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Participant organization: USAGM

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?
   1. Currently people are being discerning with what information they are looking out for and going to the right source. They believe that one is coming from particular sources. In Ghana there are some key media sources that people trust. Bringing USAGM and VOA – when they bring information from VOA they believe it is true. They believe that information is bringing brought internally or externally.
   2. Most reliable media house in Ghana so they look out for the foreign media – VOA, BBC, Dutch, Al Jazeera. They look out for those places, so they feel that BBC is the truth – VOA – state broadcasts. Key Ghana media houses.
   3. Social media – mis/disinfo – with the advent of AI. Experienced this during the election. Now people are being careful because there are legal recourses when defamation happens. Repercussions in terms of legal issues – a recent one – between one well known politician and journalists – Politician went to both Ghana and US courts and won. People are now setting up to know that you can’t say anything. Currently Presential spokesperson has sued someone as well. So now people are being more careful.
   4. Foreign influence – difficult to tell. Everyone is getting good. Might think that African’s might not be that tech savvy but now hard to tell where things are coming from. Saw a video of Trump that was manipulated. So was thinking it was foreign edited – the context matters. If it isn’t local based.
   5. Whatever happens has ripple effects. Countering what is happening in Ghana, illegal mining – being done mainly by the Chinese – putting out information that is not them it is the local government that has given them the chance to do illegal mining. People aren’t able to verify.
   6. Not necessarily anti-Chinese pushback because of it. They have people asserting them more, even though people believe they are doing illegal mining, people think they are still a good alternative. Not a lot of anti-US or anti-Western pushback. People are all in for everything American. The English speaking countries.
   7. China is very active here in the information space. They have a satellite station that they are installing with 20,000 free Chinese satellites – provided you take them on. These stations are where they are going to put out their information, their narrative. So if the US narrative is not out there to counter it, they will dominate. StarMedia – Chinese.
   8. They are showing they are moving – what they are doing forward leaning – but now that the US is pulling out they might be able to start something. But they are already in the market.
   9. When they engage the partners they say Chinese is doing more for them than US. They are giving them equipment, resources. They are just capitalizing what is going on. It is so much easier for them to access now that we are pulling out. So the moment we pull out they will come.
   10. Russia is active in this space too, but primarily Chinese. No Turkey or Gulf here.
2. 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?
   1. Had a change of government, so new ministers and ministries, there isn’t much being done right now in this space because they are also trying to restructure their internal activities and focus more on the business side and worried about tariffs. Not as worried about information right now. The government not as much.
   2. Which current tariffs issues that came, tariffs on specific items – but when it was going to be reported – US slapped more tariffs. So US Amb had to intervene in messaging. Initial news was misinformation. Some diplomatic stuff happening when there is misinformation. They reach out to local embassies. Ambassador here has press conference.
   3. Civil society in this space – they help with dismystifying some of this misinformation. Media Foundation for West Africa. They get some funding from embassy. Maybe the UK. But they also worked with USAID. They do trainings as well. On the misinformation – they were teaching journalists how they can identify videos that are fake. Websites that are fake.
3. 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?
   1. Recently organized AI training for journalists in Ghana. There was discussion on the ethical use of AI from DC. Training USAGM. In Accra and in Kumasi. 50 people attended, 3 day intensive training. Seeemed very impactful. Even until now, those participants put out stories on how beneficial that training was. Indepth use of how they can be ethical in the use of AI. Training was to let them know how to use AI ethically. And how to be able to factcheck.
   2. For the office in Accra – manage for west and central Africa. There is also an east and south office. In Cape Town in the Embassy there. Have other reps in the region – 2 in Nigeria and also in Senegal and take parts of Francophone, and one in CDI that does French Sahel.
   3. Most of the time the content comes from DC. The stations in Africa do a collarboarion, they look for partners – Startup Africa – entrepreneurial documentary. Look for different stations in different countries to come up with stories with guidance from DC on what kinds of stories. Last season was on AI and how to use AI to improve the efficiency. And then Our Voices. Started here in Ghana – to tell women’s stories. But then they moved it to DC.
