Connecting the dots...

Volume 7

13 August 2021



Philip Mataranyika
Nyaradzo Group,
Chief Executive Officer

Follow us on:

NYARADZO GROUP

www.nyaradzo.co.zw

Service • Strength • Solutions

Our move to Kambuzuma resulting in us staying in a house whose title was in both our names Mavis and I, would make me the first person in my immediate family to own a house with title, in an urban area. For all his troubles working for this and the other transport company, my father had not during his working life been able to have a house of his own. If he did at some point, I never got to know about it.

While my father remembered and shared most of what happened during his time and the years before he was born, once settled, I would remember the conversations him and I used to have regarding our roots, even when he had since died. I would choose to make it my mission to dig deeper so as to understand more about who we are and where we came from, leading me to go through a lot of literature to expand on my knowledge and understanding of the fascinating stories father had told.

As I dug further into the archives with an increased interest in understanding my lineage, I would be fascinated and intrigued by stories and the sequence of events in their lives, including the heroics of my late great grand ancestor, Chief Chingaira Makoni.

Born Mutota, fourth son of Nyamanhindi, one of Chief Ruredzo's thirteen sons, Chingaira's ascendance to the throne of the Makoni Chieftainship had ended bitter succession fights that had interrupted an otherwise peaceful co-existence between the Makoni and Mutasa dynasties.

A decade after taking over the reins, Chief Chingaira Makoni, struck a chord with his friend, Tendai Mutasa, who had gained control of the Mutasa chieftaincy in 1874 and, together, they would bring peace and stability to the troubled Manyika region that had hitherto been split in the middle in tribal wars. However, that peace would be disturbed once again when the territory fell under white minority rule a few years after the arrival in the country in 1880, of men without knees. The natives would be driven off their fertile lands to barren fields, leaving the invaders to parcel out swathes of farmlands and gold claims amongst themselves. This had given rise to the 1896 up-rising which claimed the life of Chief Chingaira Makoni after he and a few dozen of his supporters were besieged in a cave at Dindingwe Hills, and forced out after several days of being dynamited, amid pledges for safe passage.

Chief Chingaira Makoni had emerged from the cave into capture only for his captors to hastily discard initial plans for trial upon the escape of some of his fellows. He was brutally shot dead at close range; his head chopped off and shipped to England as a trophy. While attempts to have the head returned to a free and independent Zimbabwe for proper reburial have fallen flat, Chief Chingaira Makoni has been elevated into the national mythology of the country. His legend has been a source of pride and inspiration to me in the sense that the late Chief Chingaira Makoni's father, Nyamanhindi, along with my paternal great grand ancestor, Zendera who was Chief Makoni between 1835 and 1840, were among Chief Ruredzo's thirteen sons, which is how the late hero Chief Chingaira is my great ancestor.

The Mataranyikas' bloodline can be traced back to the late great immigrant, Gunguwo, named after that black bird – crow – known for its intelligence and adaptability. Gunguwo – along with his family – had to relocate all the way from Ciciri in north-eastern Tanganyika (now called Tanzania) to settle in an area called Maungwe in the 1500s. This following a violent confrontation with their neighbours over hunting rights. Rather than fight to death, Gunguwo would choose to migrate south of the Zambezi River, which happens to be the fourth longest river on the continent, flowing through six African countries, that became sovereign states as part of the scramble for Africa, and after the Berlin conference of 1884, before terminating into the Indian Ocean.

Before embarking on this long journey, Gunguwo had assigned his son, Sabarawara, on a mission to identify new lands on which they could settle. Sabarawara – also referred to as Mubvakure or a foreigner – was accompanied on this mission by his two sons, Chipunza (Jembere) and Muswere (Makoni) who will in subsequent accounts rise to become a paramount chief of the Maungwes. The trio of Sabarawara, Chipunza and Muswere proceeded south of the Zambezi River until they reached this area called Maungwe which was abundant in wildlife, especially elephants and bucks. Maungwe is the present-day Makoni District. In its original context, Maungwe is a collection of piled up boulders or kopjes. It refers purely to the territory and not to the people that come from there. To the west, Maungwe is bordered by Mbire and Nhohwe on the north-west while Manyika and Bocha are on the east and southern sides, respectively.

