Rooted Yet Rising

How Gen Z Women from Rural Bihar are Fostering Inclusion and Challenging Inter-generational Norms through Community Leadership

Begusarai, Gaya, Jamui, Muzaffarpur & Munger, Bihar

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Partners:

In Rural Bihar, Young Women's Potential Remains Stifled.

- Bihar ranks **lowest on gender indicators:**
  - **41%** girls married before 18
  - Only **28.8%** women have 10 or more years of schooling
  - Labour force participation rate in rural Bihar for 15-29 year old females is **15.3%** *
- Low **confidence**, limited family **trust**, and a lack of **role models** keep ~**10 million** young women excluded.

The Study

Objectives Of The Study

To explore the pathways through which a **community-rooted, gender-transformative** program like the i-Saksham Fellowship enhances self-belief and influencing capacity among young women, inspires family and community support, fosters inclusion, and promotes autonomous decision-making

Research Questions

1. What **barriers** do Gen-Z women face in claiming leadership?

2. How does the i-Saksham fellowship build **personal agency, collective voice and strategic leadership among Gen-Z women**?

3. How do these young women **negotiate intergenerational norms** and reshape relationships through their leadership actions?

The i-Saksham Fellowship

Approach

Outcomes

Build Capacity

- Rigorous Selection
- 10+hours of monthly coaching, leadership building
- Use of contextualized tools
- Reflective hard conversations

From limited exposure to confident, goal-oriented young women

Lead & Inspire

- Edu-Leader engages children and adolescents in communities
- Diverse cohorts
- Safe spaces

From restricted mobility to trusted community leader

Influence Families & Communities

- Adopt socially accepted roles
- Build family trust through dialogue and counselling
- Run change campaigns

From passive approval to active community acceptance

Foster Inclusion

- Higher Education
- Social sector jobs in CSOs, Corporates
- Civic leadership through the alumni collective WAYAM

From individual growth to sustained leadership for all young women

Methodology

Mixed-methods case study that includes findings from:

Endline Study (Begusarai) - 2025
- 60 Edu-Leaders (2022 cohort)
- 30 IDIs with Edu-Leaders
- 25 family members, 21 peers, 133 parents

Structured surveys
In-depth interviews (IDIs) & FGDs

Multiplier Study (4 districts) - 2023
- 14 Edu-Leaders, 22 family members, and 12 peers

In-depth interviews (IDIs) & FGDs

Program data (2022 – 25)
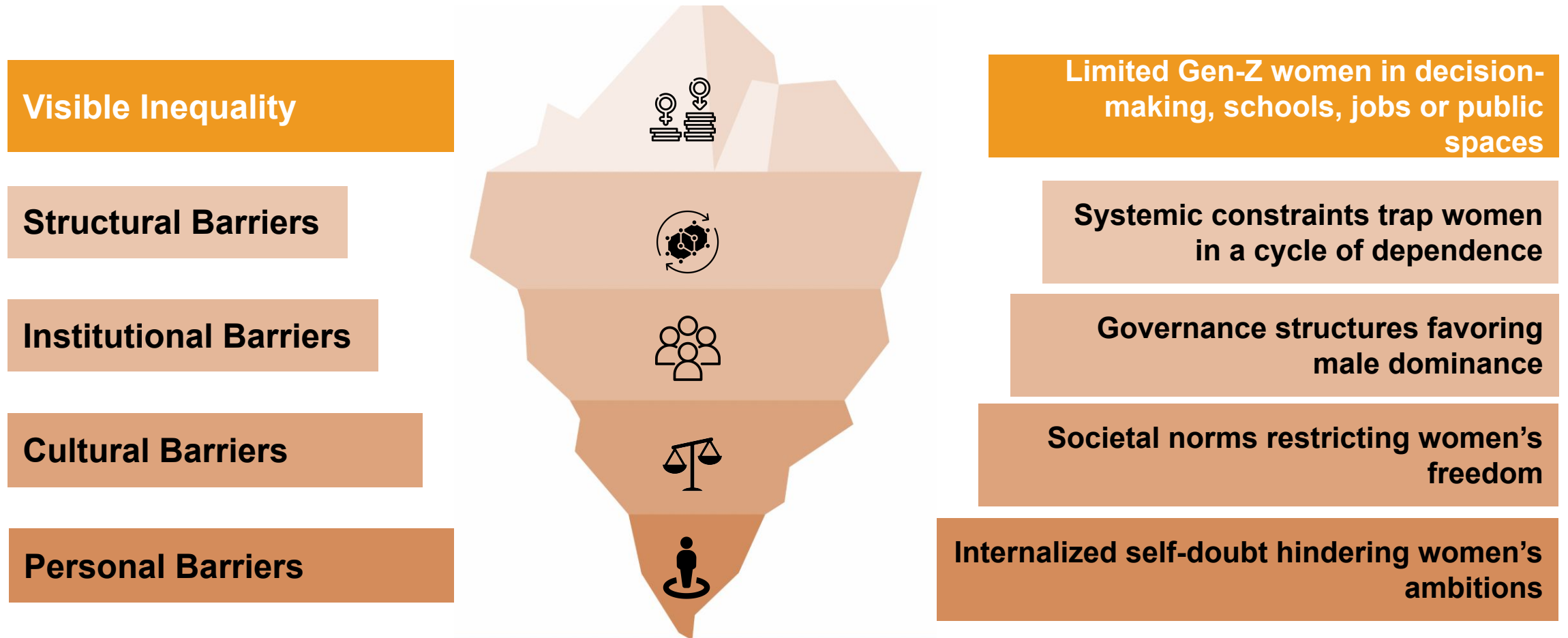
Feminist Literature Review

