Excerpts: His Highness the Aga Khan on the fuel of progress: harnessing private initiative through public-private partnerships

"Too often we have assumed that voluntary organisations are too limited to serve great public purposes. For some, the very notion of private organisations devoted to public goals seems to be an oxymoron. But this skeptical attitude is changing. The power of civil society is becoming more apparent -- in your coursework here at Sciences Po among other places. This is all to the good -- civil society should have a prominent place in the new equation for social progress, complementing rather than competing with government. And the same thing is true of the private business sector -- and the potential for public-private partnerships.

"Civil and private institutions have unique capacities for spurring social progress -- even when governments falter. For one thing, because they are intimately connected to the warp and woof of daily life, they can predict new patterns with particular sensitivity. The development of civil society can also help meet the challenge of cultural diversity, giving diverse constituencies effective ways to express and preserve their distinct identities. Private institutions also provide good laboratories for experimentation. Because they are multiple in nature, they can try a variety of approaches, sometimes failing and sometimes succeeding, but always learning from their experiences. And because these institutions need not make short term accommodations to conventional wisdom or current fashions, they have greater freedom to be controversial -- and creative. [Emphasis original]"

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 Masters of Public Affairs Programme,
"There has always been a human tendency to seek a simple, all-powerful answer to the world’s problems. Those who have lived or worked in the developing world know this pattern particularly well. When progress seems to be moving at a snail’s pace, we are easily persuaded that there must be some ‘quick fix’. The hard reality of life is that there is no single button we can push that will set off an unstoppable wave of progress.

"Social progress, in the long run, will not be found by delegating an all-dominant role to any one player -- but rather through multi-sector partnerships. And within each sector of society, diversity should be a watchword.

"A vast decentralisation of decision-making is already occurring in many countries; it has the advantage of placing new responsibilities in the hands of local communities. For the key to future progress will lie less in traditional top-down systems of command and control -- and more in a broad, bottom-up spirit of coordination and cooperation."

"Trust in people. Trust in people. It’s an extraordinary phenomenon of development that the most powerful force is people changing their own environment. What they need in many cases is the wherewithal to change. But the will to change, very often the capacity to change well -- because they live in that context -- that’s an extraordinarily powerful force."
"The key to building partnerships, whether they are among social sectors or among countries, is a profound spirit of reciprocal obligation -- a readiness to share the work, to share the costs, to share the risks, and to share the credit. In the end, what it will require most in Central Asia, as it has in Europe, is a spirit of mutual trust."

"The basic topic of our discussions, therefore, is how to create the conditions of confidence, predictability and mutual trust that will enable people and institutions to realise their full potential...."

"I would underscore the growing potential of what some call PPP's -- public-private partnerships. Such collaborations can tap the unique strengths of both sectors, overcoming outmoded dogmas which deprecate the role of the market-driven enterprises on the one hand, or which denigrate the capacities of publicly supported agencies on the other. Effective public-private partnerships must be genuinely participative, as committed leaders coordinate their thinking,
sharing objectives, sharing strategies, sharing resources, sharing predictions. And this approach can be powerful, indeed very powerful, in the social and cultural development fields, not only in the more established economic one.”

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2010 Address to the ‘Marketplace on Innovative Financial Solutions for Development’ Conference (Paris, France)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9437/

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Reem Haddad: So you believe in public-private cooperation?

Aga Khan: Very much so. Very much so. I think we lived through the 60’s and the 70’s in a conflict of dogmas and that paralysed a lot of processes. And I think today there are some areas of development which have to be dealt with at the national level by the government. There are other areas which are best handled by private initiative and not necessarily initiative for profit, just private initiative -- civil society. And the two really have to work together to be effective and so I very much encourage the notion of dialogue, public-private discussion. I think it’s highly important. The notions of conflict between the private sector and the public sector is something I hope will never, never come up again. [Emphasis original]

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Syrian TV Interview with Reem Haddad (Aleppo, Syria)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9004/

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"As you know, my principal preoccupation has been with the developing world, watching as it has oscillated between hope and disappointment. The disappointments often resulted from the false hope that one theory or one dogma, one person or one party had all the answers to the riddles of development.

