

TABLE IV. SIMULATION PARAMETER CONFIGURATION

Parameter	Value
Simulation area	60 km × 40 km
Rural sub-centers	12
UAV fleet per hub	11 (A:2, B:4, C:3, D:2)
Daily patient load	15–85 per sub-center
Network connectivity	LoRaWAN + 4G LTE (variable)
Medicine stockout baseline	23% (pre-intervention)
Simulation duration	30 days, $n = 200$ runs

B. UAV Delivery Performance

The proposed DRL-GNN routing was benchmarked against three baselines. Results showed a 39.9% reduction in average delivery time, 47.7% reduction in emergency response time, and 31.1% reduction in per-delivery energy consumption. All improvements are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

TABLE V. UAV DELIVERY PERFORMANCE COMPARISON

Algorithm	Avg. Time (min)	Success (%)	Energy (Wh)	Emerg. (min)
Nearest Neighbor	87.3 ± 12.4	91.2	142.6 ± 18.3	34.8 ± 8.2
Clarke-Wright	74.1 ± 9.8	93.7	128.4 ± 15.7	29.3 ± 6.8
OR-Tools VRPTW	68.5 ± 8.6	95.1	118.9 ± 14.2	26.7 ± 5.9
Proposed DRL-GNN	52.4 ± 6.7	97.8	98.3 ± 11.4	18.2 ± 4.3

C. Diagnostic AI Performance

IoT-based diagnostic data acquisition demonstrated a mean packet delivery rate of 96.8% under normal conditions, degrading to 87.4% under heavy rainfall. End-to-end latency averaged 3.2 s under 4G and 12.7 s under

LoRaWAN-only — both within clinically acceptable limits. Edge AI diagnostic model performance is summarized in Table VI.

TABLE VI. EDGE AI DIAGNOSTIC MODEL PERFORMANCE

Diagnostic Task	Model	Accuracy (%)	AUC-ROC
ECG Arrhythmia	1D-CNN	97.3	0.9941
Vital Signs Risk	GBDT	94.1	0.9723
Sepsis Warning	LSTM+GBDT	91.8	0.9687
Hypoglycemia Alert	Random Forest	95.6	0.9812

D. Inventory Management Effectiveness

The AI-driven inventory system reduced medicine stockout frequency by 78.4% (from 23.1% to 5.0% of observed medication-days), reduced inventory holding costs by 22.7%, and improved emergency supply fulfillment within a 4-hour window from 54.2% to 91.7%. Demand forecast accuracy (MAPE) averaged 8.3% for high-frequency medications vs. a naive baseline MAPE of 31.4%.

E. Telemedicine Service Quality

Average consultation wait time improved from 4.2 hours (physical travel baseline) to 23.6 minutes — an 89% reduction. Diagnostic concordance between the AIDE triage system and specialist physicians was 88.3%, with particularly strong performance in cardiac and respiratory emergency identification.

VI. DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that integrated, AI-driven UAV–IoT healthcare systems substantially outperform both traditional healthcare logistics and single-function technology deployments. The 39.9% delivery time reduction compares favorably with the 32–41% improvements reported in prior UAV-only systems without AI optimization [13]. The additional integration of predictive inventory management eliminates the reactive supply chain behavior that characterizes rural health facilities in many low- and middle-income countries.

The simulated 78.4% reduction in medicine stockouts has direct clinical significance: stockouts of essential medications such as oxytocin, insulin, and antimalarials have been directly linked to preventable deaths in rural settings [14]. The 47.7% emergency response time reduction is clinically meaningful for sepsis (where each hour delay increases mortality by 7%), myocardial infarction, and obstetric hemorrhage.

A preliminary economic analysis estimates an annual operating cost of approximately USD \$70,000 per district serving 12 sub-centers (~125,000 patients), yielding a per-patient cost of USD \$0.56 per year — well within WHO-recommended supplementary infrastructure investment thresholds of \$1–3 per capita annually.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Several important limitations must be acknowledged. First, all results are derived from simulation rather than real-world deployment; simulations inevitably idealize physical

conditions and system failures. Second, the simulation was calibrated to South Asian rural parameters and requires re-calibration for other geographic contexts. Third, regulatory frameworks for BVLOS UAV operations remain immature in most target regions.

Future research directions include: (1) pilot deployment in Telangana, India; (2) integration of 5G/NB-IoT connectivity; (3) explainable AI (XAI) module development; (4) cold-chain vaccine logistics extension; (5) multi-site federated learning study; (6) cybersecurity analysis with blockchain-based audit trails; and (7) health technology assessment incorporating QALY outcomes.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented an AI-enabled UAV–IoT integrated framework for autonomous diagnostic data acquisition, medicine inventory monitoring, and telemedicine support in resource-constrained rural healthcare systems. Simulation-based evaluation demonstrated substantial improvements: 39.9% reduction in delivery time, 78.4% reduction in medicine stockouts, 97.3% edge AI diagnostic accuracy, and an 89% reduction in telemedicine consultation wait time.

The framework addresses a critical gap in current rural healthcare technology research: the absence of integrated, AI-driven platforms that simultaneously address logistics, diagnostics, and telemedicine within a unified operational architecture. Economic modeling supports financial feasibility at USD \$0.56 per patient annually. The authors are committed to advancing this research toward operational pilot deployments, contributing to global health equity through intelligent, accessible, and affordable healthcare technology.

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