Purposive Sampling
- Representation across caste, geography, and experience
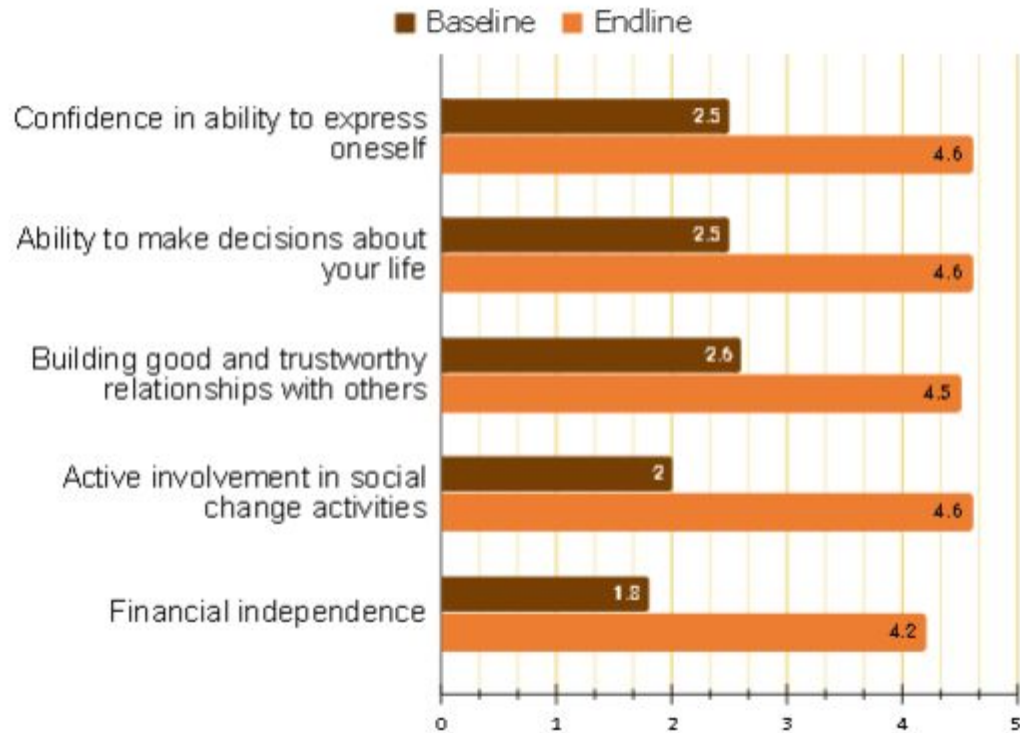- Inclusion of families, peers, and children for triangulation

Barriers to Women's Leadership in Bihar

Continuous subjugation erodes young women's confidence and renders them invisible in public life. This deepens inequality in participation, making it even harder to assert control over personal, social, and financial decisions.

Visible Inequality	Limited Gen-Z women in decision-making, schools, jobs or public spaces
Structural Barriers	Systemic constraints trap women in a cycle of dependence
Institutional Barriers	Governance structures favoring male dominance
Cultural Barriers	Societal norms restricting women's freedom
Personal Barriers	Internalized self-doubt hindering women's ambitions

Building Self-belief and Confidence

Self Rating by Edu-Leaders

■ Baseline ■ Endline

Category	Baseline	Endline
Confidence in ability to express oneself	2.5	4.6
Ability to make decisions about your life	2.5	4.6
Building good and trustworthy relationships with others	2.6	4.5
Active involvement in social change activities	2	4.6
Financial independence	1.8	4.2

"Earlier, I wasn't allowed to step out of the house alone and even I didn't have the confidence to go out by myself. But during the fellowship, that changed. Now, I can go out alone anytime; I just need to inform my family. This has given me a new sense of freedom."

- Edu-Leader, Jamui

Pathways to Leadership and Public Participation

- Edu-Leaders develop life-skills in adolescents, spearhead campaigns on early marriage, dropouts, and menstrual health.