One night while out hunting, the trio would find a footpath near a river called Rusingapwi (the one that never dries up), now called Rusape River. Since it was already late, they decided to put up there for the night so they could follow the footpath to satisfy their inquisitive minds, which they did the following morning.

Following the footpath led them to a cave where they encountered the first human (a man) ever since they had embarked on their mission. Apart from being naked, the man had long hair and spoke a language they could not understand. From conversing with him through sign language, the visitors would learn that the name of the cave occupant was Mutwira (Madziwa) who was the ruler of the area they wished to settle on. Jembere (Chipunza) and Muswere (Makoni) then negotiated with their host, Mutwira, and were granted permission to settle. During the encounter with their host, they would teach him how to kindle a fire using sticks as well as preparing food from the fire and using salt to flavor food. Before their arrival, Mutwira and his people ate their food raw, including meat. After establishing contact and rapport with Mutwira and his people, Sabarawara and his two sons kicked off on their journey back to Ciciri in Tanganyika, having accomplished their mission. To ensure they would not get lost on their return journey to settle for good in Maungwe, along with their families, they heaped stones as markers. Upon their arrival and after debriefing their ageing father of their findings, it was time for Gunguwo and his family to turn their backs on Ciciri for good, for their newly-found place of abode.

Gunguwo, who was in the twilight of his life would only agree to come with them on condition that should he meet his death along the way, his descendants would carry his remains with them for burial at their final destination. After conceding to his demands, Gunguwo would lead his clan with the help of Sabarawara and his two sons – Chipunza and Muswere – to Maungwe. Along the way, they reached an area called Dande – ruled by the ancestral clan of the present Chief Mangwende of Nhohwe. Then, the area was under Chief Chirariro. There, Gunguwo whose failing health was getting the better of him was warmly welcomed, together with his entourage. In gratitude, he gave his daughter to the brother of Chief Chirariro who became one of his wives. Shortly afterwards, Gunguwo would meet his death and his sons and grandsons flayed a black sacrificial ox and wrapped his body in the animal hide. The wrapped body was then placed on a wooden frame to make it easier for them to carry his remains for the remainder of the journey and in line with the promise they had made to their patriarch.

Consequent to his father's death and some members of the entourage remaining in Dande, Sabarawara would become head of the entourage. As the new head of the family, he asked his father's grandsons to carry their grandfather's remains as they continued on their journey. Upon reaching a point near the source of Mueke River (now called Macheke River), they deposited Gunguwo's remains in a cave, before proceeding to re-establish contact with Mutwira at his station near Rusingapwi River. As had been agreed with Mutwira during the first leg of Sabarawara's trip to the area, the visitors were allowed to set up camp on the western side of the Rusingapwi River, on the fringes of Chipadze Hill. Once settled, a few of Gunguwo's sons and grandsons would go back to retrieve their progenitor's bones from the cave close to Mueke River. On arrival from their successful mission, they would lay the remains in a large circular platform and in accordance with their customs in Ciciri.

As fate would have it, disaster would strike when a bout of severe dysentery afflicted most members of the family, killing a number of them including the head Sabarawara. Luckily for the newly settled family, Muswere his son and his other young brothers had gone out hunting. A messenger had to be sent out to warn them against returning to the family compound. They would take heed of the advice, leaving Chipunza, who had stayed behind in Chipadze, to head the family. Thereafter, Muswere and his group moved up the Odzi River before taking a detour by following Nyatande River up to its source where they found a pleasant valley with a reliable supply of fresh water. At the source of Nyatande River was a hill called Nharire from which they settled on its slopes in 1625. Notwithstanding, they maintained contact with Mutwira and his people in Maungwe who were now more than just good Samaritans in the sense that before Sabarawara's death, he had given his daughter to be Mutwira's wife as a show of gratitude for allowing them to settle in Maungwe. Mutwira had reciprocated the gesture by giving his own daughter as a wife to Sabarawara's son Muswere. As a result, when Muswere settled at Nharire, Mutwira now had high regard for his son-in-law for not just teaching him to kindle a fire and season food with salt, but for his immense hunting skills as well.

