

Njuuri Ncheke Council of Elders

Thirteen kilometers north of Meru town is Njuuri Ncheke the traditional high court for the area. Construction of the building began in 1962 on the site where elders met under trees, but due to differences between the Meru County Council (which was responsible for its construction) and the constructor, the building was abandoned before its completion.

Nonetheless, it was and is still used once a year by a Meru Council of elders as the venue for settling disputes arising within Meru communities which could not be resolved by the smaller traditional councils(njuuri). The smaller njuuri houses nominated their members to Njuuri Ncheke, the high court of the Meru people, which catered for the entire Meru community.

The Njuuri Ncheke house is located in Nyambene District, near the road leading to Meru National Park. Its shape is oval representing the traditional Meru architecture. In 1989, the building was entrusted to the NMK. The name Njuuri Ncheke is derived from the ritual oath that was taken by all the members of the traditional council; only the elders (judges) of the court knew this sacred and secret oath.

There are several njuuri houses (as they were popularly known) within one sub- location, and they deliberated over local cases within that area. These smaller njuuri were widely spread all over the former Meru District (currently Tharaka Nithi District), Nyambene and Meru Central Districts. Today the small njuuri houses are active only in Nyambene District.

Some of the cases dealt with by the sub-locational (smaller) njuuri houses were farm boundary disputes, personal debts and small theft cases. The members of the court decided on what type of punishment was to be imposed, and these ranged from ritual sacrifices to even death. The cases deliberated by the smaller njuuri houses were normally settled to the satisfaction of both parties. If one of the parties was not satisfied, he was allowed to appeal to the wider njuuri system: some members of all the njuuri houses in the location could be nominated to sit and listen to the appeal.

Njuuri Ncheke members met once a year to make new laws or review the old ones; it also determined bride prices. The smaller njuuri houses also used these laws, and it ensured uniform judgements throughout Meru. It was also the duty of the njuuri to bring rains.

Write a review of Meru Museum