

MERU

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

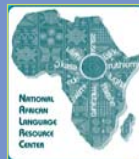
The Meru people, or Ameru, are a Bantu ethnic group that inhabit the Meru region of Kenya on the fertile lands of north and eastern slopes of Mount Kenya, in the former Eastern Province of Kenya. The name “Meru” refers to both the people and the region which for many years was the only administrative unit.

The Meru are primarily agrarian, growing a variety of crops and keeping livestock and their home life and culture is similar to other Highland Bantus. The Meru have maintained adherence to a fairly strict customary code amongst the various cohorts of the population. For instance circumcision is still a mandatory rite of passage for boys during which time cultural education including community norms and expectations, such as respect for elders and the protection of children are taught in a seclusion period that may last up to a month.

Nowadays however the depth of the instruction may vary depending on the extent of urban influence. Previously, girls would also undergo circumcision, but this practice was outlawed by *Njuri Ncheke* in April 1956. The practice has been progressively abandoned and is being replaced by instruction based alternative rites of passage.

STUDYING MERU IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC website at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



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MERU GIRL

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHO SPEAKS MERU

Meru is the language spoken by the Meru people (Ameru) who live on the Eastern and Northern slopes of Mount Kenya, Kenya, Africa and on the Nyambene ranges. They settled in this area after centuries of migration from the north. The Meru people are a fairly homogeneous community and all share a common ancestry. They speak same language, Kimeru, but there are some slight regional differences, in accent and local words. The community comprises the following subdivisions; from the North to the South:

- * Igembe
- * Tigania (Tiania)
- * Imenti
- * Tharaka (Saraka)
- * Igoji
- * Mwimbi–Muthambi
- * Chuka (Gicuka)

The Meru language is similar to its surrounding neighbors, the Kikuyu and Embu could have possibly adopted parts of Meru.



Meru Men Dancing

WHY STUDY MERU

Meru is a local first language and one of the languages broadcast over the Voice of Kenya. The 1979 Kenya census shows the combined total of Meru groups (Tigania, Igembe, Imenti, Mitine, Igoji, Mwimbi, Muthambi, and Chuka) to be 830,000 (Mbaabu, 1985). Other figures range from 800,000 (UBS 1982), to 540,000 (Heine 1980), to 350,000 Grimes (1996) cites a figure of 1,305,000 Meru speakers.

Those interested in the African languages and literature, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, peace and conflict studies, African art, international development, non-governmental organization (NGO) work, government work, or African history will find Meru very worth while to study.

Greetings:

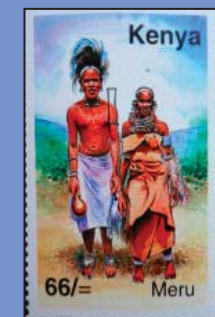
- Muga? Hi/Hello (Singular)
- Muga mono – Hi (response)
- Muga kairi – Hello again (2nd greeter)
- Mugeni? – Hi (Plural)
- Muga mono – Hi (response)
- Mugeni kairi – Hello again (2nd greeter)
- Niatia? – How are you?
- Ikwega – Fine
- Inkuthugania uri umwega - Hope you are fine
- Muga mama - Hello
- Muga mono mami – Hello (response)



A woman at Meru Herbs 'shelling' the hibiscus flowers by taking off the plump petals for drying to make tea.



Meru artifacts



Meru stamp