**Dr. Azizou Chabi Imorou, March 9, 2025, Benin**

**Background**

My work as, university of xx, I am also director of IGD, a political society, 2020 started. But before we work since 2012. Office of multiparty Democracy. They are not here.

IGD working with political parties, we support democracy. We work with political parties with national institutions like parliament and national assembly. This office, the electoral commission and we work also with government office that deal with political parties. We work in political system and IGD, we have three major initiatives, projects. Two funded by the Netherlands and one from EU. The two projects are funded by Netherlands. Project… project for strengthening female leadership in politics. We support them. We have another project with Netherlands called … project of reinforcement of leadership of Reinforcement of political parties. Project funded by EU is about electoral confidence, how to prevent electoral conflicts.

Efaire… in this project we try to prevent electoral conflicts through what we call… system of alert. And the local community. A kind of monitoring political situation in local area to see if the dynamics are going in the good way or bad way. When we see there is situation that can create a conflict we try to create dialogue in local area. Includes looking into the information space. How? We have a system, we call them facilitators, their work is to interact with political leaders, religious leaders, all strategic groups in the community. And they identify issues that could be a problem and they send a report monthly here and we have a plan of committee which analyze the data and see whether things are going good but if not good then the system can show us. When… if the situation is not good.

We report the ombudsman and to the prefect and to the political parties in case they issue a consense… and together with all this… we go in the field to try to pacify the situation. That is what we do in this project.

Fact checking? no, only via the organization.

What causes the local problems? Disinformation? All the time. Sometimes good information but it is a mixture. Bad interpretation on real facts. Gov decision. But the way it is integrated in the field there are some problems.

Through a type of medium? Not through media. Word of mouth.

Example? A governmental measure to protect exportation of sodja, they use to… soy to make biscuits. There is a factory that is here to produce all of those. But in the field it is interpreted that the gov wants to make the population more poor so they depend more on the system. To make the ppl dependent. The institution is you have products, if you sell to Nigeria you get money. The gov tells you who to sell it and how much it costs so you will be more poor and you depend on me, since you depend on me I have means to manipulate you. **Caused by mistrust?** Yes, too much mistrust in Benin. Interpersonal mistrust, between the offices and institutions and gov and mistrust on the future.

How project came to be. It was on reinforcements of parties was supposed to be about election mediation but this served as a complement to that other project. So the eu said they didn’t want to support those priorities and compromise found was making a new project with eu as the sponsor with this specific topic. They really liked this project when they pitched it. Everyone is down to make a renewal but the eu said they don’t have resources to make renewal.

They have a steering committee next week with eu ambassador to discuss. That is why the dutch colleagues are here and they are meeting them.

Contact with dutch officials? They are based in ghana. There is one guy.

How wide is his network, how deep in benin? Only five places, all places seen some electoral conflicts in 2019 and 2021. They had disputed local elections. They wanted to have more but the financing. We have staff in the five areas. One facilitator. Local dialogue facilitator and the department… three prefects delegation in this project. So staff is mixed.

**Source of mistrust: political parties; opposition members, pan Africanism, Kemisaba**.

**Actors who support the mistrust?** Sometimes just local. Opposition parties can support it for their own interest. Especially if the recent information is related to government. Also we have too much information coming from network of pan Africanists. So there is local mistrust actors and international misinformation actors. You know Kemisaba. He is benin citizen but living in France. So every decision of gov can be misinterpreted. And sometimes this misinformation work very well bc ppl have no more information apart from that.

**Poor government dissemination of information (example terror attack); contributes to rumors**

We put ppl like kemesaba in front of it, they manipulate ppl into thinking there are connections that exist that don’t exist bc the gov doesn’t give the entire information available. Attacks on the 8th of feb, terrorist attack in the north of the country. Military attacks. No word from the gov 10 days after the attack. No official information on the number of deaths, who attacked, not even condolences to the families. Everything was normal and that is how rumors spread and it constitutes a source of information. And when misinformation is spread by rumors, they government arrests ppl who spread information on sensitive information concerning the military. When circulating information that is incorrect you are accountable to justice. There is a lot of youth ppl who found themselves in prison because of it. It is a weapon against the opposition as well. When part of the movement of gov you are not condemned by the justice department but if in opposition they can go after you. Social networks especially where they apply the law online.

Ordinary citizen use facebook, whatsapp and twitter.

State led? A lot of media directly controlled by politicians and they are not state media.

Contracts, manipulation can’t maintain.

**Russia and China**

Russia and china? Russia information manipulation. They pass through intermediaries like kemesaba. Who themselves have intermediaries. It is a whole network. Facebook and social networks. Financial network that supports that but that is just the belief, no proof.

But when you look at, how do they get all of this money, alert emergency guys, how do they get these resources? And they happen to have geopolitical views on somethings. For china he does not know much. But for countries like turkey, turkey uses its network of ppl who go for studies and business. To show some benevolence of turkey.

