

## N'kuuza mwambo

(A day mask from the Khwidzi area)



### Themes

1) Need to report *mdulo* to the elders 2) Sexual taboos (*mdulo*)

### Etymology

**N'kuuza mwambo** means, 'This is my advice to you'.

### Description

This mask consists of a decorated calabash, which the dancer puts over his head. The head has tiny eyes with painted lashes, and large erect ears. The mouth grimaces and the triangular teeth are clearly seen. He wears a bark cloth suit and dances in the style of Mbiya zoodooka, the broken pot, during the boys' initiation ceremony, which takes place on the occasion of the funeral of a well known person. These initiations held at the time of funerals are performed to show greater respect for a person of status and to ask their favour on behalf of the initiates. The men sing, "*When you feel pain in your tummy, please inform the elders. They will give the right medicine. This is my advice to you.*"

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The song refers to a bellyache, but the word tummy here is a euphemism for the sexual organs. Similarly, the calabash mask refers to the *mdulo* disease and reflects swelling. The *mdulo* disease is believed to be contracted through having sexual relations with a woman who is having her period. The Chewa accept that such contact can result in death. The first symptom is a cutting pain at the level of the navel, which radiates into the sexual parts, causing the pubis to swell. *“This is my advice to you”* stresses that this type of disease is serious, and that the elders should be informed before it is too late. When the elders provide him with medicine, they will once more remind him of the advice given at the time of his initiation.

### **Song**

*“M’ mimba mukawawa umauza akulu (2x). Mumpatse mankhwala N’kuuza mwambo.”*

### **Source**

Interview in 1992