Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on ensuring civil society’s creativity and autonomy is not suffocated

"My third question concerns ways to improve the process of learning from the experiences of the voluntary sector. Traditionally jealous of their independence, many voluntary agencies are cautious about allowing scrutiny and promoting the replication of successful projects on a large scale. If the potential of private development agencies is to be realised and confidence in them is to grow, this must change. How can we improve the process of self-analysis, evaluation and the exchange of experiences without diminishing the autonomy and creative initiative of voluntary agencies? How can they learn from their own experiences in order to improve the management of their programmes?"

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1986 address to the Aga Khan Development Network’s Enabling Environment Conference (Nairobi, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/3331/

"What is civil society? Why is it so essential to the good health of any modern state? And what is the role of education in shaping and enriching civil society?

"The World Bank uses the term to refer to a wide array of organisations that have a presence in public life but are not affiliated to the state. They function on a not-for-profit basis to express the interests and values of their members and others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations."
In this sense, civil society organisations are multifarious: from community and indigenous groups through faith-based and charitable organisations, to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), labour unions, professional associations and foundations.

"But there is a broader definition that holds that civil society embraces an even wider diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms that vary in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Besides the Bank's categories, these spaces are populated by such organisations as village and women's groups, neighbourhood self-help groups, social movements, business associations, micro-credit organisations, coalitions and advocacy groups."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1992 Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Convocation Ceremony address (Toronto, Canada)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/6990/

"What distinguishes the outstanding NGOs from the other? A key factor seems to be governance. The successful NGOs have effective boards to work with management on defining the mission, strategic directions and objectives. Management is held accountable for results. The right balance seems to have been struck between local autonomy and effective oversight. Risks are consciously evaluated, and a prudent equilibrium established between the need for social innovation and the danger of failure. The composition of the boards helps to draw in useful and supportive allies."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1992 Royal Society for Asian Affairs Annual Dinner address (London, United Kingdom)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4503/

Caroline Pigozzi / Jean-Claude Deutsch: Your Highness, what pride do you get from your work?
Aga Khan: I am proud of two things. The first is the creation, in a variety of countries, of institutions of the community which possess real autonomy, which do not depend on the intervention, nor the thinking, nor the support of the Imam....

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1994 Paris Match Interview (1st) with Caroline Pigozzi and Jean-Claude Deutsch (Paris, France) [Translation]
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/850/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan explains progress depends on trusting people: delegating authority, discretion and decision making


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