

# Senegal shines in showcase for female tech innovation

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One of the apps allows women to contact three people if they are victims of violence

Barcode health cards, mobile apps for victims of violence and an online legal platform are just some of the ideas showing the direction of female digital pioneers in Africa, with Senegalese innovators in the spotlight.

The Senegalese capital Dakar this month hosted the first African edition of "Digital Women's Day", which for the previous seven years had taken place in Paris.

More than 650 people and 26 corporations attended the event where innovators displayed tech creations, often to tackle daily problems women face and inspired by their own circumstances.

Organisers say Dakar—one of the first African cities to offer [free internet access](#)—has ambitions as a budding start-up hub with plans to create 35,000 direct jobs in new technologies by 2025.

"Dakar is among the top 10 digital cities in Africa, with incubators for [start-ups](#) and major investors," said Delphine Remy-Boutang, the event's founder.

Among the participants was Nafissatou Diouf, who at 22 already heads a start-up with 10 employees.

Her firm, Senvitale, creates QR codes for wristbands, pendants and cards enabling doctors or first responders to instantly access patients' health data.

Moved by her aunt's sudden death after a failed treatment of an allergic reaction, Diouf gave up her studies in industrial chemistry and food technology to launch her digital enterprise.

Senvitale, launched in 2017, won best Senegal start-up prize last year for its free platform, which also allows patients to manage their medical appointments.

The concept was to "help doctors and emergency workers... to act quickly", the young Senegalese businesswoman said.

For now, the project is waiting on authorisation from the Ministry of Health because of the sensitive data that the company handles. But Diouf says she is already considering development of the business internationally.

## **Victims of violence**

Diariata N'diaye, a 36-year-old artist who grew up in France in a Senegalese family, turned her focus on another problem—helping to fight domestic violence and abuse of women.

Through her activism travelling to schools in France to educate young people, she became aware many victims did not realise there was help out there.

In 2015, she launched a mobile application "App-Elles"—a play on words in French that translates into "She-Calls"—that allows victims to alert three contacts in case of danger. It records and transmits the sound of the incident to the recipient and sends the GPS location.

"I began with a very basic observation: everyone has a phone and so if there is going to be a tool for victims, it should go through their phone," N'diaye said.

An optional wristband, costing 30 euros (\$33), can be used to issue the alerts via a Bluetooth link to the mobile, so the victim does not have to draw attention to herself by switching on her phone. The free platform also allows abused women to contact associations or learn about their rights.

The App-Elles creator claims 8,000 downloads of its application and a presence in 10 countries, including France, Canada, Morocco, the United States as well as Senegal.

"We have a lot of people using App-Elles when they go out," says N'diaye. "Women who start early in the morning, who come back late at night."

## **Legal resources**

When Nafissatou Tine, a 34-year-old Senegalese-French lawyer left Brussels in 2016 to settle in Dakar, she struggled to find reliable sources of information on Senegalese law.

So with the Sunulex platform, which brings together all of Senegal's digitised laws as well as decisions of jurisprudence, she sought to fill a gap for law students, lawyers and even citizens.

Sunulex has placed 800 texts on a publicly accessible free platform—a small portion out of the total of 60,000—which gets 1,700 hits a week.

The company, which already has eight employees, hopes to launch a version next month that will pitch to 10 countries in French-speaking Africa.

"It's an African platform made with African resources, by Africans, for Africans, and for lawyers around the world," she said.

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