Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals

Meeting Minutes, November 2, 2024

Host: Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals

Date: November 2, 2024

Chair: Dr. Munoh Kenne Foma

Co-Moderators: Elvis Ndansi (lead moderator), Dr. Bryan Tegomoh, Dr. Marthe-Sandrine Mpollo (French-language moderation)

Guest Speakers: Elvis Ndansi, MSN, MPH, Founder and President, Unite for Health Foundation; Prof. Theodore Ngatchu, MD, FRCP, Executive MBA; consultant gastroenterologist, Founder and Managing Director, Premier Health Centres Cameroon (Douala); based in the United Kingdom; Dr. Bryan Tegomoh, MD, MPH, Co-moderator, Cameroon Town Hall

Distinguished Guests: A public health professional in the UK with family planning programme experience, Nwabufo Françoise, nurse practitioner and founder of the Family Health and Development Foundation (FAHEDEF), Yaoundé, Sidney Tazeh, founder of CLEAR Radiology, Buea (by video)

Title: The Giveback Project: Cameroon Diaspora Supporting Health Initiatives in Cameroon

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Agenda Items:

1. Welcome and opening remarks by Elvis Ndansi, Dr. Bryan Tegomoh and the chair
2. French welcome by Dr. Marthe-Sandrine Mpollo
3. Recap of the Giveback Project concept by Elvis Ndansi
4. Giveback stories by video: CLEAR Radiology (Buea), Unite for Health in Misaje, Cameroon Oncology Center, Premier Health Centre Douala
5. Remarks by Prof. Theodore Ngatchu on investing in health care in Cameroon
6. Areas of investment and the needs assessment survey by Dr. Bryan Tegomoh
7. Open discussion
8. Closing remarks and next meeting

Opening Remarks:

- Elvis Ndansi explained that the session revisited the Giveback Project because the first presentation on it had been disrupted when the town hall's meeting was hacked.
- Dr. Bryan Tegomoh noted a busy fortnight in global health, including a new Lancet Commission report and progress on the pandemic accord.
- The chair thanked participants for the two day breast cancer seminar, which had more than 50 participants each day, and said such capacity building is itself part of the Giveback Project. He stressed that the town hall is open to engineers, IT and AI specialists as well as health workers.

Presentation Points:

Presentation by Elvis Ndansi: "The Giveback Project: What It Means and How Diaspora Members Can Take Part"

1. The concept:

Elvis Ndansi described the Giveback Project as a town hall initiative to channel the expertise and resources of Cameroonians in the diaspora, and of professionals at home, into tangible, measurable community health projects. The unit is 'your village', meaning wherever a person identifies as home. Its objectives are to empower health professionals, use diaspora knowledge and resources to improve health in villages, and address the challenges of local health centres.

2. How a project should be run:

Participants were encouraged to start with a needs assessment of their community or health centre, design the project with clear targets, mobilise resources (personal funds, partners or fundraising, with a support letter from the town hall if needed), and implement it with local health centres, chiefs and pastors. Each project should include monitoring and evaluation, a sustainability plan and sharing of lessons. The town hall planned a proposal template and a platform to record every member's project.

3. Recognition and a five year horizon:

The project runs until 2029, when the town hall aims to quantify what the diaspora has achieved in impact and money spent. Mr. Ndansi said the Minister of Public Health would be encouraged to give certificates of recognition for completed projects, and that a committee at the Ministry now exists to facilitate diaspora investment in health. He stressed that the town hall itself has never raised or managed funds and remains a volunteer, 'zero money' organisation.

4. Example: CLEAR Radiology and Premier Health Centre:

Videos showed CLEAR Radiology Medical Plaza in Buea, founded by medical physicist Sidney Tazeh, and Premier Health Centre in Douala, founded by Prof. Theodore Ngatchu. Prof. Ngatchu advised diaspora investors to build services that match the standard of where they live, which requires reliable power, 24 hour running water, hygiene, trained operators and technicians to maintain equipment, since many machines in Cameroon stay broken for months. He said profit should not be the priority, that international funders prefer government backed projects, and that diaspora pooled investment funds could fill the gap.

