Policy Briefing:

Decolonizing Global Health: The African Diaspora's Role in Advancing Global Health Equity

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Overview:

This policy briefing synthesizes key insights from the Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals meeting held on November 4, 2023 (86th edition), focusing on the theme "Decolonizing Global Health: The African Diaspora's Role in Advancing Global Health Equity," presented by Prof. Yap Boum II, Executive Director of Institut Pasteur de Bangui.

Context:

Global health research and funding in Africa are still largely set by the global North. Participants stressed that decolonization must also come from within: Cameroon and other African countries have not met the Abuja Declaration target of 15% of national budgets for health, and programmes such as HIV treatment remain dependent on external funders.

Key Issues:

1. **Agenda set elsewhere:** Research priorities, hypotheses and methods often come from the global North, and African authors are under represented in research done in Africa.
2. **Dependence on external funding:** HIV, malaria and other programmes rely on donors, as the pending PEPFAR renewal showed.
3. **Weak domestic commitment:** The 15% Abuja target is unmet and allocated health budgets are often not fully spent.
4. **Cameroon misses opportunities:** Language, bureaucracy, slow ethics clearance, corruption and researchers working in silos reduce Cameroon's share of grants and trials; DAC-Africa had received no Cameroonian protocol in its first year.
5. **Few incentives for research:** Researchers lack protected time and a decent living from research.

Discussion Highlights:

- Decolonization must start from within, with African governments setting and funding their own health agenda.

- Citizens and health workers should hold leaders accountable for health commitments.
- Diaspora members on funder boards should push for African representation.
- Researchers should collaborate rather than work in silos and choose journals by audience.
- Women and seasoned scientists should be represented in health leadership.

Recommendations:

- **Meet the Abuja commitment:** The Government and MINSANTE should publish a path toward 15% of the national budget for health and report spending of allocated funds. First step: an annual public report on health budget allocation and execution.
- **Plan for donor transition:** MINSANTE and the national HIV and malaria programmes should develop costed plans to finance treatment domestically if external funding falls. First step: a scenario analysis of a reduction in PEPFAR funding.
- **Make Cameroon competitive for research funding:** MINSANTE, the national ethics committee and universities should shorten approval times, support grant writing in English and French, and encourage research networks instead of single investigators. First step: promote DAC-Africa protocol review and planning grants among Cameroonian investigators.
- **Reward research careers:** Universities and MINSANTE should provide protected research time and recognise both national and international publications in promotion.
- **Organise diaspora contributions:** The town hall and the Ministry's diaspora committee should match diaspora professionals as mentors, tutors, sponsors and hosts of internships with institutions in Cameroon. First step: a registry of diaspora volunteers by field.
- **Strengthen leadership and accountability:** MINSANTE should appoint seasoned scientists to technical posts such as laboratory directorates and the National Public Health Institute, ensure women are represented on advisory boards, and engage professional groups and the public in tracking commitments.

Next Steps: Participants agreed the conversation should continue in future sessions. DAC-Africa was invited to present its programme to the town hall.

Conclusion: Speakers agreed that decolonizing global health means Africans setting their own agenda, funding their own health systems and telling their own stories, with

the diaspora acting as mentors and partners rather than replacements for national leadership.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of November 4, 2023. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWy0k9EvE4A