

## Mediafax reaches number 5 000

Maputo: The daily newsheet *Mediafax*, the first of the Mozambican independent media, published its 5 000th issue on Thursday, 8 March 2012.

This is no mean feat for a publication which started life as one determined journalist, a computer, and a little seed money from the Norwegian Development Agency (NORAD), initially operating out of a converted garage.

The founder and first editor of *Mediafax* was Carlos Cardoso, the finest of Mozambique's post-independence investigative journalists, who was murdered in November 2000.

Cardoso, a former director of AIM, was a member of the first journalists' cooperative in Mozambique, Mediacoop, set up in the wake of the 1990 Constitution and the 1991 Press Law, which made privately owned media possible, and outlawed censorship.

While the rest of Mediacoop carefully prepared to launch the weekly paper *Savana*, which did not appear until 1994, Cardoso insisted on doing something at once. He understood that the use of new technologies made it possible to produce a daily paper on a computer and distribute it by fax, with minimum costs.

There weren't many fax machines in Maputo in 1992, but government departments (including the office of the then President Joaquim Chissano), major companies, embassies and NGOs were soon subscribing. And for every copy of *Mediafax* sent out by fax, many photocopies were made.

*Mediafax* was the start of a revolution in the Mozambican media. It obtained a large audience and high prestige, precisely because of the quality of Cardoso's writing and his dogged capacity to follow stories wherever they might lead.

In the wake of *Mediafax* came many other faxsheets, most of them of poor quality - with the exception of *Metical*, the second newsheet Cardoso founded, after his break with Mediacoop over financial issues in 1997.

Reflecting on the almost 20 years that have passed since Cardoso turned out the first issue of *Mediafax*, an editorial in Thursday's issue remarks that dozens of fax publications have appeared throughout the country, making this the most widespread model for disseminating information. The faxsheets (which nowadays are more often e-mailed than faxed) have become "an object of study, and academic theses, and a source of income for the eternal consultants of the media and of the phenomenon of press freedom".

"But if the format has remained much the same for 20 years, the same cannot be said for the content", the editorial admits. For Cardoso, it was the quality of the journalism that was "the key to success" - and that quality ensured that, when he left

"Mediafax" and founded "Metical", the new publication was "an instantaneous success".

*Mediafax* still has its committed professionals, but the editorial admits there is "no comparison with its sparkling beginnings".

In self-criticism that is rare in the Mozambican media, it admits that *Mediafax* too has treated news in a "simplistic" fashion, and has fallen victim "to the copy/paste virus that seems to infest all the newsrooms in Mozambique", and has indulged in "the dishonest publication of press releases and of texts promoting figures, events and brands as if they were genuine news items".

If *Mediafax* wants to continue to claim a place for itself on the fast-changing media scene, "it must make a clear commitment to the journalism and to the honest information to which its readers have a right", the editorial stresses.

"It must also have the courage to open up to technological innovation, interacting with other media platforms opened by the vertiginous speed that the Internet provides, and by the popularity of the social networks promoted by Facebook and Twitter".

That, the editorial warns, is the only way for *Mediafax* to "respect its legacy as the revolutionary medium it was when it first appeared and the unorthodox and rebellious style of the journalists who, two decades ago, embodied the idea of a new journalism for Mozambique".

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