The descendants of Gunguwo of Ciciri are known as Wasangano – those who established a great kraal named Sangano by Nharire Hill. The totem Wasangano is Shonga, now used interchangeably with Nyati and Gokoma.

Mutwira would give Muswere the praise name "Makoni", remarking in his vernacular Chiungwe that "ndamupa zita nyamusi, rekuti Makoni, ngekuti ngenjere dzenyu mandikona" (Today, I have given you the name Makoni because by your skill you have out-smarted me).

Thereafter, two mutually exclusive events would occur at different times. First, while out hunting elephants, two young brothers of Muswere – Maendaenda and Kabirenhanga – would be killed by the largest land animal along with Chirariro (husband of their sister). Shocked by that rare occurrence which they considered to be a taboo, the mother of Muswere would forbid him from attending the funeral ceremony. Second, when Chipunza – eldest brother of Muswere died, a message was sent out from Chipadze to Nharire, calling on Muswere to claim the chieftaincy. Muswere would politely decline to assume the reins. Instead, he directed that his sons should inherit the throne and run their affairs separately. This created two separate chieftaincies – Chipunza and Makoni.

As kingmaker, Muswere began to realise his growing influence and prestige. He also started toying around with the idea of upstaging Mutwira. And so, he decided to play a trick on the ruler of Maungwe. After Muswere had killed an elephant during one of his hunts, he went to pay his respects to Mutwira and decided to put him to the test by asking the Chief to pick the part of the carcass he preferred. Mutwira, picked the back and thighs – not knowing the custom of his guests which forbade men from choosing the hindquarters ahead of the chest. It was a tradition in Ciciri that upon killing an elephant, the chief would be presented with the breast and thigh of the beast as per their custom. But after Mutwira fell for the trick, choosing the hindquarters instead of the chest, Muswere would assume the chieftainship from him. Mutwira obliged by renouncing his position in favour of Muswere who, in return, granted his predecessor an area called Chipunda for their exclusive occupation and control. Muswere would be Chief for the period between 1625 and 1660, establishing a permanent royal city (muzinda or sangano) on the Nharire Hill. And as his fame spread widely, people from all walks of life began to settle in Maungwe from as far as Manyika, Bocha and Mbire.

To fortify the royal city, Muswere had constructed a fort of trimmed granite blocks on the summit of the Nharire Hill and around the borders of his compound. By that time, Portuguese and Arab traders had already started trading up the Zambezi River and interfering with existing inland trade.

It is said that during Muswere's rule, the traders were actively conducting barter trade with the Maungwes through the exchange of clothing material for ornaments such as beads, as well as ivory, which was the main source of wealth within the Makoni realm. By the time he died, Muswere had established firm control over Maungwe.

Muswere's wife (given to him by Mutwira) had borne him sons, Nehumba, Chiendambuya and Nyandebvu. Before he died, he had thus instructed them to select a suitable burial place for him. Nyandebvu would choose a large cave on the western side of Matotwe Hill, which was approved by his father. In addition, a cave on Muonwe Hill was identified as suitable for storing the blood and liquids that were to be drained from the departed Chief's body during the process of mummification. The final act before the Chief's death was to call for Muswere's younger brother, Chamasezu, who was next in seniority and hence heir-apparent, to nominate him as successor.

However, Chamasezu could not make it on time as he was busy tending to his fields. For failing to appear on time, Chamasezu would be given the name Mukuwapasi (a rolling stone) because he was hardly found in one place. To rub salt into the wound, the elders decided to nominate Nehumba to be Chief Makoni on account of Chamasezu's no show and also because he was the first born son in the Chief's family.

