Policy Briefing:

Managing Health Worker Migration from Cameroon: From Brain Drain to Brain Circulation

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Overview:

This policy brief synthesises key insights from the Cameroon Town Hall for Healthcare Professionals meeting held in January 2025, the first session of the year, focusing on healthcare career opportunities in the diaspora, including becoming a physician in the USA.

Context:

Cameroon trains a growing number of doctors and nurses, while public recruitment and pay lag; many young professionals leave without guidance and lose years or abandon their training. Diaspora professionals in clinical research, medicine, laboratory science, public health and nursing described the routes they took and offered mentorship.

Key Issues:

1. **Uninformed migration:** Many migrants re-enter training unnecessarily (for example, laboratory scientists or nurses restarting nursing school) because they lack accurate information.
2. **Barriers to recognition:** Foreign credential evaluation requires transcripts, course outlines and professional council registration, which some Cameroonian schools and councils are slow to provide.
3. **Cost of licensing exams:** Exam and application fees are hard to meet on Cameroonian public salaries, delaying applications.
4. **Weak career guidance at home:** Training institutions rarely teach career planning, networking or alternative careers such as clinical research and public health.
5. **Loss of skills to the system:** Without return or remote pathways, Cameroon loses trained staff it paid to educate.

Discussion Highlights:

- Clinical research is an under recognised career path open to graduates with a bachelor's degree.

- University of Buea laboratory science graduates can sit US board exams without retraining.
- Networking and mentorship were named by every speaker as decisive.
- Leadership experience in Cameroonian programmes strengthens applications to top schools.
- Speakers called for 'brain circulation' through remote work, teaching and investment.

Recommendations:

- **Create a structured diaspora mentorship pathway:** MINSANTE's diaspora committee, professional orders and the town hall should set up a mentorship register linking students and graduates with diaspora professionals by field, working with groups such as the Association of Cameroonian Physicians in the Americas. First step: a public list of volunteer mentors and recurring town hall sessions on each career path.
- **Speed up document verification:** Training schools, the Cameroon Medical Council and the nursing order should issue transcripts, course outlines and registration certificates promptly and in formats accepted by ECFMG, ASCP, Canadian and UK bodies, and maintain listings in international directories.
- **Teach career development at home:** Faculties of medicine, nursing and health sciences should add career planning, research skills and networking to curricula and invite diaspora alumni to describe career paths.
- **Keep links with those who leave:** MINSANTE should create formal channels for diaspora professionals to teach, supervise research, give grand rounds and provide telemedicine in Cameroon, turning migration into brain circulation.
- **Improve retention and pay:** Government should review salaries, recruitment and career progression for health workers, so that staying is a viable choice and migration is planned rather than forced.

Next Steps: Further sessions were planned on pharmacy, dentistry and career pathways in Europe and the UK. The chair planned grand round lectures in Cameroon in 2025.

Conclusion: Migration of health professionals from Cameroon is a reality. Clear information, mentorship and faster document processing can prevent wasted years, while deliberate links with the diaspora can return skills to the Cameroonian health system.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of January 2025. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcdT5DLo8ts