Policy Briefing:

Cooperation Between MINSANTE and Cameroonian Diaspora Health Professionals

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Overview:

This policy briefing synthesizes key insights from the Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals meeting held on August 12, 2023 (date estimated), where the diaspora members of the Ministry of Public Health's new working group on the diaspora reported on its first meeting and the planned diaspora platform.

Context:

Following two visits by the Minister of Public Health, Dr. Manaouda Malachie, to the town hall, the Ministry created a working group chaired by the Secretary General to act as an advisory body between MINSANTE and the diaspora. It held its first meeting on July 27, 2023, and a digital platform with registration, vetting and a diaspora health card was being designed.

Key Issues:

1. **No defined priorities:** The Ministry had not yet stated the areas of need where diaspora help is wanted, so projects risk being scattered or duplicated.
2. **Practice rights:** Diaspora doctors are not formally registered by the National Medical Council; temporary registration exists but is not well known, and other professional councils were not yet involved.
3. **Visas and customs:** Cameroonians with another nationality face visa costs and delays, and donated equipment and medicines can be held at customs.
4. **Sustainability and follow up:** Missions and screening without treatment capacity or follow up can create new problems for local teams.
5. **Monitoring and evaluation:** There is little evaluation of past diaspora efforts and no shared targets to measure the working group's results.

Discussion Highlights:

- Projects should go through the district and regional health system and end with a written report.
- Participants asked the Ministry to publish its priority areas and proposed measurable joint targets.

- The platform should include professionals based in Cameroon, not only the diaspora.
- No project is too small, but projects that cannot be sustained locally should be vetted early.
- Diaspora professionals were urged to come as partners, with humility, and to work through associations.

Recommendations:

- **Publish a list of priority needs:** MINSANTE, with regional delegations, should publish the areas where diaspora support is most needed (for example specialist surgery, oncology, nurse specialist training, laboratory sciences). First step: the working group circulates a first list through the town hall before the end of 2023.
- **Clarify temporary practice registration:** The National Medical Council, with the nursing, pharmacy and laboratory councils, should publish a simple procedure for temporary registration of diaspora professionals for defined activities, linked to platform registration.
- **Launch the platform with clear vetting:** MINSANTE should complete the diaspora platform with registration, vetting through professional associations abroad, and the electronic card, and open it to professionals based in Cameroon. First step: publish the registration requirements after the August 2023 workshop.
- **Agree measurable joint targets:** MINSANTE, the Ministry of External Relations and the working group should agree a small set of targets for the two year term, such as visa processing times, customs clearance of registered donations, and number of registered projects with reports.
- **Require reports and follow up plans:** Diaspora professionals and associations should submit a short project plan before each mission and a report after it through the district medical officer, including how patients will be followed up.
- **Complete diaspora representation:** MINSANTE should fill the seats for France and Germany so that major diaspora communities are represented.

Next Steps: The working group's platform workshop was set for August 23 to 25, 2023. Participants were asked to send written recommendations to the working group through the town hall. The next session, on hepatitis B and C, was set for two weeks later.

Conclusion: The working group gives the diaspora a formal seat with the Ministry of Public Health for the first time. Participants agreed that its value will depend on clear national priorities, simple rules for practice and import, and projects that are reported and sustained locally.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of August 12, 2023. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUPVJLYk9LY