

# Manar Shab'an: Jalameh's Trailblazer



By Futoon Qadri

*any businesspeople say they started from zero, but I really started from zero. As a Palestinian woman without a college degree, who comes from a village in the north where resources for start-ups are so few, all stakes were against me. I fit all the criteria that our society says make me doomed to fail, and that is what drives me to succeed."*  
Manar Shab'an of Jalameh, Jenin

In 2010, Manar and her family found themselves in dire financial need. With practically zero starting capital, Manar took the bold move to invest her energy in starting up her own vegetable-growing business. All along, she has faced the Israeli government's continuing confiscation of her village's land and quickly learned innovative growing techniques. Manar continuously experiments and discovers new ways to create "vertical" gardens, growing taller vine vegetables over others that require shade to make the best use of a small area of land. Manar's greenhouses weave together vertical and horizontal growing patterns, maximizing the quantity of vegetables grown on the least amount of land. Given the village's limited and irregular access to water, Manar also continues to experiment with water-recycling techniques to ensure that the excess water of one plant is used to hydrate neighboring plants.

Although Manar initially started her business to meet the basic financial needs of her family, as her enterprise grew, she imagined greater possibilities by providing education and a better life for her children. As she generated income, bought land, and built a larger house, Manar's role in the family soon shifted to that of an outspoken decision-maker and leader. Not having had the opportunity to attend university herself, Manar used the profits of her business to save for her children's higher education. Currently, Manar funds her eldest daughter's education entirely on the profit she gains from her business.



Manar tends vegetables in one of her "vertical gardens," where plants are grown in horizontal and vertical patterns to maximize land use. Photo by Suhad Jabi.

Through her micro-enterprise, Manar has also stepped up to give back to her community. After receiving a rain barrel from an aid organization, Manar offered to share it with neighboring farmers who needed access to one. Manar firmly believes that her business's success should benefit the collective, not just herself and her family.

Since she started her business, Manar has furthermore become very active in her community and is one of the co-founders of Al-Jalameh Women's Society, an organization committed to the empowerment of village women and children. Manar leads councils in the municipalities of both Al-Jalameh and Jenin in order to ensure that women's issues are at the forefront of local decision-making. Although Manar has always been a veritable force, as her business grows, she is becoming a stronger and more confident leader who tackles the core issues that her family and community face. Manar receives increasing recognition for her business and leadership, most recently being named one of Jenin's

leading entrepreneurs by the Chamber of Commerce.

Currently, Manar grows pumpkins, mint, and parsley, renting the land on which she works. Her long-term goal is to grow more expensive produce such as strawberries and tomatoes so that she can generate enough profit to buy her land. Until then, she proudly uses the profits of her business to fund her daughter's undergraduate education and vows to do so until graduation day. Manar is a testament to the fact that there is no mind more innovative than that of a woman who must support her family, and no spirit more determined than that of a Palestinian.

*Futoon Qadri has led community outreach and mobilization efforts for Tomorrow's Youth Organization (TYO), Nablus, since March 2008. She has headed numerous women's empowerment programs and enjoys giving a voice to women in her community who would otherwise go unheard. Prior to joining TYO, Futoon worked in other community outreach initiatives, and with Save the Children and the British Council in Nablus.*