



# Cultivating Resilience: Revitalising Agripreneurship In Kashmir Valley

Addressing infrastructure, market access, and bureaucratic challenges through the impactful initiatives of CIED-IUST

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The verdant valleys and snow-clad peaks of Kashmir create an idyllic picture of agricultural abundance, yet the region's agri-entrepreneurs grapple with significant challenges in harnessing this potential. Agriculture has always been central to the region's economy, but translating that into modern agribusiness remains a daunting task. These challenges stem from a mix of environmental, economic, and socio-political factors that complicate the path for ambitious entrepreneurs looking to make a mark in Kashmir's agricultural sector.

The Kashmir Valley, with its breathtaking landscapes and fertile soil, offers a natural haven for agriculture. Known for its world-class saffron, apples, and walnuts, the region has long been an agricultural hub. However, while the potential for agribusiness in Kashmir is immense, agri-entrepreneurs often face an uphill battle. Despite the promise of high-value crops and unique products, turning this promise into sustainable business ventures is fraught with challenges. From geopolitical tensions to the limitations of outdated infrastructure, aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs must overcome numerous barriers in their quest to build thriving enterprises.

Kashmir's distinct geography, climate, and resources make it one of the most unique agricultural regions in the world, yet agri-entrepreneurs are often hindered by factors beyond their control. Moreover, as the global demand for organic and high-quality produce increases, entrepreneurs in Kashmir are at a crossroads. They have the potential to tap into global markets, but

only if they can surmount the complex set of challenges that stand in their way.

The following factors affect agri-preneurship in Kashmir, along with the role of CIED-IUST in its enhancement.

## 1. Geopolitical Instability:

It refers to the political, social, and security challenges that arise due to ongoing disputes, internal conflicts, and socio-political unrest in the region. This instability often disrupts economic activities, hinders investments, affects tourism, and creates an uncertain environment for development, including in sectors like agriculture, education, and entrepreneurship. It can lead to limited access to markets, reduced infrastructure development, and a lack of policy consistency, all of which impact the region's overall growth and stability.

The CIED IUST plays an indispensable role in cultivating innovation and entrepreneurial ethos, particularly in regions beset by geopolitical turbulence such as Jammu & Kashmir. Aligned with its mission to engender a culture of entrepreneurship, the Foundation equips the youth with transformative education, specialised training, and vital resources to navigate multifaceted challenges. In the face of severe disruptions prompted by political unrest, entrepreneurs like Shahid-ul-Islam Bhat, founder of Agri SeSo LLP, exemplify perseverance, relying on the Foundation's steadfast support. Through its strategic initiatives, the CIED IUST Foundation empowers entrepreneurs to transcend barriers related to market access, transportation disruptions, and supply chain volatility, thereby mitigating the inherent uncertainties of such tumultuous environments. By serving as a catalytic force for innovation and entrepreneurial advancement, the Foundation not only addresses immediate impediments but also fortifies the region's long-term resilience, driving inclusive and sustainable growth.

## 2. Inadequate Infrastructure

The dearth of contemporary infrastructure, particularly in rural locales, significantly impedes the efficiency of supply

chains. Suboptimal road connectivity, a lack of advanced cold storage facilities, and an underdeveloped logistics sector exacerbate the issue, culminating in substantial post-harvest losses, especially for perishable commodities.

One of the entrepreneurs, Adnan, the founder of Al Karim Souk Private Limited, grappled with profound logistical inefficiencies due to inadequate transportation and storage infrastructure. However, through the CIED IUST Foundation's specialised training in state-of-the-art logistics solutions, he was able to enhance operational efficiency, streamline processes, and significantly mitigate post-harvest losses. By providing targeted expertise and fostering innovation, the Foundation empowered Adnan to overcome infrastructural deficits, transforming his business into a more resilient and sustainable enterprise.