   4. Lots of journalist training. The AI training, a couple of them – one with ethics, one with youth and how you maximize AI, and then training on nature crimes – in two parts. In both Ghana and Gabone. Looking at illegal mining and fishing, wildlife, logging. Mobile journalism. Across the region. Nigeria, was going to go to Dakar and other places but on pause now. And then training – national broadcast. Initially used to be yearly basis – look at their newsroom and request and request particular training that would help augment – DC office would pick it up and if they needed something on editing, and design training package. So tailored training – in Ghana. Has been really helpful.
   5. Most of it coming from DC. They do have freelancers. Here in Ghana one of the programs, the music – on the radio. Both TV and Radio – how was the penetration – 40-45 media partners for radio. TV not as much. Trying to get more TV stations. Average TV could be out 10. English and local dialects. Hausa here – Fulbe was a US DOS initiative, and brought USAGM. But in other countries many other languages. Bambara, Waloff.
   6. Chinese programming is mainly English. But they are trying to sponsor people to learn Chinese. Trying to get journalists to learn. There was one platform of schools – Chinese was part of the curriculum. Not a lot of interest.
   7. UK and others running training. BBC does run. DW, BBC, France24, AlJazeera, and now the Chinese. They run programming but also do media and journalist trainings. BBC can go to a radio station and take the staff to their HQ – 6 months training. They train them and then they come back to their original stations or sometimes go to international. In Hausa, Maraba is a very well known community Hausa station. They complain that when BBC is looking for journalists they come and recruit from those stations. VOA doesn’t usually pick them. The competition was doing more. They started doing what the US is doing and they are doing more.
   8. It hasn’t been canceled but is on pause – their programming here. Some contracts have been canceled. All the contracts in some places have been canceled. All the programing is just silenced. But music playing. Now no music. On satellite, some old documentaries. But now nothing.
   9. Have already seen China coming in to pick up some of that. Not confirmed that they are working with our partners, but they have said that the Chinese stations have reached out to them. This partner works in the second largest city. China is giving partners equipment and transmitters already but haven’t heard of journalist training.
4. What more can the U.S. or allied governments do in this respect?
   1. More training for various partners and more collaboration – BBC were taking people from Accra to BBC. Some journalists ready to fund themselves, don’t even need VOA to pay for them. So opening up doors for local or African media houses to benchmark what they are doing and trying to penetrate more. Numbers in US might not reflect. Newspaper that covers international news, they were trying to let them credit that it comes from VOA – it is a place that people were trusting for accurate information. During the war in Sierra Leone, they were relying on VOA for information on where it was safe to go. So SL now in a state of disappointment, they really trusted VOA. So intensify these activities
   2. More intensification, broader reach would help. When we were growing knew VOA was a trusted source. The face of VOA in Africa was Shaka Sala, he recently passed but we all grew up watching him on straight talk Africa. Would see him interviewing African leaders. If this goes down the drain, it is very sad and very impactful.
   3. Nothing on the military side. Because the DoD is well established, they run their own messaging. At airport US military planes – people read negatively about US using those tarmacs. People thinking there is military base here. People were not too comfortable. But over time, with all they do through the military with Ghana, people are realizing they are here for good. See them donating ships for health – and trainings as well – helping with floods and other disasters. People are accepting it a little more. Every program they do it is really well highlighted in the media space in Ghana – not even collaborating with VOA – they collaborate with local media and military – it is always really well highlighted. They take them to trainings on how the Ghana military should work. And happens at the Kofi Anan center.
5. How does the U.S. conduct interagency coordination or inter-government coordination with respect to its policies and operations in Libya/West Africa?
6. Who else should we speak to?

Summary – how relevant the foreign influence is, and particularly VOA in putting out accurate information, and how that vacuum is going to create more disinformation that we are all trying to eliminate. Put out more information that would suit them – our adversaries. Some competitors said that the staff had been fired from VOA/USAGM – people trust those agencies and it was clear disinformation. Over the years VOA has been a household name in West Africa. And a lot of the media houses have come far because of VOA’s contribution. VOA will have a great impact on the media houses. Whatever happens will really affect the partners.