

# Chipunga mphepo

(A day structure from the Mua area)



(miniature model)

## Themes

- 1) Communion with the ancestors
- 2) Unity & harmony

## Etymology

**Chipunga mphepo** means, 'It sweeps everything together like the wind.'

## Description

**Chipunga mphepo** is a mini-version of Chimkoko. The shape is that of an animal resembling a bull or antelope. There may be very short horns, or horns may be absent. The structure is smaller (two metres long by a metre and a half high) than Chimkoko. The head stands erect, and the back is slightly swayed. It is made of a bamboo frame on which palm leaves (night structure) or maize husks (day structure) are woven. The animal has a long tail like Kasiya maliro, which swings around when the structure gyrates. The head resembles that of Chimkoko with teeth, but with ears that are larger and round as if they are gathering the wind. One dancer, sometimes two, activates the structure. This allows the beast 'to race like the wind'. It also gyrates and gathers people from the four winds. The animal is not aggressive, but gathers people together like the chief or the head of

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the spirit world. The structure is used for funerals, commemoration rites, initiation and *dambule*. This structure was very popular in the Mua area up to the 1970s. Today it is seldom seen.

It enters the arena with the following song, "**Chipunga mphepo**, *let us play with it. The beast of speed, let us play with it, Oh!*" The symbolism of **Chipunga mphepo** is derived from that of Chimkoko. The animal of speed, fast like the wind, draws the village and the world of the ancestors together.

The allusion to the wind is an obvious reference to the world of the spirits, invisible like the wind. **Chipunga mphepo** brings together the men and the women, the life givers and generators of the village, and unifies them with the previous generation, now departed to the spirit world. Together they are invited to collaborate for such events and to enjoy each other's company. The animal can be compared to the bull, the sacrificial animal of the Ngoni, which is slaughtered and roasted on the occasion of funeral rites and commemoration ceremonies. The roasted meat shared by the Ngoni brings them into communion with each other and their deceased. For the Ngoni, the bull is the symbol of togetherness and communion. The Chewa seem to have assigned to the Ngoni bull the same meaning. They have compared its speed to the wind and the ancestral world. This has allowed them to emphasise the importance of their collaboration with the spirits and their sense of devotion in remembering their dead.

### Song

*"Chipunga mphepo, tisewere naye (2x) nyama ya liwilo, tisewere naye oh!"*

### Source

Interviews in 1992, 2000 and 2001