Policy Briefing:

Leveraging the Diaspora to Improve Health Services in Cameroon

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Overview:

This policy briefing synthesizes key insights from the Cameroon Town Hall for Healthcare Professionals session of December 3, 2022, with His Excellency Dr. Manaouda Malachie, Minister of Public Health, on how Cameroon's health diaspora can help optimise and innovate health services, ahead of the National Medical Conference of December 13 to 16, 2022.

Context:

Since 2019 the Health System Transformation Agenda has upgraded reference and regional hospitals, and the Minister reported that about 81% of requests for evacuation abroad in 2022 were redirected to national hospitals. Diaspora professionals want to teach, operate, donate equipment and invest, but face slow administrative files, poorly defined entry points, visa formalities and the lack of a permanent channel with the Ministry.

Key Issues:

1. **No single entry point:** Diaspora offers reach the Ministry through the Division of Cooperation, the Directorate of Human Resources, embassies or personal contacts, without follow-up.
2. **Slow handling of files:** Participants said files stall with officials; the Minister cited sanctions and a reporting number.
3. **Continuity beyond one Minister:** Members asked how the effort would survive a change of Minister; the answer was a technical working group and a digital platform.
4. **Equipment donations:** Shipping costs and outdated donated equipment limit the value of donations.
5. **Workforce gaps:** Nurse anaesthetists are no longer trained, and staff pay remains a concern.

Discussion Highlights:

- The Minister committed to a working group after the National Medical Conference, with MINSANTE, MINREX, MINFI and diaspora focal points, acting as the diaspora office.
- He announced that his teams would start building a digital platform for the diaspora the very next day.
- Ministry missions would visit diaspora communities through Cameroon's embassies after the conference.
- He defined the diaspora as anyone who feels Cameroonian, whatever their nationality.
- He warned against intermediaries who claim to know the Minister and take money.
- Four continuing education and simulation centres were announced, the first planned for 2023.

Recommendations:

- **Constitute the diaspora working group with written terms:** MINSANTE, with MINREX and MINFI, should create the working group by ministerial decision, with named members, a secretariat and a meeting calendar, so that it survives changes in leadership as the Minister intended. First step: publish the decision and the group's terms of reference after the National Medical Conference.
- **Launch the digital platform with one procedure:** MINSANTE should open the platform as the single door for missions, twinning, teaching, private practice and donations, with a tracking number for each file and a response deadline. First step: a registration form and a published list of focal points (Division of Cooperation, Directorate of Human Resources, Division of Studies and Projects).
- **Name diaspora focal points:** Diaspora associations and the town hall should each name a focal point per country, as the Minister asked, and channel offers through them. First step: the town hall compiles a list of associations and focal points and sends it to the working group.
- **Publish a needs list for equipment:** MINSANTE's Division of Studies and Projects should publish the equipment most needed by facility and the minimum standards for donations, and agree a shipping arrangement with partners. First step: a needs list on the conference or platform website.
- **Pilot twinning and training missions:** Reference hospitals (Garoua, Douala and Yaoundé General Hospitals) and diaspora departments should start a small number of twinning agreements and short missions, with visa support letters from

the Ministry, and link them to the planned simulation centres. First step: one twinning pilot per reference hospital in 2023.

- **Restore nurse anaesthetist training:** MINSANTE and the Ministry of Public Service should create the nurse anaesthetist corps and a training route, with diaspora anaesthetists teaching. First step: diaspora anaesthetists submit the concrete proposal the Minister asked for.

Next Steps: The National Medical Conference was held December 13 to 16, 2022, after which the Minister said the working group would be set up, ministry missions sent to diaspora countries and the digital platform developed. He asked to return to the town hall and offered documentation on COVID-19 gains and a later presentation of the seven pillars.

Conclusion: The Minister presented an upgraded hospital network and invited the diaspora to train, twin, practise and invest, and he committed to a permanent working group and digital platform as their entry point. Participants welcomed his openness and asked for procedures that work in practice and last beyond any one Minister.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of December 3, 2022. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehyyjP21Dv0