

SPEAKING OUT: PRISCILLA EKE ON FEMINISM

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Figure 17 Priscilla Eke, 30, is a PhD researcher on Nigeria's gender gap in leadership
Credit: Priscilla Eke

'There is an idea that no matter your academic achievement, if you are not a wife and a mother then you haven't achieved anything. All my years, my degree, my career goals don't count for anything just because I'm a woman and I don't have a husband or kids. People are always asking, "Where is your husband? Are you talking to anyone?" A lady or an uncle will give you advice: all this means nothing if you are not married with kids. It's one of the criteria on which women are judged.

Even married women, decisions are made on their behalf. You can't make decisions on your own, your husband has the final say. Or they say: "We cannot give you certain jobs because it means that your earnings might be greater than your husband so we can't even consider you for certain positions."

In our history, if you go back to pre-colonial era, women were actually in charge of things, they were part of the community, had authority. We had women kings and women chiefs and women who held titles, who were in charge of different sectors within communities. But as you go through the colonial era it was the men that were sent to school, only the men, and power and access were given to men and the women were just sent back to the home. The culture now is not the culture of where we started from. We are holding on to Western culture, this wasn't really our culture.

Younger women understand that there are certain things that marginalise them in terms of their thinking about what they can do, and they are trying to change that whole narrative. It's a long-term battle but it starts now. We are speaking out more. We are calling things out. We are in the face of people we need to be in the face of. And dare I say, maybe we are a bit harsh and forceful but we are speaking up, we are questioning things and are getting people to stop and think. People in positions of power, people who are much older than us, people who have reproduced this culture we are in, we are getting them to stop and question and to think "ok, maybe I got it wrong, maybe there is a new and different way that you can do something".'