



# ROOFTOP GREENHOUSES IN REFUGEE CAMPS SUCCESS STORY 1



KARAMA ORGANIZATION

## GROWING ON YOUR ROOFTOP

*How Khalti Hasna grows vegetables and her own self-esteem on her roof in the refugee camp*

Every day, older lady Hasna climbs the small stair to the rooftop from her concrete apartment. What previously was an empty space with only the water tank in the corner, hosts now an iron structure with a plastic cover over a wealth of green goods. "I take care of these plants like my children" jokes khalti Hasna,

khalti Hasna (aunt Hasna) by all who know her. Seeing her generous smile and energetic gestures, one would not believe a short time ago this lady barely left the two rooms of her home and her spirits were very down. The simple greenhouse changed her life in many ways.

from the moment I receive them as a small seedling till they are giving their final fruit, I feel for them like my children". This 62-year old

*Khalti Hasna whole-heartily states "my little greenhouse made me get up and grow, even at this age I feel I'm contributing again and I feel we are building together something big".*

Karama Organization's project brings food security and economic empowerment to 220 women and their families in the refugee camps of the West Bank. With agriculture still planted in the hearts of these first

lady from Deheishe refugee camp in Bethlehem area is lovingly called

and second generation refugees, planting and growing is close to



everybody's heart but unemployment and financial hardships are common in the camps. Food insecurity is increasing only among the refugee population, pointing to the extra layers of disempowerment constraining their lives. However, through this

### PROJECT SUMMARY

The project [Rooftop Greenhouses in Refugee Camps](#) is funded by the European Union. Karama Organization is implementing this initiative from February 2017 to January 2021. The action establishes rooftop greenhouses in five refugee camps in the Southern West Bank and supports women groups to grow their social enterprise, developing their gardens' surplus into high quality, traditional food products. This action aims to lift them out of poverty sustainably and empowers them socially and economically. Other partners on the project are the UNRWA and Penny Appeal (UK).

initiative, that is the first of its kind in Palestine and possibly in the Arab world; rooftops become fertile places where women grow organic vegetables and herbs for the local market. This improves the food availability in the area but also has countless physical and social benefits for the participants and community, creating green spots all over the concrete houses.

Khalti Hasna was selected into the project for both economic and social reasons. Her family's income is low and the UNRWA service office recommended her because of her difficult financial situation. But after Karama staff visited Hasna for the

application interview, it quickly became clear khalti Hasna would need a social intervention too; she was suffering from depression and social isolation. A main reason was her situation was her fight against cancer; it drained her body from energy and closed her mind off from others. She lives in her apartment with only her adult son, who leads a busy life working around the clock to support other family members. Her body experienced many pains and became weak and stiff and she was not active in the community anymore.

The project in its first year invited Hasna and 59 other women from refugee camps in the Southern West Bank to take part in this innovative idea. The women should attend weekly meetings in a local community center, where they receive training and guidance in both taking care of the garden and plants, as well as social topics that are important to them. The trainings resulted into confident gardeners who know how to deal with diseases and the specific needs of the vegetables. It also made a strong social connection between the women, who became a support group for each other. Karama Organization made sure to include home visits in the project, so the women would be supported closely and not feel lost. Through these home visits, the social worker from the project developed a special program of social and health

interventions for Hasna, to improve her health and overall wellbeing.

After getting a basic understanding of the greenhouses, the iron construction was delivered on the roofs of all women. The plastic cover results in a good atmosphere for the plants to grow year round, while the 7-inch tubes where the seedlings are planted, limit the use of water and soil. All women are required to work in the garden themselves; they prepare the soil, mix the natural fertilizers and plant the small seedlings with their own hands. All the neighbors were surprised to see khalti Hasna actively take part in all these steps. While the organization offered to send extra assistance for Hasna to help in her garden, she quickly took up every step of the greenhouse herself. Watering the plants, tying the robes, adding the fertilizer, she suddenly felt the energy for it. She told everybody to not be surprised; *"This greenhouse connected me with my past and with my inner strength. Seeing the plants growing and producing in front of my eyes, while I'm watching is a beautiful thing"*. The physical movement does not tire her, the opposite, it helped her body to get regular movement and she experiences less pain than before.



The women learn how to keep their gardens free from chemicals and use organic "home remedies" to fight diseases and increase productivity. The harvest from the greenhouses is sold collectively by the project to restaurants and stores that value the organic production of the women. The team distributes profits fairly between the women who have brought in their harvest. So far, the women went on learning visits to Hebron area and Tubas, seeing other women developing businesses from scratch, by planting and growing themselves. This inspired the refugee women to work hard on their own project and they have good hopes for the future.

With the first project year already working towards its end, the positive change in the beneficiaries and society is clearly visible. The participants have a high spirit and are proud of their hard work and harvest; they also feel more powerful since they have contributed to the community's wellbeing and know to value themselves more.

The inhabitants of the camp seem to long for tools in their hands to work for their own betterment. Uncertainty of the future and the insecurity of everyday life makes hopeless and passive. However, this initiative makes people hopeful and active. Khalti Hasna whole-heartily confirms this: *"my little greenhouse made me get up and grow, even at this age I feel I'm contributing again and I feel we are building together something big"*.

