

# Innovation Platforms Case Study Competition

## Case Study Summary

### **Changing Women's Lives – One Cow and One Litre of Milk at a Time – Deep in the Foothills of India's Himalayan Mountains**

Tulsidevi, a widow and mother of four children in Baseri village, in the mid-Himalayan hills of the state of Uttarakhand in northern India, was struggling to make ends meet with two cows and a small piece of unproductive land when her husband passed away. She then had to spend long hours in the forest every day collecting fodder for her cows but she was not earning anything from them. Her livelihood, and life, began to turn around when she joined a MilkIT innovation platform and through it found ways to generate a regular income from milk from her cows.

Many men in rural Uttarakhand facing low agricultural production levels – their remote region has few viable markets and populations of wild animals that regularly damage their crops – have been forced to migrate to nearby cities for employment. This leaves many women like Tulsidevi alone much of the year to manage their farms and farm households. With few markets for milk in the region and low-yielding, poorly fed indigenous cows, dairy farming has not generally been considered an income-generating activity. Furthermore, the dairy development actors here have tended to work individually, not joining forces to improve access to dairy markets and improved dairy feeds.

Beginning in early 2013, the MilkIT project made efforts to unite dairy development actors, researchers and farmers in a dairy innovation platform in Almora and Bageshwar districts of Uttarakhand. This stimulated some quick changes and benefits. For example, more than 800 households are now selling their milk at higher prices due to collective marketing by self-help group-based cooperatives and closer links to the state cooperative, with subsidies provided to those transporting milk from distant villages to markets. Livestock keepers have been able to replace unproductive stock with higher yielding animals due to credit support provided by development partners. 'Participatory action research' to test simple feed innovations such as feed troughs, forage choppers suited to women's needs, adoption of improved forage varieties and dual-purpose (feed plus food) crops has helped to reduce women's labour while increasing the availability of fodder. An impact study conducted in November 2014 showed that families participating in this innovation platform earned five times more income from their dairy animals than non-participants over a 12-month period. Participating households also reported that their planted fodder generated 50 days of feed for their cows while non-participating households derived feed from planted forages lasting only 12 days.

*Learnings:* Creating an 'enabling environment' for participation and encouraging the right stakeholders to join an innovation platform helps to stimulate change. Participatory action research helps to tailor innovations and technologies to local contexts and address local issues. Innovations that quickly lead to visible changes can attract the attention of policymakers and help take the innovations to scale.