As all this was happening, Muswere's body was wrapped in a cloth and placed in a hut (rutumba) to dry for a year before its interment by his successor on the western slope of Matotwe Hill. The tradition at the time was that before a chief was installed officially, approval of the Warozvi would be sought. The Warozvi were already in the land to the south. In order to get his confirmation as Chief Muswere's successor, Nehumba ordered his younger brother, Chiendambuya to proceed to the court of the Warozvi. It is said that the Warozvi received Chiendambuya so favourably that they refused to sanction Nehumba's enthronement on grounds that he himself should have presented himself to pay his respects. The tables were subsequently turned against Nehumba after the Warozvi accompanied Chiendambuya on his way back to Maungwe where Nehumba fled the scene upon their arrival. Chiendambuya was subsequently installed as Muswere's official successor, and was accorded his escort, tsvimbo (sceptre) and chiremba (crown of skins) – being symbols of chieftainship passed on to him by the Warozvi kingmakers.

Days after Chiendambuya's enthronement, Chamasezu arrived for his brother's funeral only to find that he had lost the chieftainship. Peeved by it, he strongly lamented the loss only to be pacified by two heads of oxen given to him as compensation. Further, his senior position was acknowledged when he was appointed as Zibaba (great father) of the Maungwes – giving him the official responsibility of selecting the rightful successor to the chieftainship. It was also felt that Mutwira who had been tricked by Muswere to give up his chieftainship needed to be completely weakened so that he wouldn't stage a palace coup. Hence, when Chiendambuya was crowned chief on the small rock called Chitombotsuro, Mutwira was made to carry him down on his back as a symbolic act of reaffirming his loyalty to the new chief. Mutwira was also presented with what the new Makoni Chief called "dzinombe dzembereko" – a skin by which mothers carry their children on their backs. This became a regular feature at installations of Makoni chiefs which only ended at the crowning of Ndapfunya as the first Chief Makoni to ascend to the throne when the British arrived in the 1880s.

Also recognised following Muswere's demise was Chiendambuya's younger brother, Nyandebvu, who earned the distinction of having buried their father (Muswere). Nyandebvu's descendants became known as "masacuru", meaning the royal undertakers. Sakureba became possessed by the spirit of Mubvakure (Sabarawara) and in his capacity as the spirit medium (Svikiro) would hand down the important ritual duties to his descendants, among them rainmaking and the magical doctoring of the fields.

Another ritual act by Chiendambuya when he became Chief Makoni was that of extinguishing old fires at his kraal and lighting up new ones to symbolise that they were great fire-givers while reminding his subjects of the superiority of Sabarawara and Muswere over Mutwira. It was Mukuwapasi's duty to kindle the new fires in a traditional way, assisted by Mutwira. The custom still survives to this day.

Yet another ritual under the new chief's rule was meant to entrench fertility in the area. The incoming Chief Chiendambuya would have sexual intercourse with the daughter of one of his father's brothers who was by bantu custom hanzvadzi (sister) the night before he was formally installed.

The custom only ceased under the British colonial rule. Chief Chiendambuya ruled from 1660 to between 1705 and 1710. His name is held in awe, above all the ancestors and previous rulers. He was also famed for holding yearly festivals known as Masingo, performed from July to August. Aptly named festival of the fruits, women who had never borne a child were sent to Chipadze to brew beer at the grave of Gunguwo and that of his son, Sabarawara.

Two families of the moyo totem who had followed Gunguwo and his family from Dande to Chipadze namely Manyara and Nyambiya, would slaughter a sacrificial ox beside the two graves. By celebration of Masingo, the people of Makoni reaffirmed their unity with their ancestors and invoked their blessings upon their families, fields and animals. This ritual fizzled out when the missionaries came with their Christian teachings. Until the arrival of the missionaries, there was always a spirit medium, the spirit of Chiendambuya who was given the area, Weya, to preside over. The spirit medium would intercede (kuteurira) between the Chief's people and the ancestors (mudzimu) of the original Chiendambuya Makoni. Succession for headman-ship of Weya went from Svikiro to Svikiro, not by birthright but through the wishes of the ancestors. Upon his death, Chief Chiendambuya left several sons of which the most senior were Nyakurerwa and Chimbo. It is said that Nyakurerwa and Chimbo were born on the same night from different mothers. It is also said that the midwives that delivered Nyakurerwa let out a customary ululation "mhururu" to announce his birth while the midwives for Chimbo completely forgot to do so. It was therefore presumed that Nyakurerwa was senior to Chimbo in the absence of evidence to the contrary. Hence, upon Chief Chiendambuya's death, Nyakurerwa was chosen to succeed his father.

