

## Matenda asautsa

(A red day mask from the Mua area)



### Themes

1) Faithfulness to the *mwambo* 2) HIV/AIDS & sexual diseases

### Etymology

**Matenda asautsa** means, 'The disease has reached its terminal point.'

### Description

The medium sized mask (30 cm.) depicts a sick person close to his/her end. It features a head which is bald except for a few sparse patches of hair and an emaciated face, letting the skeleton appear through the skin, which is covered with erupting wounds. Wrinkles fill the forehead and agonised eyes are set deep into their sockets. Eyebrows protruding with sparse hair, a tiny nose, a broad toothy mouth shouting pain, two deep labial lines, salient cheeks and deeply grooved temples reinforce the skeletal appearance and the poor health condition of the patient. The angular chin displays a few sparse hairs; also the moustache. **Matenda asautsa's** headgear and outfit are made of tatters. He carries two whips, conveying that he has come from the spirit world in order to correct wrong behaviour.

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**Matenda asautsa** enters the *bwalo* and wiggles his pelvis like a worm, imitating the dancing style of Bwindi or Ndapita ku maliro. His dance is licentious and suggestive. He performs during initiations, funerals and commemoration ceremonies. The men acclaim him with the following song: 1) *"The disease has reached its terminal point. Let us be careful! The disease has reached its terminal point."* The women continue: 2) *"Some will cry! What have I done that you stare at me? Since... we are all (as good as) dead!"*

The character of **Matenda asautsa** is as recent as 2010. It performed for the first time on the occasion of the funeral of a young man who had died from a mysterious disease, HIV/AIDS related, which manifests itself through the swelling of the pubis. **Matenda asautsa** addresses the youth and warns the younger generation against promiscuity. It dramatises the terrible consequence of HIV/AIDS by stressing the skeletal appearance of the person. In our days sexual diseases of all sorts are perceived to be related to AIDS. When such diseases appear, AIDS is near. The area of Mua, which has a mission hospital, was privileged to undertake the first investigation on the existence of HIV/ AIDS in Malawi in 1986. Awareness campaigns started first in this area. The Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art has provided young people with skill and ability to express their culture and their inner emotions. It is remarkable that so many wood carvers have been inspired by the HIV theme. Many mask carvers have chosen to promote AIDS prevention awareness by repeatedly creating new *gule* characters and masks focused on the issue: Ayemwe atsale adzamange, Dziko latha, Kufa n'kugona, Mtundu watha. This new teaching followed closely the ancestors' advice concerning promiscuity and the advent, during their long history, of numerous sexual diseases: Chiudza, Chiwau, Chizonono, Chiwauka, Hololiya, Kadziotche, Kanchacha, Kwanka anyamata, Msakambewa, Ndakuyawa, Njolinjo. **Matenda asautsa** adds weight to the ancestors' advice and focuses once more on the importance of the *mwambo*.

### Songs

- 1) *"Matenda asautsa. Tiye tisamale! Matenda avuta."*
- 2) *"Wina alira! Ine mundiyan'gana ndatani? Poti tonse ndife maliro."*

### Source

Interview in 2012