Policy Briefing:

Science, Politics and Funding: Strengthening African Health Research Careers and Agendas

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Overview:

This brief draws on Session 128 of the Cameroon Town Hall for Healthcare Professionals, held on February 21, 2026. Dr. Luchuo Engelbert Bain, physician, bioethicist and head of international programmes at APHRC, spoke on careers, funding and Africa's place in a changing global health order. Participants discussed research funding, mentorship, science communication and engagement with policymakers.

Context:

Cuts in international development funding have reduced jobs and increased competition for grants in global health. Two-thirds of global health agencies are headquartered in three high-income countries, and most of their leaders are from and educated in high-income countries (data cited by the speaker). Few African governments fund their own research, the Abuja target of 15% of public budgets for health is largely unmet, and early career researchers in Cameroon face weak mentorship and authorship disputes.

Key Issues:

1. **A shrinking job market:** Public health graduates outnumber jobs, and the traditional NGO, government or academic path is no longer secure.
2. **Research agendas set elsewhere:** External funding shapes priorities, and national research funding and plans are weak or absent.
3. **Evidence that does not reach policy:** Researchers inform politicians late and in the wrong format; policy briefs alone rarely change decisions.
4. **Weak mentorship and research integrity:** Student work goes unpublished or supervisors take credit, and predatory publishing harms careers.
5. **Misinformation outpaces science:** Anti-science movements are funded and organised; science communication is not.

Discussion Highlights:

- Dr. Bain: if you don't do the politics, the politics will do you.

- Dr. Bain: decolonisation must start from the inside, with national funding and equitable African partnerships.
- Dr. Bain: an ethics approval is not legally binding, but it is legally relevant.
- Dr. Bain: there is no evidence that evidence on its own brings change.
- A participant: join the committees where decisions are made.

Recommendations:

- **Create national research funding:** MINSANTE and the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation should establish or strengthen a national health research fund with a public research and development plan, so that external grants add to national priorities rather than set them. First step: publish national health research priorities and a funding target.
- **Make mentorship count in academic promotion:** Universities and the Ministry of Higher Education should include the quality of mentorship, student publication and fair authorship in promotion criteria, and set clear rules on authorship of student theses.
- **Teach health politics, ethics and science communication:** Faculties of medicine, nursing and public health should add modules on health politics and diplomacy, research and publication ethics, critical thinking and communicating with policymakers and the public.
- **Involve policymakers from the start:** Research institutions, the town hall and partners should engage relevant ministry officials and parliamentarians at the design stage of research, and present results in formats and at times that fit their agendas, with support from communication specialists.
- **Fund proactive science communication:** MINSANTE, professional associations and partners should fund a standing science communication effort on social media and radio to counter health misinformation, using trusted clinicians and researchers.
- **Build trust for African philanthropy:** Institutions seeking local funding should adopt certified grant management standards, and government should consider tax incentives for donations to health research.

Next Steps: The town hall will continue sessions on careers and research for early career professionals, share Dr. Bain's slides, and invite him to return.

Conclusion: The session argued that African health professionals need political skill, ethical grounding and a strong network as much as technical expertise, and that

Africa's place in global health depends first on what African institutions fund and do for themselves.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of February 21, 2026. Recording to follow.