

Tanuja Kumari declared Country Winner for MSI's Courageous Awards 2019

Tanuja Kumari works as a Counsellor for Mini-COT in Purnea, Bihar and leads the operations from the front and reaches out to the most vulnerable and most neglected communities. She also battles everyday patriarchy and reaches out to the communities irrespective of the bias she is subjected to by the community. She also advocates with local governments and goes beyond her routine job to further our mission and visions. And because of this, she has been adjudged the Country Winner for 'Courageous Award' by Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India.

Apart from her regular job, she plays a pivotal role in strengthening ANM's competencies in IUD insertions.

So what makes her courageous?

A client had once visited an M-COT and got an IUD inserted, but she was confronted by her husband who came charging to the Public Health Centre and demanded a removal. After much negotiation, the woman had to remove her IUD and leave. Tanuja was heartbroken but she did not lose hope and started visiting the family regularly, after many such visits, the husband realised the benefits of family planning and accompanied his wife to get a re-insertion. Tanuja's grit and determination resulted to preventing unwanted pregnancies in that family.

Tanuja not only battles everyday patriarchy when she goes to the community to advocate for IUDs and family planning services, she also walks the extra mile to ensure the burden of FP just doesn't fall on the woman and that the man of the house is also equally committed.

Floods and her commitment

Bihar witnesses some of the worst floods every year in the country. When river Kosi and its tributaries is at spate, delivering services in M-COT becomes very challenging, but Tanuja is not the one to be bowed. "When there is a Fixed Day Service, we are committed to visit that public health facility. If we don't visit many women will be disappointed," remarks Tanuja. This year due heavy floods, a vital bridge had collapsed, then ditching the vehicle, under Tanuja's able leadership, the staff took up all the equipment and walked on foot, travelled through rough muddy terrains to reach the FDS site.



Tanuja Kumari and her team cross a makeshift bridge for FDS in Purnea, Bihar

This was truly extraordinary, she could have faced bodily harm by taking the dangerous route, but she was determined not to fail her clients, she knew that despite floods and rains, those who need FP services would certainly be waiting at the PHC for her and her team.

She continues to inspire

Tanuja has become a figure of hope and courage among her teammates. She regularly pushes her teams to go beyond the call of duty to ensure crucial family planning services reach the most neglected and underserved. The community members also respect her a lot and due to her inter personal relations with the community, more and more men and women are opting for family planning services. She has been able to drill in the message into the community that FP services are life-saving and not only result in better health outcomes, but also in better economic outcomes.

Submitted by Bipin Kumar, State Program Manager, Bihar