Participant name: Elsa… something

Participant organization: Canadian Embassy in Ghana

NOTES

HQ is harassing them to find information on disinformation.

In Ghana: disinformation is not an important factor compared to the Sahel countries, but also there might be a lack of interest that affects the possible evidence of such impact. There are many domestically driven interests that shape disinformation: 2/3rds of journalists are housed in politically owned media. The main areas of disinformation are in health, women’s issues (especially those in power), LGBT issues, and politics. Powerful and influential pastors and imams are also source of disinformation. Christianity in Ghana has all sorts of denominations but advance their interests locally.

Main source of foreign disinformation is supposedly from Russia, but we have an attribution problem. Some journalists are trained in China. China provided a grant of 150 million [double check] to a local university. The new government is looking at new partnerships to hedge rather than align. That’s also a way to have a different policy with the AES states, and they designated a special envoy. The new President is a very effective communicator and has done his masters in Russia.

Problems: Poor media literacy, poor professionalism. Media is very religiously dependent. Local languages serve as the principal obstacle to monitoring and countering, but also in some ways protects local context from foreign actors. Dynamics at the border are also different.

UAE influence is focused on gold mining, and is more like Russia. Qatar’s al Jazeera is also an important contributor of information. But Qatar’s focus is more on market access: as such, it is very similar to China.

In Sierra Leone, poor country, lots of disinformation. The Diaspora doesn’t come back, as compared to Ghana. It’s partly due to the culture, where success is treated very differently. There is a big Lebanese community. Diamon Mining is a big contributor to the economy. The opposition party is very destabilizing: local actors will lie for political gain.

Canada’s action is very focus on understanding Russia’s role. It’s a driving factor for its funder role. It has 2 funds: one that is currently funding Penplusbytes, and another for a school for deaf children north of the country. Programming across coastal Africa is generally focused the same way. However there is a reduction of resources, and might get worse with the elections in Canada. Conservatives have historically reduced funding such as these. And the new liberal leader is more focused on peace and security than women’s issues like Trudeau was.

The CSSM office in Accra saw its USAID funding pulled out, but they are still able to complete their tasks.

Moving forward, journalism needs to be improved. Reforms of the current electoral process, as part of the constitutional review, must serve as a hook for reforms in journalism. With the very polarized political environment, this is actually the best and only moment to do so. Journalistic standards could be legislated. Currently, according to Afrobarometer, democracy is declining and freedom of the press as well.