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1. How are different actors sharing false, malign or harmful forms of information in Libya and West Africa? What is the impact of such efforts?

Since the most of the media here is supporting political parties, that tends to be a bigger threat than the external threats. It is also so many media actors. More than 500 – up to 700-800 media channels, where as Nigeria has a lot less actors with a bigger population. In terms of salaries for journalists, financial support – makes it challenging.

The actors are primarily local actors – politicians – biggest contributors to mis/disinfo issues. Because most media organizations politically oriented – makes sharing of information quite difficult, rather than when you have fully independent media.

Foreign actors – Russia has come up, but it appears that the role of Russia is overestimated largely – but of course there are some actors from gulf states.

Q: On the journalists and media affiliation in Ghana – Missing bigger picture about career of journalists and why the political affiliation. Ex – FoxNews – you don’t expect FoxNews to be critical of the Trump administration. These are media organizations that have been set up by politicians – so the independence of the journalists. So their role in questioning the politicians. So if you are being fed something that is propagandist in nature. If you have a situation where more and more politicians are getting into the space of establishing media stations you will have less critical journalism. The incentive to go against the establishment is quite low because the pay is bad. There is enough legislation to protect journalism – journalists have been arguing for broadcasters bill. But there is enough legislation to support the system in terms of setting up. Political individuals are paying – payrolling. Various and spread out on where this happens. Many small ones that focus on the local context – very spread over with very high number of actors.

Is there any legislation that prevents someone from being a politicians and own local or national media? No.

People are spread out and so many languages and the cultural differences which actually makes it – to actually counter disinfo very hard.

Q: When it comes to politicians affecting the information space – any foreign influence? Always ways at looking at it where you can say they have an influence – because at a certain level, quite a number of people will go overseas for education. There is a generation that all went to Eastern Europe, then some that went western – UK, US, etc. For example if you are young person and you spent 10 years doing masters/PHD in US, larger influenced. But if you return back you’ve build contact over the years. So it will definitely have an influence. The question is is that influence good or bad and how does it affect such activities here. For me, these things are important but there is no rational basis for saying that because someone went to school, obviously it had an effect.

Q: Diaspora? Rural versus urban? Could be basis for that. FDI – for diaspora – more than investment in Ghana. There are much more people in diaspora that supports individuals/community back home on daily basis. IF that stat is accurate, it means that these people who send or remit back home they have a huge influence on what sort of information they provide. If someone is consuming information that is false, previously, it make take years or months for that information to come down to Ghana. But if someone is sharing false information on Whatsapp to his family in rural communities back home in Ghana – it has already been transmitted. Because my relative abroad – may not even come up in mainstream media – but the information that mainstream media concerns about is more political matters, but not information affecting health, education. So if you have a video that says Chinese are developing fish out of plastics and that video is shared by relatives that says don’t buy fish from this source because its plastic. That information is spread across villages – that information will not come up in mainstream media but is a huge contributor.

Just by some impressions, not data – can assume that there are quite a few from rich regions that have managed to leave Ghana – many from the Ashanti region – the correlation between urban spaces and who have moved is higher in urban and lower in rural.

China is hard – challenging to get information on what they are doing. Quite challenging. Very present in the mining industry. And very invested. Attribution problems.

But religion is an important factor. Evangelic. And then a religious aspect to with their influence.

1. In what ways are governments, military and civil society organizations in Libya and West Africa working to counter this? What more can be done in this respect?
2. In what ways are the U.S. or allied governments working to counter this in Libya/West Africa? How are they working to build institutional capacity in Libya/West Africa?

Norway – roundtable back a few weeks ago which have been arranging in Nigeria with the Finnish government there and then in Dakar. They did work around the election in Ghana and then one that was particularly supported – about spreading election results and information leading up to it. But looking to do more in this field. Haven’t landed more on what to do yet, but it has been moved higher on agenda for Norway.

Priorities – it is kind of a bit how do you fight it. What do you do to counter it? So that’s the underlying question. It is come very far and it seems like – looking into the best way of actually countering it. So more on the external influence and understanding – it seems like there is less presence of Russia in Ghana compared to other places. But definitely understanding that there are

Terrorist organizations up north – how they can impact the information space past just recruitment and delegitimizing central government. And that their foreign influence is done through influencers – and attribution problem there.

More comprehensive strategy needed. After elections. One example to counter spreading information – counter disinformation with accurate information. What to prioritize to counter.

1. What more can the U.S. or allied governments do in this respect?

From the roundtable discussion, one fo the thigs that came up was the fact that there needs to be better regulation from western countries. The Tools for spreading disinformation are not developed here. Iphones – Apple has changed to USB-C because of European standards. So if type C is universal should switch to Type C. So you can’t have a situation where the tools are heavily controlled by the Western companies – but they are more concerned about the people manufacturing disinformation when the tools – Twitter, FB, Whatsapp, Snapchat, TikTok are all platforms developed in the West. So what rules are FB putting in to check or regulate these things. Because of course traditional media has its own check and balances – who is doing the editing and who is doing the fact checking. More discussions in this space.

Companies here are quite weak in turns of cyberattacks, and access to data that can be used for mis/disinfo. Making the organization more resilient against attacks.

1. How does the U.S. conduct interagency coordination or inter-government coordination with respect to its policies and operations in Libya/West Africa?
2. Who else should we speak to?

Vilde – been here for 6 months. Led the organization of the roundtable on mis/disinformation that led with Helsinki-based European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.