

Fire detector for tightly-packed slums alerts at-risk neighbors



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In an average-sized home, a smoke detector is useful for sensing the presence of a fire while distinguishing dangerous heat from cooking. However, in the shacks found in the slums of South Africa, for example, ovens aren't used and standard devices aren't as suitable for determining real threat. The country's [Khusela](#) startup has now developed a smart detector specifically for shacks, which enable community-wide warnings in the event of a fire.

The device looks much like a typical fire alarm, but the technology inside caters to the specific needs of the slums. These areas often have little electricity and the homes are tightly packed, meaning a small fire can rapidly turn into a devastating blaze affecting many families. Rather than detecting smoke — which is prevalent due to the open-fire cooking many in slums resort to — Khusela uses innovative heat sensing technology that can distinguish between cooking and dangerous fire. The devices are inexpensive compared to traditional alarms and are also connect to others in the vicinity. If a fire is detected by one device, all the other alarms in a 100 metre radius will also be triggered, giving residents the time to evacuate before a spread actually happens.

Khusela was recently a finalist in the global [Seedstars World](#) startup competition and also won the [Global Social Venture Competition](#)'s People's Choice award. Are there other ways to deliver inexpensive, life-saving technology to areas that are off the grid?

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