Americans and French much more discrete and they are asking benin to track such information.

Assumption that kemesaba supported by Russia. His position is very pro Russia and at the same time has no job but the means to support high budget productions. Video reports on you-tube.

**US Influence: usaid intel collectors**

The us with change to trump, an upheaval with the way the us interacts with the region bc USAID was not only an actor for aid but an intelligence mechanism. That is what ppl think.

Usaid and other agencies they work in areas that are quite sensitive and a lot of africans depend on them and ppl spread false information about that bc they don’t have the full information. There is not a lot of communication made by usaid to local actors? What has been seen often. Ppl say Donald trump is getting rid of the intelligence research of the united states.

The information is incomplete and kemesaba makes claims about connections.

**Good that us is getting rid of its intelligence research?** Intelligence gathering is ok but you can’t do intel for yourself and not share information you collected only for youthself in regard to usaid. Look at the combat of terrorism, info us and French have about ct but they only use it for themselves and only for certain contacts. Share the information, you don’t share, maybe you have misinformation you use for decisionmaking, instead of good information you use misinformation.

**How can US/FRANCE improve info? Co-monitoring and production of information**

How can we improve way us/France communicate information? Co-monitoring and co productions of information. There is a problem if you are the only one who makes the information. They work with … so it is a coproduction of information that is made here and it is not the same thing as if they did this alone. And be selective for information for your own means. The us and French need to do the same. They need, before info is shared, some consensus building with different actors in the information space about what happened. Is there an example he can cite about how it could work? No example.

With all the public debates and cooperation but also cooperation with the French for example, cooperation with French not good but we need things from the French. There needs to be better communication.

It is esp a problem of communication on the French side, comms from paris is very

**U.S. comms regarding military? Lack transparency; US Aviation training in South was not transparent so open to rumors when discovered.**

French armed forces comms? Same thing, they are bad at communicating. They are training differently on the field. There is no transparency by the French armed forces and they discover one day there is information and you consider it as treason bc it already happened. Example. There is an American presence in the south of the country. Supportive by civilian pilots. Former military members of the armed forces that support the us army presence in the area. There are militaries in that camp. Aviators… so they are here to train the ppl and support in many ways, information everything. Training for gov pilots and military members sometimes for just transport, transporting sick ppl in the countryside. But before they arrived, those American training forces, no communication made by benin gov that they would be arriving. A lot of the ppl they are training they came to that area, they themselves spread information about it, they had access before hand but they kept it secret. No one knew this was happening. The perception was by the civilians they were confused about the announcement made in news after it was done and rumor was it was a French army base that was there. So deficit of information created misinformation. What should have been done, nationally and locally, comms about the training. So an example, he compares this to if you want to build a road, you say are you ok with the road and you make some dialogue about what the local communities.

Esp with social network sit is harder to contain that information on the military domain bc it is spread out, more easy to find rumors and reveal such military.

**French blamed for airplane crash; “You don’t choose to crisis to communicate” need to communicate before crisis**

When the plane left from that base and had a technical problem and crash they blamed the French bc they thought it was a French base but actually it was American trainers.

It is just an American training presence to help train pilots for transportation, it is just presence of American trainers and they train aviators for transport and that is the example. When the plane crash afterword, they blame the French.

**If he was a military chief, he would have started a dialogue to begin communicate but you don’t choose crisis to communicate**.

If you actually communicate during the entire period you regularly update the civilian calms

**USMIL partner of choice? Benin choosing to avoid classical types of partnerships (Venezuala and Cuba)**

Partner of choice? I don’t know if the us is the Benin choice but the Benin gov avoid communication, avoid French army partnership. They avoid bc of the situation in the region, benin faso. In… benin used too much southern American services. Benin is trying to make ties with south America. With cuba, venezuala. There is some presence in gov agencies in the military of former veterans of venez and cuba armed forces. So benin is trying to avoid classical types of partnerships. Bc of regional situation, with entire region, Nigeria, the coups, but also bc of disinformation produced around those actors.

**Donald Trump is confirmation of US pro-LGBTQ confirmation**

Donald trump seen as a confirmation of the perception of the united states. They thought before that Americans only self interested in the region. The only reasons that the americans were trying to impose lgbtq culture… even in some media some claimed that those who come to help are those who are in the back supporting those terrorists and when Donald trump came he said that usaid was an agency of intelligence gathering, that usaid supports 2 million for each country to support lgbtpq in each country. That the us has supported groups in the middle east and contributes to perception of us contributing to terrorism as well. Even if it is not true, and not supported by population, Donald trump rhetoric confirmed. He is perceived as good bc he confirms those beliefs.

**Need for more grants**

**What needs to happen to support his work?** This org does not work on disinformation. We have school of politics and democracy and we train youth people and politicians to this school. We also train them to see how to verify and fact check. So maybe you are not victim of fake news.

That is what is done in those schools by youth ppl and youth politicians. They do it also with the women initiatives. Esp disinformation attacks a woman’s privacy. On the field they cross check the information. They communicate with ppl about the information. And when they see the information does not work they look for a compromise and they try to assess why is there a gap and why a misunderstanding between them and the prefect and they try.

**What support needed to help?** Depending on financial supports, so more grants. This project is done it is over, the one about integrity of elections. It is over and elections coming and they don’t have the resources to deal with them. EU does not want to renew bc they don’t have money for more contracts.

**Train ppl to talk about topics that are sensitive to local populations**. It is basically this specialization of school in politics where deploy ppl and train them in specific approach and do mediation on the ground \\

Kemiseba, how many ppl follow?

1.3million followers on facebook.

**Anger at lack of international support for Benin military**

Benin, the EU just offered a plane of farm to distribute grains to the chickens before they cutting them, they say it is for anti terrorism fight and the president is happy bc his euro masters are giving it to him, he says it will fight terrorists and we wonder how valorous soldiers are falling one by one in this war, the truth is the they are sacrificed by our gov. is this the type of material they send to Ukraine. For them it is billions… we only get what we deserve. The militarys of benin I love profoundly they acc… capitol letters, emojis.

**kemeseba**

What is the counter message? Not with the same frequency? Not even the gov is that followed.

Gov spokesperson.

No local influencers opposing. Checks on facebook but first message is post by kemeseba, I am here to support the ppl against their tyrants.

There is not much info about there that goes against it. Bc it is all so hard to maintain.

He says those planes are necessary. That I the worst part, not we are making the choice of giving those planes and nothing else. We need transportation so he makes fun of something benin does need and no info to counter his claim to share how important those vehicles are.

Where in France? They revoked his French citizenship. He’s got a Niger gov diplomatic passport. He took his passport and went to paris, he was jailed for two days and they kicked him out again. So now he is in benin? No he got kicked out. Between niger, mali, burkina faso. He goes to Russia. He even posts about the last time.

**Russia supports military with trips Russia and mil training vs. china supports economy.**

How compare Russian vs. china? Russia wants to show itself as an alternative to the injustice of the Europeans. No econ investments by Russia in benin. But they give grants to go study in Russia. They do training support to military members. And Chinese other hand are more investment and they are everywhere in economic terms. So ppl think that china is in charge of economy and Russia in charge of the military. And that means that a lot of ppl who do business like Chinese tend to… ppl in private sector like china bc it is a big investor and ppl in the military and veterans they like Russia. They speak about iran, military members who like Russia also like Iran.

He was former ambassador to iran. The first ambassador to iran. They closed the embassy in 2021. What is iran doing here? Nothing, iran tried to build electric grid but it didn’t go anywhere. There was training by police from iran. So there was cooperation for cross border surveillance in terms of cooperation but it didn’t go anywhere bc of concerns it would sever ties with israel. The military now believes oh shit we need to get back to Iranians bc they see drones and they think that is the way to go. They think iran will provide the drones. What is attractive is lethal weapons and the us and euro only provide support and equipment.

There is conflict between what the. Military thinks they should have and what the gov does. So they are diverging.

**China will pick up retracted US presence**

Who will pick up on us shrinking? Russia no. china yes, turkey also. Not really iran. But all together all of those actors could change that. If concerted between them, maybe all together they could fill that . no compunction in turning to china? People will welcome that. They will clap to that. (he claps)

Ppl don’t say that loud but if you talk to them, esp for military members that need to refrain from talking opinions they will say that.

A way to counter this would be for the eu and the us to offer systems more perceived as lethal and correspond to what the military members want and communicate it properly instead of being obscure in way of communication.

**Russia seen as good bc they provide alterantive; no human rights restrictions, giving weapons to Burkina**

Russians and Chinese more transparent? It is not that they communicate that way but they offer an alternative to what is perceived as constrained by human rights.

The issue is communication is nice to have but the systems being delivered matter a lot to public perception. They see bf and mali have important military systems that are lethal delivered by Russia and they are not constrained to human rights and that is a good way to market alternative to that. So it becomes an attractive supplier for military members when they want similar systems. Satellite information from americans. The arms we see in Ukraine delivered. Benin is easily surveiled from satellite imagery. So if you want America to fight terrorism better share those systems.

Seems the us only does it for partners that matter most and not combatting enemies like terrorism.

**USAID: Lost opportunity**

He said he was trying to secure a grant from search for common ground to use social media and monitoring social media for election dialogue during the elections. Monitoring but also to produce dialogue on social media and use it as a tool for dialogue. It was looking like it was going to happen and then didn’t happen.