5. Example: Unite for Health in Misaje:

Mr. Ndansi presented Unite for Health Foundation's work in Misaje subdivision (Donga-Mantung, Northwest region). The yearly Sha Festival, begun in 2013 around hygiene in houses selling the local corn drink 'sha', has become an economic empowerment event for over 100 women, with scholarships for 25 vulnerable students and farm inputs in 2024. On March 6 to 7, 2024, a free antenatal campaign at the district hospital provided consultations, ultrasound, education and mama kits. The foundation is fundraising for a maternity clinic in Misaje subdivision with solar power, a borehole and internet for teleconsultation, with a gala planned for December 5.

6. Example: Cameroon Oncology Center:

The chair shared a video on the Cameroon Oncology Center in Douala, which he described as a diaspora initiated project and the only centre in Cameroon with a working linear accelerator, while the cobalt unit at the public general hospital is often down. He said it showed the diaspora can fill major gaps in partnership with those at home.

7. Where to invest: the WHO building blocks:

Dr. Tegomoh presented the WHO framework for health system strengthening to show that giving back need not be limited to service delivery: health workforce development, health information systems and AI, medical products and vaccines (including diagnostics and PCR capacity), financing, and leadership and governance all need investment. He shared the town hall's needs assessment survey link and said preliminary results would be presented in a coming session. He cited Prof. Ngatchu's point that diaspora members should transfer what works where they live.

Discussions and Q&A Session:

- **A public health professional in the UK asked whether the town hall could hold a session on writing proposals for health interventions, including monitoring and evaluation across the project cycle.** Mr. Ndansi and the chair welcomed the idea and asked him to help identify experts. Dr. Tegomoh added grant writing for funders such as the NIH, CDC, WHO and the Wellcome Trust. He later suggested co-creation: diaspora members from the same area pooling efforts so that a track record at small scale attracts donors.
- **The chair asked how free campaigns such as the Misaje antenatal event can be sustained.** Mr. Ndansi said sustainability is a challenge; annual events supported by repeat donors help, but economic empowerment of women is more sustainable than free goods because it lets them pay for care themselves. He added that even with money, supplies are sometimes unavailable in village pharmacies.
- **A chat question asked how electronic health records could be introduced in Cameroon's public and private sectors.** Mr. Ndansi advised starting with MINSANTE's National Digital Health Strategic Plan, which he shared in the chat, and the Ministry's IT and digital health division, and urged that interoperability be planned from the start to avoid the siloed systems seen in the USA.

Call to Action and Closing:

- Nwabufo Françoise, a nurse practitioner working with out of camp refugees, described paying school fees for about 50 children, start up support for parents, and five women in her community who had delivered at home since July, one alone. Mr. Ndansi noted that home delivery remains about 40% in Cameroon.
- The chair highlighted a participant's foundation, which runs a health centre and community education, sickle cell and cervical cancer screening with telemedicine, self funded for over ten years.
- Pictures were shown of a health centre being built by a diaspora member in the West region.
- Dr. Tegomoh congratulated Dr. Yauba Saidu (CHAI), Nwabufo Françoise, Elvis Ndansi, Dr. Foma and colleagues on their paper on sickle cell disease in Cameroon (PLOS Global Public Health, October 24, 2024), drawn from the Mfou health district, which recommended routine screening, infection prevention, community engagement and workforce capacity.
- The chair announced plans for an accredited diaspora lecture team for medical, nursing, pharmacy and public health students, noting the University of Buea medical school's interest.

- Mr. Ndansi invited members to submit videos of their projects for a five minute slot in future sessions.

Next Meeting

In two weeks (expected Saturday, November 16, 2024); topic to be announced.

Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4D4WVTUiwik

Submitted by: Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals