

# Stories of Success & Resilience from Gaza

The Women Restoring Palestinian Food Sovereignty





**There are approximately 1000 women-owned agrienterprises within the densely populated Gaza Strip, representing a large cross-section of Palestine's food system.**

In May 2021, Gaza experienced sustained bombing over eleven days. More than 50% of the women's farms were damaged or completely destroyed.

These are stories of success and resilience told by women farmers as they work towards rebuilding their farms and food processes, and restoring Palestinian food sovereignty.



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# The Story of Samar Al-Baa the Beekeeper

Samar Al-Baa's bee farm is not only the sole source of income for her and her family, it is a career that has fascinated her since she was young.

**“Beekeeping is a hobby that I have been passionate about since my childhood. The difficult conditions in the Gaza Strip did not prevent me from becoming a beekeeper and having a bee farm of my own.”**

But even bees and their hives were not protected against the shells and bombs during the last aggression on the Gaza Strip in May 2021. The beekeeping sector is considered one of the most affected by the last aggression on Gaza as a result of its proximity to the border with the occupation. According to the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), of the estimated 20,000 existing beehives, 7000 active beehives were destroyed during the last bombardment on the Gaza Strip.





The bombing also coincided with the honey harvest season, thus preventing beekeepers from reaching their bees. This caused wage losses for many beekeepers. Amongst those affected was Samar and her bees, her beehives heavily damaged during the recent bombardment of Beit Hanoun town. In the days and months after this destructive period, support from GUPAP helped to ensure her and her farm's resilience.

**“GUPAP stood by us female beekeepers and micro shopkeepers, providing us production inputs and raw materials so we can continue producing and working after the damages and losses incurred during the last aggression. GUPAP also supported us in raising and strengthening our voice, advocating for the rights of women farmers and influencing policies to achieve food sovereignty in Palestine.”**





But it was the Urban Women's Agripreneurs Forum (UWAF), established and incubated by GUPAP, that provided Samar with peer-to-peer connection and inspiration from fellow women farmers working to restore and strengthen their farms.

**“UWAF allowed me to exchange experiences and knowledge with other women members, and learn about similar Arab success stories regionally.”**

Samar credits the opportunities it has provided her, to exchange experiences and knowledge with other women members, and learn of similar Arab success stories regionally. In addition,

**“I feel proud being a member of the Urban Women's Agripreneurs Forum.”**

In the coming months and years, GUPAP will seek to transform this intervention into a sustainable program based on several strategic interventions to reach at least 500 women food producers. Already facing major challenges to produce and retail their harvests, due to high competition with imported products, Samar calls partners and allies to stand by this vulnerable sector to enhance its resilience and sustainability in light of the sector's damage during the most recent aggression on the Gaza Strip.







# The Story of a Rooftop Rabbit Farmer

In May 2021 Reem went 12 days without being able to work at her rooftop rabbit farm because of the Israeli bombings. Not only was her agri-enterprise affected by the pandemic, but so too her farm.

**“The Israeli bombing during the last aggression on Gaza caused the death of a large number of rabbits and countless losses.”**

The last Israeli bombardment paralysed the movement of Gaza citizens, even inside their own homes. Border closures in and out of Gaza affected the price of food, equipment, and animal feed which consequently inhibited the agri-enterprises potential for expansion.





Nonetheless Reem still hopes she will be able to expand her small agri-enterprise in the future. On her 90 square meter house rooftop, Reem has established a small rabbit breeding enterprise. Starting this enterprise at just over 30 years old, Reem explains that her agri-enterprise must support her 10-member family due to their lack of income; this being the common narrative for the people in Gaza. Her husband had recently lost his farming work because the agricultural land he was working on was destroyed during the Israeli aggression on Gaza in 2014.

Due to the fragility of the agricultural sector in Gaza and the frequent marginalization of women-led agri-enterprises, joining the Urban Women Agripreneurs Forum (UWAF) is both empowering and meaningful for women who may be otherwise marginalised.





**“Being a member of a distinguished diverse group of women agripreneurs, where our number has now reached about 100, gives me the opportunity to exchange experiences and learn about the challenges and success stories of others.”**

Reem ends with a message of hope for the future, and she shares with us her happiness and gratitude to Gaza Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Platform (GUPAP) and UWAF as they continue to stand by the agri-enterprises, providing production inputs and raw materials to the UWAF members so that they can continue to work produce even after the damage and heavy losses that these enterprises have suffered.







# The Story of A Palestinian Seed Bank

In 2019, Hanadi started a Seed Bank, the first of its kind in Gaza, to allow Palestinian farmers the ability to grow organic, local heirloom seeds. Hanadi has been pursuing and advocating for food sovereignty in Gaza in the face of setbacks from Israeli sanctions on Gaza, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as continuing crises due to war, and an increasingly unstable climate. “The Seed Bank strengthens the local food system and encourages local farmers to use local seeds that suit our environment, climate and soil”, Hanadi tells us.

**“I am proud of my project, which is the first of its kind in Gaza.”**



The Seed Bank's main objective is to preserve local "Baladi" seeds (currently 33 varieties of seeds), which are at risk of becoming extinct. The idea for the project emerged because of the Israeli control over the Gazan food system. Farmers are pushed to use imported genetically modified seeds that the Palestinian people colloquially call "Israeli or foreign" seeds. The effects of this control and domination of foreign seeds hinders the ability of local farmers to be sovereign, that is, to control their own means of agricultural production. The project protects, promotes, and encourages the use of local Baladi seeds that are more suited to adapt to the changes in climate, along with having superior ability to grow free from disease without a reliance on chemical herbicides and pesticides.

The location of the Seed Bank sits within an agricultural region where local farmers can easily connect to utilise the bank and trade seeds. The bank supports a variety of seeds including vegetables and leafy greens such as spinach, silver beet, rocca (rocket), radish, a range of wheat and barley seeds, as well as aromatic and medicinal plant seeds such as moringa, chamomile, zaatar, peppermint, sage, basil, fennel, parsley, coriander, and dill.

**"This project is really important to not only preserving seeds, but also to preserve our culture as Palestinians. The local seeds don't require much irrigation and have greater adaptability to climate change and don't require extensive chemical input with herbicides and pesticides. The Seed Bank raises awareness for farmers and the broader community in how important it is to use local seeds instead of genetically modified seeds."**





Hanadi has a double degree in Geography and Education from Alaqsa University and supports her parents and her sister in the Khan Younis Gazan district. She joined Urban Women's Agripreneurs Forum (UWAF) in 2020 where she was a youth leader and received experience and education in digital marketing. Now, Hanadi is a coordinator for Khan Younis district and facilitates communication between both GUPAP and women agripreneurs in Khan Younis district.

The forum assists women agripreneurs, in many ways however, Hanadi stresses the importance of their advocacy work with various government bodies to promote agricultural policy change. This advocacy work includes providing specifications and labels for selling products in shops and shopping centres to ensure the production of agricultural and animal products is food safe, credible, and can compete with global brands.

**“Doing this work cultivates joy and hope for the women here, especially since our population suffers from sanctions imposed on the Gaza Strip, as well as living under siege for years with high levels of unemployment in our community.”**







Hanadi dreams of one day being able to expand the Seed Bank to include a greenhouse and nursery to grow seeds, sell seedlings, and help Gazan's access more local seeds. She also wants to purchase a machine to dry the seeds, which will make production faster and easier. "Here in Gaza we only get between 4-8 hours of electricity, so I use solar energy to ensure the fridge continues to operate," she explains.

**"The people here are resilient and continue to work and rebuild their lives despite the enormous difficulties and challenges we face."**

Ultimately, Hanadi believes that the campaign will promote the Seed Bank and show the world the success and resilience of Gazan women agripreneurs.





# The Story of a Solar Powered Fruit & Veg Store in Beit Hanoun

In 2018, Hanady Sufian Khalil Abu-Herbeid began work on a solar powered dried fruit and vegetable business in Beit Hanoun, North Gaza. With the support of her family, two years later she launched her home business to nearby grocers, local markets, and retailers.

Beit Hanoun has a small local population that is susceptible to Israeli assaults and bombings, where, to even start a business is a story of resilience. Hanady explains because of its proximal location to Israeli borders the community's lives, homes, and livelihoods are vulnerable and in danger of further aggressions.

At university, Hanady studied Renewable Energy Engineering, which is where the idea for SolarFood originated. She tells us,

**“I didn’t have any experience in drying foods, but my mother did. I am proud to have acquired the relevant knowledge and managed my time well in order to start up this enterprise for it to become my income source.”**



**“In the last two years of my university degree, I managed to build a business and complete my studies. I now have a business which I work in daily as I keep researching, documenting and will continue to reach my goals.”**

Whilst war and bombings continue in Gaza, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic means that Hanady’s business was severely affected, however, she tells us,

**“I now work very hard every day to rebuild it so that it is even better than before!”**

Hanady’s business is a means to preserve food and minimise food waste. Beit Hanoun is an agricultural area where there is access to many varieties of food, but also surplus produce that isn’t sold at the local market. Hanady tells us that

**“By using solar technology I am able to lower the cost of production of dried foods while ensuring they are free from preservatives and chemicals meeting the demands of my community for providing healthy food.”**

Hanady produces numerous varieties of dried foods including apples and chilies, as well as herbs and spices such as zaatar and sage, with a ‘made to order’ system for customers with special requests.





**“I want to create employment opportunities for women and create the first Palestinian company that uses solar energy to dry fruits and vegetables.”**

SolarFood seeks to create healthy supply chains and ethical food production, along with employment for women in the agricultural sector. As such, Hanady was invited to join UrbanWomen Agripreneurs Forum (UWAF) at the end of 2020. Since then, UWAF has supported her by providing and importing supplies, digital marketing education for social media platforms, and field day exercises and events where the members are able to connect, support, and learn from each other. The Forum, along with the education and networks it has fostered is something that Hanady finds irreplaceable, especially as the war in Gaza and pandemic continue.

With the funds raised from the campaign, Hanady hopes to move away from labour-intensive and time-consuming production to a workspace where she has access to electronic equipment. Finally, Hanady hopes to connect with a designer who has experience in designing food packaging and labelling so she can reach more customers and further expand her business.





# The Story of Olive and Date on Al-Babedi St

Mirvat has been involved with the Urban Women Agripreneurs Forum (UWAF) since its establishment over three years ago. Alongside her work with UWAF, Mirvat and her business partner, Duaa AL-Rayes, run Olive and Date in Al-Babedi Street, Gaza City. Olive and Date started in 2017 and has a focus on creating employment opportunities for young female university graduates who may find it hard to find employment opportunities otherwise.

When describing Olive and Date to us, Mirvat emphasises how proud she is of her enterprise,

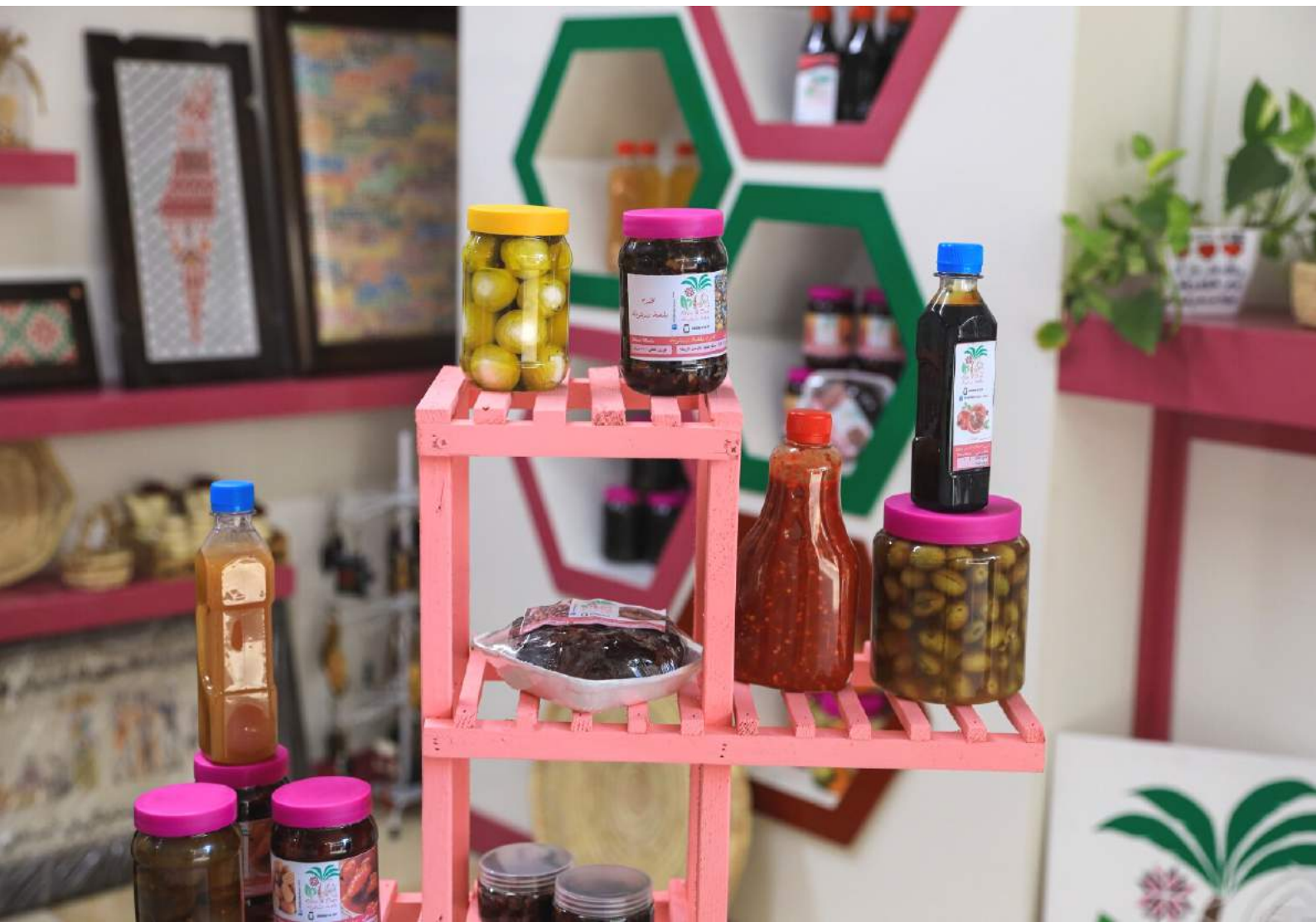
**“Despite many challenges, we’ve succeeded in building a well-known enterprise that is financially viable, and we have managed to secure a place to operate from, both for production and sales. We also own agricultural land which we grow a range of vegetables on.”**

The enterprise produces a range of preserves, pickles and fermented foods, ajwah (date paste), maftool (pearl couscous), pomegranate molasses, grape molasses, date molasses, apple cider vinegar, zaatar, dukkha and a variety of other products. All of their products are free from chemical preservatives and are made of 100% natural ingredients.

Mirvat stressed how important it has been to find connection through food and agricultural work in Gaza, especially as a woman in the industry. Looking towards the future of the enterprise Mirvat says,

**“I hope to be able to produce and sell products across the Gaza Strip, West Bank and outside of Palestine too.”**

Mirvat shares with us that being a part of UWAF has been an invaluable influence and experience. “The forum has had a positive impact in strengthening the resilience of women agripreneurs and their enterprises, especially through expanding their customer base, marketing, and networking with other forum members. It has been really positive in terms of developing our businesses, as well as our products, and strengthening our resilience both professionally and as a community” she reveals.







Mirvat's priorities are diverse, some being to recruit more employees in order to expand production, strengthening her managerial skills, and seeking further financial investments. Mirvat additionally highlights the need to purchase raw materials, and other inputs to save energy, and lastly to become more efficient and invest in the use of renewable energy. These are crucial investments to make as Mirvat plans to launch new products and further improve current products with appropriate packaging and labelling.

Mirvat ends with a message of confidence,

**“This campaign (to provide 50 UWAF members and women farmers with an equal number of grants) will have a positive impact in strengthening the resilience of women agripreneurs through promoting our businesses, marketing our products and supporting the continuous development of our projects.”**



# The Story of An Inclusive Food Business

Two years ago, Zainab started Zeno Food, the first food business in Gaza to cater for people with intolerances and allergies to gluten. Zainab lives in Tel El-Sultan, which she tells us is a densely populated neighbourhood in the Rafah District. There, she lives in an apartment with her parents, brothers and sisters.

Zainab proudly uses only locally sourced ingredients and has recently brought on one staff member to manage the product's marketing and distribution. In the future, she hopes to expand her business. Her first steps will be to purchase new equipment, and to create industry-standard labels and packaging.

Zainab tells us that this campaign will have a significant impact on her ability to promote and market her products, something so important for a new business. With the funding, she hopes to integrate efficient production processes by purchasing equipment to aid in increasing production and investing in solar energy.



When asked where she sees herself and Zeno Food in one year she says,

**“I would like to own a large unit to produce a big range of gluten-free products, to be able to export my products outside the Gaza Strip, as well as ensure that all new products gain appropriate registrations, and I would like to own a fully equipped workspace”.**

Apart from the running of her business, Zainab is also a coordinator at UWAF. She joined UWAF in 2019 and has since been engaged in all aspects of the Forum, such as the various activities and training workshops. Zainab tells us she is proud to be a part of UWAF and the Gazan food system,

**“Not only have they supported me by providing funding, training, and capacity-building, but they have also supported other women agripreneurs. I’m also proud to have my own enterprise that is unique and caters to people with allergies, supporting their health and nutrition”.**





Highlighting the amazing work of UWAF, Zainab shares with us some of the impact that UWAF has had on the other women agripreneurs. “The Forum has strengthened the resilience of women and their enterprises through learning about our rights whilst actively campaigning. One of the most important campaigns was to produce official labeling for 35 women-run enterprises in order to enable the formal registrations of their products and ensure marketing products easily. The Forum has also supported women through capacity building, providing marketing for their enterprises, as well as funding 49 enterprises with \$400 each”

Zainab emphasises the importance of having Forums such as UWAF, not only to provide education and legal support but they are a place of resistance and act as a claimed space of power. Zainab ends

**“Ultimately, the Forum strengthens the resilience of women and it has formed a safe space for us to defend our rights”.**





# The Story of a Scientist & Cheesemonger

Nashwa, a mother of two children (with one more on the way) lives in the Middle Area District of Gaza with her husband and children. In the basement under her home, she runs Calcium Plus, a small cheese company business. Calcium Plus produces cheese that is fortified with calcium and phytoestrogen to support skeletal and bone health.

Nashwa started researching cheese fortification in 2013 while she was studying at university. With her interest sparked, she continued to test and develop various fortification processes that are safe for human consumption. By 2016, Nashwa had won an award through the Islamic University which granted her funding to get Calcium Plus up and running. Nashwa now holds an honorary membership from the Palestinian Food Industries Union, and her products have been patented across Palestine. Currently, Nashwa has employed three friends to work alongside her Dalia Harz, Israa Salim, and Sara el-Souri.

Nashwa has been successful in the face of much adversity, so far she has designed logos, packaging, and distributed her products to the local community. The next steps are to officially register her business and apply for the official labelling of her products.

When asked what Nashwa's highest priorities were for Calcium Plus, she told us she needed a lot more infrastructure to continue to grow her business. Most importantly, she needs to invest in a pasteurising machine so she can work efficiently and ensure food safety standards. She says

**“I see my project developing in a big way once this infrastructure is available, as it would assist me in developing the project in a big way”.**

Like the other women in our Success and Resilience series, Nashwa is also a member of UWAF. Nashwa describes the Forum as being vital to support her funding efforts and capacity building, along with linking her to various industry consultants. After being a member for two years, Nashwa wanted to play a bigger part in the support of the women agripreneurs, so she now acts as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Middle Area District.

**CALCIUM PLUS**  
لإنتاج الألبان والأجبان



**جبنة بيضاء مدعمة**  
بـ Ca++ الكالسيوم والإستروجين النباتي

القيمة الغذائية			
الألياف 2 gm	الرطوبة 45 gm	الكالسيوم 802 mg	لـ 100 gm
بروتين 16 gm	دهون 15 gm	فوسفور 76.2 Pg	







**“UWAF has a positive impact on women agripreneurs as it strengthens their resilience and supports the continuity of their projects through delivering a range of services.”**

Nashwa goes on to further explain, “the Forum has helped women develop their websites and social media pages as well as publish some of their success stories. The Forum also hosted a recreational day to showcase the successes of various enterprises to lift the spirits of women agripreneurs, especially after the last war on Gaza in May this year”.

She ends the interview by describing the impact this campaign will have on her and her business

**“The campaign will support me in marketing my products and reaching more people, which in turn will help me grow my business and support my community’s health and wellbeing, particularly that of women and children, especially since calcium supplements can be expensive, much more than expensive than the fortified products I make”.**