

AL-QARARA SEED BANK SUCCESS & RESLIENCE STORY

FROM DESTRUCTION
TO RECONSTRUCTION:
THE REVIVAL OF AL-
QARARA BALADI SEED
BANK

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Introduction:

In the heart of Gaza, amidst the ruins of destruction, a story of resilience and regeneration unfolds. Al-Qarara Baladi Seed Bank, once a beacon of hope for agriculture, faced a devastating blow when it was destroyed during the ongoing aggression on Gaza since October 2023. Despite the displacement, Hanadi, her sister Mona and their father embarked on an inspiring journey to revive their dream of preserving the region's agricultural heritage (Baladi seeds).

But this dream wasn't born out of necessity alone; it was the continuation of a vision first nurtured by a dedicated family, Hanadi Muhanna and her family, from Al-Qarara. Before the destruction, Hanadi and her family had passionately gathered various seed types within the original "Baladi Seed Bank" on his land in Khan Younis. Hanadi and her sister, Mona, are active members of the Urban Agriculture Entrepreneurs Forum, which was formed as a community space for exchanging experiences and knowledge by the Gaza Urban Agriculture Forum.

About Al-Qarara Baladi Seed Bank:

Al-Qarara Baladi Seed Bank, the first of its kind in Gaza. It is a community initiative and a model of family farming aimed at protecting and preserving local seeds. This initiative targets farmers by providing original local seeds such as wheat, barley, spinach, and others. targets farmers by offering original local seeds such as wheat, barley, spinach, and others. The seed bank was established in response to challenges faced by farmers using imported seeds, climate change, and the threat of extinction of local seed varieties. These indigenous seeds are valued for their resilience to harsh conditions, disease resistance, and ability to outcompete weeds. The primary goal of the seed bank is to preserve and reproduce these traditional seeds to prevent their extinction. Before the war, the seed bank used to collaborate with and lend seeds to around 200-252 farming families. However, the number has now dropped to 78 families due to displacement, as most of the land is now occupied by displacement camps, and there is a severe shortage of water.

The idea behind the seed bank was simple yet profound. Bank provided farmers with small quantities of seeds based on the agricultural season, with the understanding that they would return the same quantity after harvest. This system ensured a sustainable cycle of seed distribution, preserving local agricultural practices.



Hanadi and her family meticulously organized the seeds on wooden shelves, stored in plastic containers to protect them from spoilage, or in larger sacks for bulk quantities. Some seeds that required lower temperatures were even kept in refrigerators.

The Journey to Rebirth:

Undeterred by their displacement, Hanadi and her family refused to let the destruction of the seed bank mark the end of their mission. In Deir Al-Balah where they displaced. They established a partnership system with local landowner, where they provided seeds, labor, and fertilizers, while the landowner provided water and land. About 10 workers were involved in this collaborative effort. The goal was clear: to cultivate specific plants that would yield seeds, not just for survival but to restore the variety of crops once safeguarded by the original seed bank. Among these crops was okra, carefully planted as part of this revitalization effort.

Challenges and Innovations:

Despite these efforts, storage remained a challenge due to limited resources. The seed bank relies on primitive methods, using barrels and plastic containers, with the goal of renewing seeds every season. This careful management ensures that seeds are preserved for future planting, while any surplus is sold or lent to farmers, who return seeds after harvesting. Large quantities of spinach seeds have been distributed, with ongoing efforts to supply chard and spinach seeds to North Gaza, where communities suffer from severe food shortages.

The Role of the Gaza Urban Agriculture Forum:

The Gaza Urban Agriculture Forum seeks to enhance the role of the seed bank in preserving local seeds, driven by its commitment to promoting an ecological urban agriculture approach. In this context, the forum has purchased quantities of local seeds and distributed them to women entrepreneurs. The forum will continue to support the seed bank by implementing initiatives and establishing additional networking channels between it and seed banks in Hebron and Egypt.



Conclusion:

Today, the Al-Qarara Baladi Seed Bank stands as a testament to human resilience and the power of community. The seeds harvested from the Deir Al-Balah plot have been carefully stored, with plans to distribute them to local farmers. The seed bank's revival not only restores a critical resource but also rekindles hope for a more sustainable and self-reliant agricultural future in Gaza.

The story of the Al-Qarara Baladi Seed Bank is one of triumph over adversity, a beacon of hope shining through the clouds of destruction. It reminds us that even in the face of overwhelming challenges, the determination to preserve and nurture life can lead to a fruitful and flourishing future for generations to come. The roots planted by Hanadi and her family years ago have grown into a powerful symbol of perseverance, proving that even in the harshest conditions, life finds a way to bloom.