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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?

In Ghana when it comes to mis/dis info the key actors are usually the political parties. Was the case during elections. These days they don’t even wait to elections to put on the machinery, but right from day one they are trying to get the attention of the public. Some of the tools used traditional media outlets and online platforms. Media outlets and team of young people -the foot soldiers that are always bombarding you with one form of information or another. Also commercial entities that may seek to sell their products. The use of AI to use very prominent figures to sell products. When we want to reduce it to the COVID era – there were a couple of times when the attention was being turned to the source of the virus, there were some attempts by the Chinese to put information out there to defend themselves. And perhaps they may have used some mechanisms and some misinfo tools to be able to get those goals achieved. In recent times, especially with the new US leaders pulling out and creating a gap – people being unemployed and programs being terminated who want to expect that other agents might try to seize the opportunities to either highlight how good they are and how bad the US is. And in Ghana final point is that Chinese are often accused of being the major felonious polluting environment in search of gold. IN the mining areas a lot of Chinese and a lot of their products, when such info is out there you will expect that they want to use whatever mechanisms they have – social media and mis/disinfo to come out as good people and showcase the positive they do.

In terms of the media of spreading the traditional media and social media and print media. And press conferences. Just to gain political capital. Three categories – scammers. Use social media for economic gain. People suffer a lot of damage – loss of property, use false information. Second – beneficiaries of conflict – some people who benefit from conflict and don’t want the conflict to end. As much as certain information that we have might be true, they try to ignite emotions – people have confrontations and creates an opportunity for them to be able to gain/benefit. Ex – Lawyer in the Northern region who has done so well in ensuring people continue to be in conflict – with false information – with information that is not credible. So he does mind game. Giving different narratives, depending on which faction he is talking to. This fellow was secretly selling – was seen as a savior. Someone working ot resolve the conflict. His actual objective was to keep them in conflict. They will continue to pedal out wrong directives that will keep people in conflict. Third category of people – Situation where minority try to be historians over the conflict. And over the land demarcation. So they try to play in the minds of the chiefs who are gullible and don’t know their history by giving out information that is not credible. Benefits whatever intention that person has in promoting the conflict. Actors in Northern Ghana. They use all those sources – face-to-face, social media and sometimes traditional media. Use all that they can. Sometimes some of them are able to put together a report, an opinion. To publish in news articles. Often when people see the suggesting – once the community that is largely illiterate, a lot of poverty – once successful person leading charge, they tend to believe these people. They do less factchecking – believe blindingly. Influence of cross-border actors and that is where quite concerned that these VEO may be taking advantage of loose border to enter Ghana and pitch camps. But they do use that a lot. But also instances where the concern is that – there’s a lot of narrative about how BF is developing and the concern is that people are dis/misinforming public about someone who seized power illegally, and putting democracy at stake. BF president received largest applause of all people at Mahama’s inauguration. Think some information on BF president is not credible.

Obviously this information is one of the methods that extremists groups using to radicalize youth and extremize the. They promise them all the good things in life and they target the youth and marginalized minority groups – try to be the saviors. Look at what you are being denied, come join us – together we will fight and then restore your rights and dignity as a person. Has been the modus operandi of the VEOs. They come at Christmases and try to support them financially, and try to establish schools and mosques just to attract people to let people know that they are not forget by them. They are preaching the message and at the end of the day they are able to convince the youth and minority and marginalized ethnic groups. Much research on ground on VEOs – they target the marginalized group – especially the Fulbes who are discriminating against across the Sahel region to include Ghana. They try to give a package that will help redeem them as people of value. They promise employment opportunities to the youth. Especially in Togo, Ghana, BF, etc – illegal mining – a lot in Northern Ghana and the actors in this market are mostly foreigners – and when they get themselves established you aren’t sure if it is the gold they want or something else. Indications that they don’t just want gold, they use sex workers as bait. Have them around vicinity – just to talk to the youth. So they pretend to be selling themselves but they try to radicalize – they try to give misinfo to the groups. They are working undercover. It is difficult for the security personnel to be able to pick up this. You like maybe – redrex – they tap on the services of the youth and will give it to them at a lower or reduced cost. Don’t have data to suggest that it illegal mining is exclusive to only Chinese, but believe that VEOs are using gold mining – galomsey – looking for violence and money. Of course most of these mining sites have people that are heavily armed – so where to get these arms from? How do they get extensions from these people – who are selling arms and VEOs? Recently government organization described these galomsies as terrorist organizations. Symbiotic relationship between those doing the illegal mining and the activities and movements of VEOs. In the south, galomseys might be Chinese. But in Northern Uganda, you have Nigerians, Burkinabe, etc – other foreign nationals – not Chinese. Controlled by Nigerians, Burkinabes, and sometimes Togolese. It is as if they are all aware of the lucrative nature of that illegal mining site and how attractive it is. And you have every activity, the sex workers available there – have anecdotal data – the data suggested about 30-40 young men who were moved into BF – most of the violent extremists attacks in BF are close to some border communities in Ghana. In 2024 – a community were there are Burkinabe and Ghanaians living together near border – so when you have them move to illegal mining sites, you have within he border communities – you have foreigners and others joining in this together. Have about 6 mining sites. And are told smuggling out – supplies – not just for farming – but also used for making locally made guns – and then find their way back to Ghana to illegal miners. At the end of the day they are successfully advertising and recruiting.

