**WhatsApp interview with USAID rep, March 13, 2025**

Right now not a whole lot. Before Jan 20, OTI had portfolio of 80 small grants. Doing a lot of work, little on mis/dis, but are in the final year of program but it is scheduled to end. We were scheduled to end of Sept of this year. I don’t think we are going to make it that long but that was our timeline. The programmed opened in 2021, so almost 4 years. In benin doing final capstone projects, part of our legacy was to hand relationships and networks to embassy and donors. A lot of activities in youth groups, done the work of building up nascent organizations so going to link up smaller and recently formalized groups in the north to national authorities to create connection. Lack of connection between national and local is persistent problem.

A lot of work with women’s groups and parliamentary caucus and the women leaders recently elected and a couple of them from northern Benin so we were working with them with the goal of the conflict being talked about more in parliament but not quite got there. Another bucker working on social cohesion. The nomadic population and a lot of localized conflict in Sahel so trying to encourage cohesion. And smattering of small grants aligned with those efforts.

This project was fantastic. Embassy really grown since 2022 and in the last two years it exploded and more people working.

Non-OTI, in Benin it is mostly health, so PEPFAR. Read the news it is continued, on the ground it is not continued, problems with payment systems so partners on the ground have not been able to get paid and go to work …. (is this delay willful or can they really not use the payment system?) They busted it and they are dragging feet, being forced to turn it back on.

Mostly health, other CVE work. Katrina mentioned project that would be focused on youth livelihoods in the north. SRPS, Strengthening regional peace and stability. That was implemented by DAI. Run out of USAID in Ghana. Small grants program, similar to how oti functions, focused on pcve. There was on USAID website.

Small grants based in the north. CSSM being implemented by IOM. Cofunded between us, Germany and the Netherlands and they are the only ones still implemented.

**Value of networking fact checkers?**

I don’t know how that would work. I’ve seen the power of doing small activities but my program trying to do is link these small activities up to a larger national level. So an opportunity in benin for more institutionalized approach. I don’t know enough about media landscape in Benin. Tough to get information from the north, and there are radio journalists who want to get information out and they want to get accurate information out so I think there is an appetite.

Connect fact checker in the north but we do know mentioned a strict digital code and gov has weaponized against journalists in Benin. Blanket terror accusations to scare people off. In Benin they consider political opposition and try them in the same courts. Not the least permissive country in the world but that is something I can see being a barrier to journalists in the north.

**Implications of lack of governance programs being terminated?**  Not my portfolio, not my … but in general cutting these projects are going to have a negative impact. We were supporting elections, free and fair elections, making sure we had access to information and benin was relying on that support. Looking at usaid portfolio as a whole but really the health programs being cut will have the biggest impact. **Social consequences?** Yes eventually. Now things are just starting to hit. Couple weeks ago gov of benin thought things would turn back on. When vaccines do not get delivered and meds stop then it might hit.

**Will it foster greater sovereignty as some local contacts say?** Easy to say now. Some of work USAID done is not always the most visible. We take a lot of time to make sure we are branding our activities to make ppl know it was from American ppl but in north we had a branding waiver to help with security of implementers and recipients.

Other investments. The World Bank, their social cohesion regional project. But that is being funneled very differently. That is worked through the gov and gov implements it so different than usaid model. They might think that these projects are from gov when bank rolled by the world bank so I don’t know. We supported a lot of nascent local orgs in the north and we were in the sunset phase anyway so our support has been implemented. So we built a good foundation so we are not totally leaving people in the lurch.

Contact at world bank? Based in Abidjan. Ask Sarah Crawford if she has one. The world bank is hard to get a hold of when they are in Benin.

USAID? In Abidjan there is Guy Martorana, running USAID’s DRG portfolio. I don’t know if he is able to talk.

What is next? I don’t know, see how things play out here and I’m waiting.