Participant name: Jerry Sam

Participant organization: Penpplusbytes

Notes

We have reports funded by NED on this topic.

Penplusbytes and our work. Was created in 2001 in the purpose of promoting access to information, and prevent mis and disinformation. Improve media literacy, making pre-bunking, and train and advocate for media literacy as part of curriculum. Cooperation with UNESCO about this. Civic education is also very important so that they can understand the adverse effects. It’s also a way to prebunk so that it doesn’t spread.

Fact checking unfortunately arrives late. Facebook and twitter have false information, but once it leaves the platforms, the work of countering that becomes much more complicate. That is why it is very important to do media literacy.

Penplusbytes seeks to combine media’s pen with internet bytes. We see how media has been impacted by disinformation. We are also doing comparative analysis of how disinformation affects Sahel and coastal countries. Mali, Ghana, and Ivory Coast were case studies. Francophone for CI. Russia, Qatar, UAE are all in the space.

Terrorist organizations are using religious identities to spread disinformation to undermine government authority, and recruit terrorists. Muslim foreign countries are leveraging religious contexts.

China doesn’t care about ideology but market access. They have a lot of platforms that they make available to market partners to spread information. They don’t spread misinformation but control the technology.

Russia is more of a tsunami. They hit in a way that destabilize everything they can hit. They have Africa Corps to plant disinformation in traditional media, X, WA, Telegram. They are also using TikTok with local influencers so that they can translate their content with local languages. They promote authoritarian narratives, but also against LGBTQ by marking themselves differently from the west. Purely the narratives are that Russia as a friendly savior from bad westerners. The Chinese have a bit of that and make clear that they are not interfering. You see that especially during Coup d’états. In Guinea, the coup had a lot of success: French flags were banned and people used Russian flags.

Domestic implications and affects election process. In 2020, CI elections it was very present. In Ghana too the election and media were impacted. Particularly pan Africanists. In Burkina Faso, they are especially present. Violence in Kenya led to Kenya not being able repay debt impacted relations with China. But China often puts a flag on whatever economic development they are funding.

Influencers: it is purely economic. They are not motivated by their message. For many they are unemployed, so Russia offers a salary. So corruption and unemployment are big factors. A majority of them would be going toward who would be paying best. Pan Africanists would be inspired more by the message.

Northern Ghana is a peace heaven for fighters. They seek medical attention there and go back fighting in the Sahel. We need to prevent this to be prevalent because this incentivizes movement toward the coast. And Russia’s affiliates targets is to move toward the sea. In Togo is beginning to be influenced by Russia: if they turn, it might be an important source for ammunition for the fighting.

China is an economic partner that tries to break American hegemony. US tariffs will certainly help China’s presence to grow. They know when the computers are used in the airport. Ministry buildings and infrastructure is also built by China. And they happen to know that the government is interested in building some roads from city to city. So they win the bid.

Anglophone and French countries have differences for Chinese influence. Disinformation was especially targeting reliance on western countries and the way they have developed. In anglophone countries is much less impacted. Civil society has much more entrenched democracy, compared to the Sahelians. Maybe linked to their ability to communicate with the U.S. and UK, and abroad.

Our laws in Ghana were created prior to social media. Criminal act of 1960 regulates media in normal times. Then there is data protection, and a later missed opportunity to counter disinformation. Disinformation thrives when there is a vacuum in the information space. Video content and other sources of bad information can thrive.

When the government seeks to implement new laws, this can be a way to infringe on freedom of speech, especially in Africa. One of the key challenges like Mali is the absence of independent oversight. Our solution is to create an independent ombudsman, who is able to call the government out when it seeks to disinform civilians.

Civil society and advocacy do a lot of work on tech. We get a lot of support from NED, Germans. We designed and developed locally, policy implementation. School lunches were source of disinformation, health disinformation, so this has harmful effects.

We train journalists so that they are better at reporting and not just amplifying disinformation. So that they can debunk lies live on radio. Often people use their logo to give credibility to false information, so people need media literacy too.

A lot of information is shaped and suited for systems beliefs, so it spreads very quickly. One of the ways it could have worked was via ECOWAS, but now they don’t have much teeth. But if they cooperate with AU and had more courage, they could have a good intercountry response.

We are the only ones doing this type of work in education, and responses have not been enough. Some work in Ghana and in the eastern regions for children. Some work with influencers, but they are so numerous.

WANEP and media foundation are both important contacts to have