Policy Briefing:

The Giveback Project: Organising Diaspora and Local Contributions to Community Health in Cameroon

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Overview:

This policy briefing synthesizes key insights from the Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals meeting held on January 27, 2024, at which Elvis Ndansi presented the concept note for the Giveback Project and Dr. Bryan Tegomoh demonstrated its draft reporting platform.

Context:

Many Cameroonian health professionals at home and abroad already support health facilities in their home communities, but efforts are scattered, hard to verify and often duplicated. The town hall, with about 2,350 members and a link to the Ministry of Public Health's diaspora committee, proposed a five-year programme (2024 to 2029) to organise and measure these contributions.

Key Issues:

1. **Scattered efforts:** Diaspora contributions are many but uncoordinated, with no shared record of what was done, where, or at what cost.
2. **Accountability:** Donors want traceability; communities need projects they own and can sustain.
3. **Practical barriers:** Shipping supplies, import taxes and permissions to open facilities have slowed past efforts.
4. **Measuring impact:** Without consistent reporting, the overall contribution of the diaspora to Cameroon's health system cannot be shown.

Discussion Highlights:

- Existing projects can be reported, and projects may be anywhere in Cameroon.
- Supporting students and research (for example reagents) counts as giving back.
- Members can share shipping capacity; a reported tax exemption on imported medical equipment was welcomed.
- Coordination should prevent duplication between nearby projects.

Recommendations:

- **Formalise the partnership with MINSANTE:** MINSANTE, through its diaspora committee, and the town hall should agree in writing on the vetting process and on the Minister's recognition certificate. First step: a short memorandum naming focal points in each regional delegation.
- **Set up regional vetting and local ownership:** Regional delegations should help name one or two vetting volunteers per region, and every project should name a local contact and a health committee to monitor it.
- **Publish templates and the platform:** The town hall should release the needs assessment and proposal templates and move the reporting platform to its website, with an option for private reports. First step: test them with a few members' projects before wider launch.
- **Clarify import rules for donations:** MINSANTE and the Ministry of Finance should publish the current status of the tax exemption on imported medical equipment and supplies and a simple procedure for donors.
- **Report impact each year:** The town hall should publish an annual Giveback report (projects, places, beneficiaries, spending) and share it with MINSANTE and regional delegations to inform planning and avoid duplication.

Next Steps: Templates and the reporting platform were to be finalised by the town hall's IT team, volunteers were invited to join the project, and members were encouraged to begin assessing needs in their communities.

Conclusion: The Giveback Project aims to turn the goodwill of Cameroonian health professionals into documented, verified and coordinated support for community health. Participants agreed that its value will depend on local ownership and consistent reporting.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of January 27, 2024. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN61clqFGxI