



DAKAR MEMORANDUM ON INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY

**Seminar on Information and Democracy
October 24th and 25th, 2023, Dakar, Senegal**

AfricTivistes and the Forum on Information and Democracy held a seminar on Information and Democracy on October 24th and 25th, 2023 in Dakar, Senegal. The seminar brought together experts, researchers, media professionals, government representatives and civil society players to discuss the challenges and opportunities linked to media, digital innovation and democracy on the continent and specifically in Senegal.

In a representative democracy, those in power are representatives of the people. They make decisions and act on behalf of the people, who in turn have a fundamental right to information on the governance of public affairs. The media, by virtue of their mission to inform, play the role of intermediary between the agents (the rulers) and the principal (the people). Through their mission to inform, the media contribute to shaping public opinion and the development of political awareness, acting as a watchdog and promoter of democracy.

The contribution of the media to the advent of democracy in Senegal and its status as a "democratic showcase" in Africa is not negligible. Senegal could claim to be a democratic anomaly in a sub-region and sub-Saharan Africa where political upheavals, sabre-rattling and the interruption of the institutional process are an integral part of daily political life.

The emergence of digital technology in the Senegalese public arena has brought about a number of changes, both in the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed, and in the way information is processed and disseminated. By opening up to the virtual, the public arena is democratising public discourse.

At the same time, this openness makes it imperative to monitor and alert the governance of public affairs. Indeed, the use and recourse to digital media is also accompanied by the emergence and amplification of an impressive flow of fake news, creating fertile ground for the amplification of violence. These two facets of the introduction of digital technology into public debate basically raise the question of its contribution to anchoring or consolidating

democracy in Senegal. In other words, is digital technology a threat or an opportunity for Senegalese democracy?

This central question was the focus of the wide-ranging panel discussions, which included leading figures from the Senegalese audiovisual landscape, researchers, government representatives and Senegalese civil society stakeholders, and led to two (03) observations and fifteen (15) strong recommendations for a more democratic Senegalese society, with particular emphasis on citizen participation.

In terms of observations, the participants :

1. recognised the efforts made by the media and public authorities to strengthen the legal and institutional framework;
2. noted the shrinking of civic space, the ever-growing scale of the production and dissemination of cheap information, but also the increasing scale of disinformation and manipulation.
3. noted the lack of trust between citizens and the media and between citizens and public institutions.

In terms of recommendations for consolidating the role of the media in Senegal's democracy and protecting and expanding civic space in the era of digitalisation, the participants called for the following:

1. Consolidate citizen control and establish continuous accountability as a core element of elected officials' actions;
2. Adapt traditional media to the new dynamics of the media landscape, particularly with digitalisation;
3. Use the same disinformation channels to convey the right information;
4. Integrate fact-checking into the media's editorial structure;
5. Educate the public about the challenges of traditional and digital media in order to prevent them from being vulnerable to fake news;
6. Fund think tanks to foster a viable research-friendly ecosystem;
7. Make research results accessible so that the media can use them;
8. Invest in and support investigative journalism;
9. Develop greater awareness of the types of information shared to prevent harm;
10. Support initiatives by young people active in digital technology;

11. Make Civic Tech initiatives accessible and easy to use for a wider audience;
12. Develop more projects with a significant impact on all social and political spheres;
13. Create synergy among civic initiatives developed using digital technologies
14. Produce more content that meets the information and participation needs of young people;
15. Give citizens the leeway to produce alternative media and digital narratives;

Dakar, 25 October 2023

It was around this central question that the rich discussions in the panels made up of luminaries from the Senegalese audiovisual landscape, researchers, government representatives and players from Senegalese civil society, led to two (03) findings and resulted in fifteen (15) strong recommendations for a more democratic Senegalese society, with particular emphasis on citizen participation.

In terms of findings, the participants:

- 1) recognized the efforts of the media and public authorities to strengthen the legal and institutional framework;
- 2) noted the shrinking of civic space, the ever-increasing scale of the production and dissemination of easy information, and the growing scope of disinformation and manipulation.
- 3) noted the breakdown in trust between citizens and the media, and between citizens and public institutions.

In terms of recommendations for consolidating the role of the media in Senegalese democracy, and for protecting and expanding civic space in the age of digitalization, the participants called for :

- 1) Consolidate citizen control and place permanent accountability at the heart of elected officials' actions;
- 2) Adapt traditional media to the new dynamics of the media landscape, particularly with digitalization;
- 3) Use the same disinformation formats to convey the right information;
- 4) Integrate fact-checking into the media's editorial organization chart;
- 5) Educate the public about the challenges of traditional and digital media, to prevent them from becoming vulnerable to fake news;
- 6) Fund think tanks to foster a viable research ecosystem;
- 7) Make research results accessible so that the media can use them;
- 8) Invest in and support investigative journalism;
- 9) Develop sensitivity to the types of information shared to avoid harm;
- 10) Support young people's digital initiatives;
- 11) Make Civic Tech initiatives accessible and user-friendly to a wider public;
- 12) Develop more projects with considerable impact in all aspects of socio-political life;
- 13) Create a synergy of civic initiatives developed through digital technologies
- 14) Produce more content that meets the information and participation needs of young people;

15) Empower citizens to produce alternative media and digital narratives.