Policy Briefing:

Policy Briefing: Medical Missions and Diaspora-Built Health Facilities in Cameroon

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Overview:

This policy briefing synthesizes key insights from the Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals meeting held on May 6, 2023, focusing on the theme "Medical Missions to Cameroon," presented by Dr. Samuel Ndinjiakat and Mrs. Emelda Ndinjiakat of Faith Gardens Medical Foundation International and Grace Gardens Hospital Ndop.

Context:

Many diaspora health professionals want to help at home but do not know the process. The speakers built a hospital in Ndop, North West Region, through medical missions from 2014, authorisation in 2018 and opening in November 2019, during the regional crisis and then COVID-19. Their experience shows both the path through the Ministry's structures and the obstacles along it.

Key Issues:

1. **No clear entry path for the diaspora:** Diaspora groups struggle to know which office to approach, face informal payment demands, and wait years for approvals (four years for the hospital's name).
2. **Short missions without follow-up:** Mission care has value only when follow-up is in place, which requires a permanent local structure and trusted staff.
3. **Emergency access in rural and conflict areas:** Ambulances cannot reach many villages, there is no blood bank in Ngoketunjia Division, and basic emergency skills such as CPR are not widespread.
4. **Low cervical cancer screening:** Screening coverage was cited as under 20%, and small screenings in Ndop and Yaoundé found high rates of abnormal results.
5. **Duplication among NGOs:** Many NGOs and foundations work in Cameroon without coordination, which wastes resources.

Discussion Highlights:

- Opening a facility starts with the district medical officer, a technical report, and approval by the Regional Delegate, followed by Medical Council inspection.

- Regional delegations in the North West and South West were described as open to diaspora partners.
- Motorcycle first responders linked by community phone networks can reach areas closed to ambulances.
- Low-cost mobile colposcopy with VIA can extend cervical screening in district hospitals.
- Supporting proven organisations is often better than founding new ones.

Recommendations:

- **Publish a diaspora guide to opening and supporting facilities:** MINSANTE, through its planned diaspora committee, should publish the steps, documents, fees and timelines for authorising a health facility and importing donated supplies, with a named contact in each regional delegation. First step: a one-page guide posted online and shared through the Town Hall.
- **Set time limits for approvals:** MINSANTE and regional delegations should set and publish maximum processing times for facility authorisation and naming, and a channel to report requests for informal payments.
- **Support community emergency response:** Regional delegations and partners should pilot trained motorcycle first responders with first aid kits in conflict-affected divisions, starting with Ngoketunjia, and plan blood storage capacity at division level.
- **Scale cervical cancer screening in district facilities:** MINSANTE's cancer control programme should support VIA and mobile colposcopy screening and HPV vaccination outreach in private and faith-based hospitals as well as public ones, with results reported to the district.
- **Map NGO and diaspora activity:** MINSANTE, regional delegations and the Town Hall should keep a shared register of NGO and diaspora health projects by region to reduce duplication and match donors to working projects.

Next Steps: The Chair offered to connect the motorcycle emergency response proposal to Gates Foundation contacts. Participants were invited to connect with the speakers and to the Organizational Partnership for Humanity event in Houston in November.

Conclusion: The session showed that a diaspora-built hospital can work in a conflict area when it follows the Ministry's own structures, keeps a trusted team on the ground, and listens to the community. Clearer and faster procedures would let more diaspora professionals do the same.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of May 6, 2023. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVvn52bSRfA