Chimbo had since his boyhood resented the arbitrary fashion in which he was judged junior to Nyakurerwa and it worsened when his half brother became chief. Chimbo would flee to another area with his sister and her husband when the new chief was installed, although that was never the end of him. With Chimbo out of sight, it would appear Nyakurerwa's rule was out of danger. The Moyos and Warozvi would continue to feature prominently in the history of the Waungwes who are of the Nyati totem. For example, when Nhamhunga Tandi – a chief of Moyo-Makumbudze totem – was driven from Nhohwe by Sakubvunza (ancestor to the Magwendes of Moyo-Muzukuru totem) to the north-west boundary of the Maungwe, he was well-received by Chief Makoni since it was politically-correct to be in good terms with the Warozvi who had given them land known as Utandi.

Tandi became the official representative of Warozvi at the court of Chief Makoni and was responsible for the anointing of newly-appointed chiefs of Maungwe through the person of his priest-emissary, Mavudzi. Nonetheless, Tandi and Makoni could not cast eyes on one another because of the belief that the magical potency they possessed would cause mutual destruction if they came into eye-contact. Whenever they needed to consult each other, a Chigwira or black cloth was placed between them to give isolation and mutual protection. Along the way, Chimbo would prove that he was not done yet.

Away from the prying eyes, he hatched a plan along with his sister and her husband to return and remove Nyakurerwa from the chieftaincy using a trick in which his sister and husband would go back to the Chief's court to offer their respects to the Chief and place before him a magnificent roll of cloth as a gift. Inside the cloth, Chimbo would be armed with a dagger and once Nyakurerwa's wives unrolled the cloth for inspection by the Chief, he would leap out and stab his brother. The plan was executed with the precision of a zoro knife and on the death of Nyakurerwa in 1725, Chimbo would assume chieftainship. Driven by anger and revenge, he would drive out all grown up sons of his slain brother except for Njuwire who was still a child when he took over.

On his death, Chimbo would be succeeded by his son, Chikumbirike, who would be supported wholeheartedly by his half-brother, Maradzika, as their mothers were sisters. Ruredzo, the eldest son of Chikumbirike, would rule for 30 years from 1790 to 1820.

Being a nephew (muzukuru) of Mandeya, who was a royal guard (Jinda) of the powerful Chief Mutasa, Ruredzo was able to cultivate friendly relations with Chief Mutasa on the east. On his death in 1820 – succession reverted on the line of Maradzika, whose son Dandanyika (nephew of the Rozvi Chief Tandi), was installed as Chief Makoni and ruled for 10 years. Dandanyika was unable to sire sons and his only daughter, Kupembga, was married to Madondo of the bonga totem. Because he had no sons and the chieftainship was limited only to male children, succession would fall on descendants of Ruredzo. Just as well, Ruredzo had thirteen sons, all of whom were eligible for succession to chief.

In terms of seniority, Fusire was the eldest son of Ruredzo and the natural prince (nevanji) or heir to the chieftainship. However, Fusire was said to have a reputation for being cruel and capricious, Zibaba Mukuwapasi would reject his bid for chieftainship. Fusire was also said to have been notorious for having built a huge domestic establishment so much that the elders were little disposed to sanction the appointment of a chief whose demands were likely to prove exacting. The field was therefore narrowed down to the other twelve sons of Ruredzo, amongst them Muswati, Zendera, Nyamanhindi, Muchichwa, Muruko (Nyakurukwa) and Mataranyika who would die before he got married.