- This led to Edu-Leaders increasingly **raising issues in the Panchayat (33% to 70%) and increased confidence** to address village-level challenges **(37% to 78%).**

- **Improved parent's attendance in school PTMs** from **37% to 76%.**

> **"Earlier, when I visited the community, people didn't take me seriously. They thought I was just there to ask questions and leave. But as I kept coming back, engaging in conversations, and taking action, things changed. Now, they share their problems with me openly. I've built a strong sense of trust with the people in my community."**
>
> **– Edu-Leader, Begusarai**

Built Credibility and Garnered Family Trust

Family Trust Rating
(1- lowest, 5- highest)

■ Baseline ■ Endline

| | 1 and 2 | 3 | 4 and 5 |
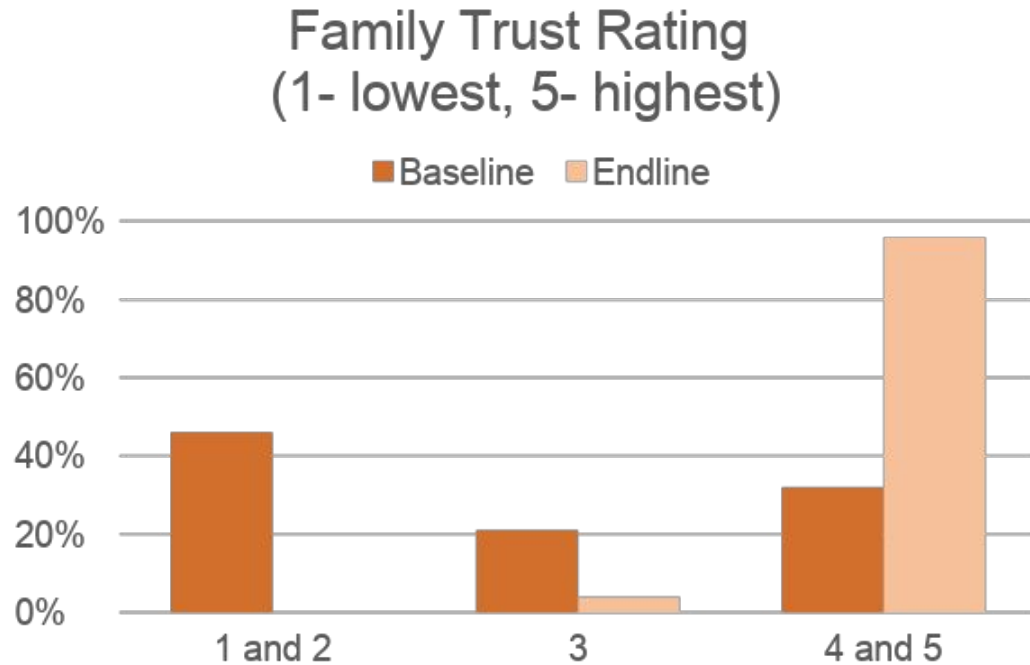
"When my sister got married, she was just shown the photo of the groom and wasn't asked if she wants to marry him or not. Now when they are looking for me, I told them I want to study now and don't wish to marry. They showed me 2-3 boys to marry and I told them I didn't like them so they accepted my decision."

– Edu-leader, Munger

- Familial trust in Edu-Leaders' decisions rose from 32% to 96%.

Developed Supportive Relationships

- **Emotional networks deepened**; sharing problems with mothers rose from 27% to 43% and with sisters from 23% to 32%

- **61% of alumni** continue mentoring peers, sustaining agency, and building resilience against backlash through **the WAYAM network**

"Earlier, I wasn't able to build relationships with others. But now, through my community work, I've been able to build strong relationships with the ASHA worker and the Headmaster (H.M). This has helped me feel more connected and confident in my role."

70% Alumni pursuing their aspirations and growing as community change agents

Emerging pathways

Pursue Higher Education

Azim Premji University

Masters from regional universities — Shiv Nadar University

Eternal University — **Diploma in Elementary Education**

Development professionals with other CSOs, and govt.

educate girls | LeapForWord | Flipkart | UJJIVAN SMALL FINANCE BANK – Build a Better Life | AKHAND JYOTI EYE HOSPITAL | FREEDOM EMPLOYABILITY ACADEMY – Building ethical, productive mindsets and core employability skills / uninhibited

PRAYOG | BERG TECHNOLOGIES PVT. LTD.

Network for community-level change

Leadership positions in community institutions- PRI, SMC, SHG*

Extension service providers under diff. govt. ministries

Peer-driven collective to influence and inspire other girls

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* PRI= Panchayati Raj Institutions, SMC=School Management Committee, SHG= Self-Help Group

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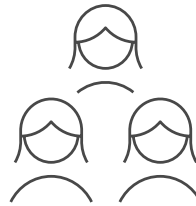
Potential Collaboration With ISDM

- Run short-term courses for Edu-leaders

- Incubate new project ideas (e.g. grassroot researchers, climate change)

- Case Studies and Action Research