Participant name: US Embassy, Abidjan, Public Diplomacy

**NOTES**

Recently, organized 10 series of workshops, 4 in Abidjan and 6 others in each big city. Activities including teaching how to debunk fake news, training journalists, students, academics, civil society. Each were 1 day events + exercise.

The government of CI has “En ligne, tous responsible” (online, all responsible). Nationwide campaign since last year.

CI and USA GEC signed the MoU last year. Includes tackling information manipulation by foreign states, signed by minister of FA, implemented by the minister of communication who is the spokesperson. Quick survey has found that disinformation has already gone down. Being implemented during the African cup of nation, which was a nice test, and plans to double down before, during, and after the elections later this year. The US also supported community and local radio, and so engages a lot with local civilians. But the spending pause is now impacting more plans. Journalists are no longer doing the exchange program because of it. Todd: But PD says that there is no clear follow up; none of staff at embassy were working anything related to the MOU and unclear whether there would be any follow-up.

REPPREL program, on disinformation, is a network of online local press. They received grants and a special label on their website confirming their authenticity. The network has 50 members and receive CI funding and 40,000 from the USA. Similar programs elsewhere in the region. Another program is a videogame meant to train disinformation for CI, created by State’s GEC. This program coincided with the government’s own national plan. Game jam, a 2 3 day event to compete in creating a videogame.

Influencer Kone Babou, was arrested in France. Nathalie Yamba is also another influencer. Kemi Seba is popular but his posts are relayed by local influencers, like Nathalie Dassilva (not a real person). These people tend to support Guillaume Soro, who is self-exiled in the AES. Trying to amplify the message that France is present militarily. It’s also much more anti-French than anti-western.

Chinese playbook is less active but seek to frame favorably China’s image. Russian disinformation also seeks to target religious communities, and anti-LGBT messaging is also supported by American evangelicals. China is also leading a program “China in our eyes” a writing competition on China. There is disinformation on health programs too. CI’s ability of exposing misinformation is limited.

Is fear of China overblown? We don’t compete in infrastructure. Our own cuts have more impact than China restricting our access. We don’t follow on our investments, nor can we commit ourselves on contracts the same way China can. It’s an easy win for someone to fill in the role. A legit journalist, Venant Scanin, made a front cover story that USAID is a wakeup call for Africa that it can’t rely on foreign aid for its development. China also has a MoU with CI on combatting disinformation, which also involves creating content.

CI’s civil society is weaker than elsewhere. Government officials have multiple roles and need support for their roles. The Minister of transport is also the mayor of the second city. No clear lines between cabinet members and politicians.

**Todd’s notes**

Past training on disinformation with code for africa. We organized 10 training events and organized four for capitol and six in outlying cities. Trained in how to debunk fake news. One day events. Training coinced with government run “online responsibility” training which was nationwide campaign in august. Few months after campaign GEC did MOU with Ministry of communication.

Impact of training? Decrease of fake news on social media; Crucial year because election is coming and gov does not want interference. Launched campaign with soccer competition, cot was host and winner of the event. Most malign actors used this cup to spread information.

We support radio programs, community radio

Now spending pause, right now there is no journalism training. Every year IVLP sent 1-2 persons to US. Last time we organized investigative journalism training event was 2022/23

Some grants survived

* REPPREL CI network of online press, we give grant to fund their efforts to label/rank websites. Anyone in cot can create a website, some are credible others not
* They created their own network, last grant was $20,000, new one was $400000
* Work with similar network int he region with participants in Senegal, benin, BF/Mali

**Gaming**

Working with video game producers, vender is working now to create the game, designed specifically for COT on Facebook

Hosting a Game Jam in April. Working with Game for Change, 2-3 teams race to create counter disinformation game. Will be held in Abidjan and this was spared from funding moratorium.

**GEC MOU**

Expectations from Cot? Do not know. openly accepted bc it it coincided with their own campaign, the object of the MOU was the same as the campaign for online integrity. Believe many outswide cot who plan to disrupt situation, like AIC so they believe the MOU will help.

**Negative influencers**

* Ivorian influencer based in France was arrested for spreading fake news. He's allowed to live in france but then deported and went to BF.
* Souleymane Kone, alias Gbagbo Kone
* Franklin Nyamsiwa Kamerun
* Nathalie Yamb, a fake account

**Threat**

* Russia does more on influence than china. China focuses on infrastructure and benefits. does not engage in online electoral influence.
* BF doing a campaign against vaccinations; nyt covered it
* China pays journalists to go to china and ppl are happy to go and then they report favorably
  + China hosted a writing competition
  + January 8 launch, asked journalists to write stoories about China, positiviely, they then select best stories and winner gets award and trip to china
  + Journalists are very fond of doing this.
  + Personally, interviewee thinks we overblow threat from China, sees it “vague and overblown”. What do we gain by countering them?
  + It is difficult to engage in strategic competition. We can’t promise contracts, more of a danger to cot instability from Russia bc it threatens state institutions related to health and vaccinations
* Russia pushes on fissures. and conflict around election, focuses on resentment on LGBTQ issues, has origin in Russia
* American evangelicals pushing anti-LGBTQ
* USAID?
  + Nothing active now.
  + **Democracy rights and governance initiatives in the north were our only form of US engagement.**
  + Ivorians are concerned about loss of grants.
  + One veteran journalist criticized Africa’s dependence on foreign aid. Venance Konan is his name.
* MOU with China on information space
  + Journalist exchanges and content production
* Cot needs civil society capacity building
  + Civilian space is weak here
  + When we do build capacity they get coopted by the government and loose credibility
  + If strong civil society who can we support and when successes that