Muswati would be appointed as successor, reigning from 1830 to 1835, before dying when the Swazi invaded the district under the leadership of Zwangendawa Jere. The confusion brought about by Zwangendawa Jere's invasion made it impossible to carry out the ritual of prescribed mummification and subsequent interment of the deceased chief on Matotwe Hill. Therefore, Muswati was hastily buried in Chitsotso (thicket), a venerable resting place of the masemukadzi (first wives) of the line royal.

On the death of Muswati, the next surviving son of Ruredzo, Zendera, a nephew of Saruchera and aide of Chief Mutasa would take over as Chief Makoni, reigning for the period 1835 to 1840, amidst the chaos of the Swazi invasion that claimed the lives of many sons and grandsons of Ruredzo. When the tide of war subsided, a catastrophic period of famine and drought remembered as "Shangwa" ensued. During Shangwa, many of Ruredzo's sons, amongst them Nyamanhindi, Muchichwa and Muruko, left Maungwe to secure food for survival. Even Zendera's sons deserted their father, leaving him to cope with the aid of servants, retainers and minor headmen. In the memory of his young brother who had died young and before he got married, Zendera would name one of his sons Mataranyika. Some of Mataranyika's brothers, sons of Zendera include Gwasira, Rutsenza, Nyokamete, Mbozi, Mbiziyadambura, Chiome (Chigudu), Mutsata, Dafi and Chinogomera.

Taking advantage of the disorganisation in the Maungwe clan, following the Shangwa and the attack by Zwangendaba, two of the disinherited sons of Chief Chipunza, kinsmen of Makoni, murdered Zendera. The eldest of the two sons, Mukunyadze (the usurper), proclaimed himself chief without opposition and he ruled for five years with the support of his younger brother, Mukwengwere.

It is said that, the sons of Muswati who remained in Maungwe accepted the change of guard to save their own skin. Dismayed by Zendera's gruesome murder, Nyamanhindi, who had gone to Manyika to escape famine, cemented his relations with Mudemberwa Mutasa, chief of Manyika, who was also related to him by virtue of him having married Ngonya – the daughter of Waraza and full sister of Nyamanhindi. While Mudemberwa loathed hostilities, he agreed to assist Nyamanhindi. Mudemberwa sent his brother, Matida to lead an army that would assist Nyamanhindi in dethroning Mukunyadze, with the aid of spies. They would set fire to the chief's kraal and in the process captured the usurper and his young brother while brandishing arrows with tips that had been made red-hot by the fire. Matida waited to see Nyamanhindi securely installed as chief before returning with his army to Manyika where he discovered that his brother, Mudemberwa Mutasa, had been murdered by enemies in his absence. He himself was then appointed Chief Mutasa. Since then, the Makoni Chieftainship has rotated among the four houses of Mswati, Zendera, Nyamanhindi and Muruko (Nyakurukwa), sons of Ruredzo, with the current Chief Makoni, Cogen Simbayi Gwasira, who is a descendant of the house of Zendera, to which I belong.

The seed of wanting to know where we came from and how, was planted in me by my father in the many hours of discussions we had whilst he was still alive and I cherish those moments. After over four centuries since we settled in the Maungwe area, I remain humbled to have been part of the inner circle that was involved in the process resulting in the selection of the current Chief Makoni, which is our birthright. There are a number of key attributes in my great grand ancestors' lives and customs, as this intricate piece of history indicates, that I value dearly. As can be gleaned from our long history, being an undertaker is not something new within the greater Makoni family. We have been undertakers from way back, from when our patriarch Gunguwo died and was buried according to our customs dating back years in Ciciri, to the decent burials of all our chiefs in Maungwe and that of others who die.

Adaptability, a never-say-die spirit, and fortitude are also some of the qualities I admire about my forebearers and have adopted a good number of them throughout my life in its ups and downs thus far.

Connecting the dots back to my great ancestors is a very integral part of the person that I am and want to be, as is documenting and telling of my story in detail, right from way before I was born.

Acknowledgments:

D.P Abraham, M.A (Oxon.) – The Principality of Maungwe: It's History and Traditions
National Archives