Also add self-made pastors and spiritualists who are critical actors in pedaling mis/disinfo. They play with the minds of people to tell people how powerful they are spiritually. One in his district when the reverend pastors wrote an article – pretended to have solution of every problem and charges people for his help. Exploitation. Creates animosity without community. Most face-to-face interactions but do use social media and traditional media as well.

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?

Various attempts over the years to tackle this, for example during the election – 130 journalists received training on how to identify and tackle mis/disinfo – ran some programs from USAID and DOS. The concern was that politicians trying to seize media and mis/disinfo, so attempts to provide training to help distill this. But as a country, you can provide all the training, but if the policy/driving force behind the radio/media house – they want to be the first to break the news -they do throw away professional lenses. And when you have some media houses – the kind of training you provide might not be enough.

Minister of Information, in 2024, wanted to come up with a law on mis/disinfo – but not sure it saw the light of the day. Yesterday the current minister for communications indicated that government is making/preparing to have this law against mis/disinfo. So hopefully these things will help create a national legal framework to help deal with this.

Through our support, national peace council – train some youth to do some basic fact checking – especially to deal with election mis/disinfo.

Most of mis/disinfo work being led by DOS colleagues. DRG office – much of that was led by Eugene.

Efforts being made by government, have joint military operations that provide education. Train Ghana, Benin, BF, and Mali – Accra initiative. Efforts being made by the four countries to kind of come up with strategies to fight violent extremism and mis/disinfo. At the DRG level we provide peace council – national architecture that is support to prevent conflict and violent extremism – worked with them and civil society to provide training to media professionals. Trained over 200 media persons in 2024 at the regional level to some of the editors and used them to do step-down training to various districts. Wanted to reduce the pedalling of misinfo. So we increased the numbers of who we could – we also targeted – in terms of women being so powerful in terms of information – women can bring peace and ignite conflict – so tried to use them as troops to spread the good information. To repel any mis/disinfo that may be happening within the communities. Trained over 8000 women across the Northern part of Ghana in border communities – on how to identify mis/disinfo – put out action plans in terms of how they can provide training to community members as far as mis/disinfo is concerned. A good number of that.

Other training we did – pastors and spiritualists as actors – imams – some fake imams who sometimes use the doctrines, the wrong doctrines to ignite conflict. So we also provided some training to some of the imams. In terms of how to come up with good messages to muslims without promoting conflict. We do not have interreligious conflict but we have intra-religious conflict. As a result of mis/disinformation. So try to kill that by providing training to some of the Imams.

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

Various capacity building initiatives to media to help address mis/disinfo. It is never enough. It is very dynamic and keeps evolving so need constant capacity support. Happy about attempts by government to formulate law – MFWA and others have been calling on government to tackle the issue head on, to include punishing media houses who publish mis/disinfo. But also concerns about civil liberties – so how do we balance this – allowing for responsible freedom of speech but punishing intentional disinfo. Need capacity building in this space! For us as citizens it is very important to have basic skill to evaluate whether it passes the test on being credible. Something we can do. At the mission level most interventions being led by USAID and with the termination of the agency you hope that whatever is going to be created out of this will also focus on this otherwise you might think that governance might put food on the table – might get worse.

The military will not recommend – for obvious reasons. There is some fear – people will stay away from the military, especially in uniform they will run away and will not readily share information because they are scared.

Community members -recepients of mis/disinfo should be target. Those who want to spread mis/disinfo is deliberate action – we should target the recipients. The peddlers are deliberate about it, they want to achieve a certain aim and it is difficult to – we need to provide educations.

Early warning data system that we have as part of we have. Provide some training to people who are aware of what is not the truth. What is considered disinformation. And whoever wants to peddle this information is easily identified. So could strengthen the early warning data system to include many of the youth. We have trained a lot of youth, both men and women, to be able to pick up information and signals of people who have questionable behavior and report this information to intelligence agencies. To further investigate. And spread education across Ghana – didn’t have enough funded to go across Ghana – only had funding for some communities. Early Warning System funded through USAID – have civil society network West African Network for Peacebuilding hosting the system. There is a Ghana system, and a national network, and a West African early warning system.

Yaw – yes am not recommending the military to take the lead to fight disinformants, but however, the military tries on intelligence. And the kind of intelligence that military can gather is far more than what civilians can do. So how do we strengthen relationship between the military and other key institutions, even the police and other civilians, to allow for exchange of such key information and the media – in order to deal with such information. In talking about the security personnel, the bureau of national investigation – they are closer and trusted with the people more than the military. They work in the border communities.

People take them to be the truth – some of the influencers.

In 2023 did an assessment report on media and journalism and covered some of the mis/disinfo and will try to get permission to share report.

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?

EU and World Bank. Also doing work around VEO.