



Embarking on New Paths

The Road to AI and Blockchain Adoption



By Ali Dreidi



believe that the Palestinian people, and particularly this generation, possess the ability to transfer Palestine to its proper place in the world. This entails taking on an active role in creating positive change. We must contribute to building a better world by creating breakthroughs in scientific research, driving technological development, combating climate change, and joining the fight against world hunger and poverty. These

goals cannot be attained, however, unless we build the necessary foundations and fashion the strategic building blocks that will allow Palestine to participate in bringing about positive global change.

My career began at the Ministry of Finance in a newly established UK government-funded unit, during which I also became a CFA charterholder.ⁱ This expertise helped me land a position as senior investment analyst at the Palestine Investment Fund where I met a wide range of amazing entrepreneurs and companies and started to get some exposure to the technology sector. I got a taste of entrepreneurship by participating in the first Arab Bank Fintech Bootcamp, held in Jordan, winning second place for a wealth-management platform. At the Ramallah office of The Portland Trust, a British nonprofit action tank, I was most recently the head of programs, tasked with overseeing all projects and building relationships, particularly in the tech sector. This enabled me to expand my network with key local and international ecosystem



Ali, Amer, and Laith
(director of Fikra) at
Fikra headquarters.

actors, universities, local industry leaders, multinational corporations, donors, and private funding organizations. I also learned about bottlenecks and gaps in the sector, which motivated me to think about how to turn some of these challenges into opportunities.

One such key opportunity lies in the need to accelerate the adoption of emerging and transformational technology in Palestine, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain. While multiple studies have highlighted the enormous potential for AI and other deep technologies in driving major economic and societal transformations over the next several years, this may not be good news for everybody. Potentially, AI might

widen gaps between countries, reinforcing the current digital divide. It became clear that something had to be done and it had to be done now.

Through our mutual interests, I met Anan Anabtawi, a successful Palestinian tech investor and entrepreneur who lives in the diaspora. We share a similar vision, and Anabtawi was eager to give back to Palestine not only through philanthropic donations, but also through investing risk capital in multiple strategic initiatives to support the development of the tech ecosystem. This included building a center of excellence, which I co-founded, with a capacity-building and technology-advisory arm, implemented by UC Berkeley,

to facilitate knowledge transfer in transformational technologies, paired with commercial operations and market linkages to promote learning by doing. Anabtawi's strategic vision and his generosity in funding tech-driven initiatives at all stages of education (high school, university) and at the industry level are critical for building expertise around emerging technologies.

Our efforts were bolstered by contributions from two brilliant Palestinian minds, Amer Ghanem, a PhD in computer science, and Amjad Abu Rmleeh, a PhD in control and modeling in biomedical engineering. These top-notch individuals are equipped with critical experience in deep technologies, and their insights and contributions as academic coordinators toward strategic direction, screening, and projects-based learning have been invaluable. The director of Fikra Innovation Hub, Laith Kassis, has assisted me in bringing all the pieces together and has been a great friend and mentor throughout this journey.

It is a pleasure to witness that the way we do things is bearing fruit: we provide youth with job opportunities and offer our staff continuous professional development, full flexibility through remote work, and equity incentives such as stock options. We are proud to have an amazing team of ambitious Palestinians who are delivering projects at the highest levels to clients all over the world. Our

software and blockchain developers, data engineers, machine-learning engineers, and data scientists are participating, for example, in building key products for a US-based health care company that specializes in women's health care – and in the process is revolutionizing the field. We also build blockchain infrastructures for mining and stakingⁱⁱ operations for various protocols, and for cross-chain interoperability.

The game is still young; we have a long way to go and many challenges to overcome. I look forward to sharing my story with you as it unfolds.

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ⁱ CFA stands for Chartered Financial Analyst, it is a postgraduate professional certification offered internationally by the CFA Institute to investment and financial professionals; for more information, please visit <https://www.cfainstitute.org/en/programs/cfa/charterholder-careers>.

ⁱⁱ To learn more about staking, please visit <https://www.coinbase.com/learn/crypto-basics/what-is-staking>.