## 3. Market Access Barriers & Technological Deficiencies

Geographical isolation and limited marketing channels create significant barriers for entrepreneurs, restricting their ability to access larger markets. The intermittent closures of national highways and the exploitation by middlemen further impede profitability, especially for those in rural areas. These challenges, coupled with technological deficiencies, hinder growth and restrict scalability. Boosting innovation and fostering entrepreneurship is crucial for national development, business growth, and societal transformation.

The Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development (CIED) at IUST aims to address these issues by reshaping the entrepreneurial mindset, particularly in regions burdened by high unemployment. By creating a robust ecosystem that fosters innovation, CIED empowers youth to turn their entrepreneurial aspirations into scalable ventures. Through collaboration with university resources and hands-on learning, CIED equips entrepreneurs with the tools to modernise and thrive.

Fawzul Kabir, an entrepreneur and founder of GR8 Sports India Pvt Limited, initially faced significant challenges in

accessing international markets due to supply chain inefficiencies. However, with CIED's cutting-edge training in modern technologies, Fawzul adopted automated systems, overcoming logistical challenges and elevating his business. His success not only expanded his reach beyond local markets but also culminated in ICC approval, earning international recognition for his products within the global cricket ecosystem. This transformation highlights the far-reaching impact of CIED's approach, demonstrating how innovation can overcome market access and technological barriers, driving sustainable growth and global competitiveness.

## 4. Policy and Bureaucratic Obstacles

Despite government initiatives aimed at supporting agricultural entrepreneurship, bureaucratic red tape often delays access to subsidies and grants. A lack of clarity in policy implementation can leave entrepreneurs without the necessary support. One of the entrepreneurs from Kashmir, Refaz Ahmad Wani of Twin Tech encountered bureaucratic hurdles that complicated his business documentation processes, highlighting the need for more streamlined government procedures.

## 5. Fragmented Landholdings & Limited Access to Finance

The prevalence of small, fragmented landholdings significantly restricts economies of scale and mechanisation by making it difficult for entrepreneurs to implement large-scale farming practices or invest in modern agricultural technologies. This fragmentation, coupled with limited access to finance, creates a vicious cycle that stifles growth and innovation. Entrepreneurs, particularly those in the agricultural sector, often struggle to secure funding due to the perception of their ventures as high-risk by banks and financial institutions. This lack of financial resources hampers their ability to invest in new technologies, expand operations, and drive growth. One of the entrepreneurs, Asifat Shafi, founder of Shanara, faced considerable challenges stemming from both

fragmented land resources and limited access to finance. The inefficiencies caused by small landholdings restricted her ability to scale her operations and improve productivity. Additionally, Asifat confronted significant hurdles in acquiring the necessary financing, compounded by cultural constraints and the absence of robust support networks for women entrepreneurs in the region. Despite these obstacles, the CIED IUST support proved transformative. Through strategic mentorship, access to alternative funding, and tailored guidance, CIED empowered Asifat to overcome both land and financial limitations, allowing her to scale her business and make a significant contribution to the regional economy.

This highlights the crucial role of CIED in breaking down barriers and fostering sustainable entrepreneurial growth in challenging environments. Besides this, the CIED IUST has emerged as a crucial player in supporting agricultural entrepreneurs in Kashmir. By providing targeted assistance, the foundation effectively addresses these hurdles:

- **Capacity Building:** CIED offers training programs that equip entrepreneurs with modern agricultural techniques and business skills, enabling them to enhance productivity.

- **Financial Support:** The foundation connects entrepreneurs with potential investors and facilitates access to funding, helping to overcome financial barriers.

- **Market Development:** CIED assists in creating pathways for entrepreneurs to access larger markets, increasing their profitability and sustainability.

- **Infrastructure Improvement:** Initiatives focused on enhancing logistical networks and cold storage facilities are pivotal in reducing post-harvest losses.

Through these efforts, the CIED IUST is helping to cultivate a more resilient agricultural sector in Kashmir. With continued support and investment, the region has the potential to thrive as a key player in the global agricultural market, positioning its entrepreneurs at the forefront of sustainable and innovative agribusiness practices.