Policy Briefing:

Channelling Diaspora Contributions into Measurable Health Gains in Cameroon

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Overview:

This policy brief synthesises key insights from the Cameroon Town Hall for Healthcare Professionals meeting held on November 2, 2024, focusing on 'The Giveback Project: Cameroon Diaspora Supporting Health Initiatives in Cameroon'.

Context:

Cameroonians abroad and at home already fund clinics, diagnostic centres, radiotherapy, maternal health campaigns and training, but much of this work is self funded, unrecorded and uncoordinated. The town hall's Giveback Project aims to make these contributions visible, measurable and aligned with national priorities until 2029, and a committee at MINSANTE now exists to facilitate diaspora investment in health.

Key Issues:

1. **Invisible contributions:** Many diaspora projects are not documented, so their impact cannot be measured or replicated.
2. **Financing gaps:** International investors prefer government backed projects, leaving diaspora initiatives largely self funded.
3. **Operating standards:** Equipment fails without reliable power, water, trained operators and maintenance technicians.
4. **Sustainability:** Free campaigns help in the short term but depend on repeated donations; economic empowerment lasts longer.
5. **Skills for proposals and evaluation:** Community initiatives often lack the proposal, grant writing and monitoring skills needed to attract support.

Discussion Highlights:

- Examples presented included CLEAR Radiology (Buea), Premier Health Centre (Douala), the Cameroon Oncology Center (Douala) and Unite for Health's work in Misaje.
- Participants proposed sessions on proposal development, grant writing and monitoring and evaluation.

- Pooled diaspora investment funds were suggested as an alternative to international finance.
- Interoperability was urged for any electronic health record work under MINSANTE's digital health plan.
- Home delivery, about 40% nationally, was cited as a reason to back safe delivery projects.

Recommendations:

- **Create a diaspora health project register:** MINSANTE's diaspora committee, with the town hall, should keep a public register of diaspora health projects with location, type, cost and results. First step: adopt the town hall's reporting template and invite members to submit projects.
- **Recognise completed projects:** MINSANTE should issue certificates of recognition for completed and reported Giveback projects, as proposed, to encourage reporting and replication.
- **Facilitate approvals and pooled finance:** MINSANTE and finance partners should simplify permits for diaspora health facilities and explore a pooled diaspora health investment fund with clear governance.
- **Align projects with the WHO building blocks and local plans:** Diaspora professionals should base projects on a community needs assessment and align them with regional delegation plans, including workforce, information systems and medicines, not only infrastructure.
- **Build capacity for proposals and evaluation:** The town hall and diaspora experts should run sessions on proposal writing, grant applications and monitoring and evaluation for community health initiatives.
- **Plan for operation and maintenance:** Investors and donors should budget for power, water, staff training and equipment maintenance from the start, and partner with district hospitals rather than working alone.

Next Steps: Preliminary results of the town hall's needs assessment survey were to be shared in a coming session. Sessions on proposal development and grant writing were proposed, and members were invited to submit project videos.

Conclusion: Diaspora contributions to Cameroon's health system are already substantial. Recording them, aligning them with national priorities and supporting them with sound planning and finance would multiply their impact by 2029.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of November 2, 2024. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4D4WVTUiwik