"Genuine hope, on the other hand, has usually been rooted in a tough sense of realism -- a recognition that no one has all the answers,"
that today's answers may not work forever, that good people do not all think alike, and that we must constantly learn from one another for an uncharted future. When this realistic spirit prevails, then the search for economic and social progress can become a shared experience, based on what I would call a 'cosmopolitan ethic' and fostering a spirit of partnership and collegiality.

"These comments explain why I value so highly what people call 'public-private' partnerships. There is much to be gained when governments cooperate with private institutions. Governments can help provide a strong Enabling Environment for both private enterprise and for civil society."

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"The word 'partnership,' in fact, could be the watchword of this celebration [of the inauguration ceremony for the restoration of Humayun’s Tomb (Delhi, India)]. What we honour today, above all else is the spirit of partnership in which this work has unfolded.

"In my view, an Ethic of Partnership must be at the centre of any successful project of this sort. Among other things, an Ethic of Partnership means that traditional separations between public and private domains must be set aside, so that public-private partnerships can thrive as an essential keystone for effective development.

"The role of governments, including municipalities, is essential, of course, in providing an 'enabling environment' for development. But the public sector cannot do this work alone. A creative mix of participants is needed: corporations and development agencies, foundations and universities, faith communities and local community groups....

"I believe that public-private partnerships can be an increasingly useful approach, here in India and in other settings. India is one of
the world’s richest countries in terms of historic heritage, with 30 World Heritage Sites including 24 cultural sites. They represent a patrimony that cannot be preserved by the public sector alone. Public-private collaboration will be essential."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2013 address at the Inauguration Ceremony for the Restoration of Humayun’s Tomb (Delhi, India)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10625/

"The first [misconception of development] concerns what I would call the ‘dominant player fallacy:’ a tendency to place too much reliance in national governments and other institutions which may have relatively superficial connections to life at the grassroots level....

"If these reflections are well founded, then what is urgently needed is a massive, creative new development effort towards rural populations. Informed strategic thinking at the national level must be matched by a profound, engagement at the local level. Global philanthropy, public-private partnerships and the best of human knowledge must be harnessed."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2009 Address to the Global Philanthropy Forum (Washington D.C., USA)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/9217/

"IPS has taken more of my personal time and thought than practically every other business activity connected with developing countries. The heart of the matter is the idea which lies behind the whole concept of IPS -- the idea of partnership in progress. [Emphasis added]"

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1967 Industrial Promotion Services (IPS) Building Opening Ceremony address (Nairobi, Kenya)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1432/
"Many good things might grow out of such enhanced communication [between the stakeholders in the development of Afghanistan]. Among them, I would hope, would be an unfolding array of public-private partnerships. The range of such partnerships has been expanding of late -- but there is still enormous unrealised potential. Such partnerships will require a profound spirit of reciprocal obligation and mutual accountability -- a readiness to share the work, share the costs, share the risks, and share the credit."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2007 Address to the Enabling Environment Conference (Kabul, Afghanistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8072/

"Our experience in Afghanistan, as well as in neighbouring Tajikistan and Pakistan, is that sustainable development is only possible when the community is engaged at the grassroots level and is given the ways and the means to take responsibility for its own future. This means building the capacity of civil society institutions as well as tapping into the wellspring of individual initiative that has been part of the vigorous Afghan spirit for centuries. It is therefore critical that the Government of Afghanistan creates the appropriate legal and fiscal framework, the regulatory conditions and the stable democratic institutions -- in other words, the Enabling Environment -- that encourages and supports the confidence and growth of private initiative, and also facilitates the development of public-private partnerships."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 2006 Address to the Conference on Afghanistan (London, UK)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/7646/
"Contemporary history for all its wasted opportunities, its floundering in the sands of unproductive dogmas, shows us examples of enormous public achievement. The postwar building of the Japanese economy was a triumph of international development. Through concerted partnership efforts, the public and private spheres in Japan have perfected institutional and policy tools to make the market work for developmental and quality goals. Elsewhere in Asia, newly industrialising states have launched similar strategies for development, with similar success. Indonesia provides one of the most striking recent examples of the ways in which purposeful public policy can realise a wide range of development goals -- against the most amazing odds of geographical dispersion, linguistic disparity, ethnic and religious differences. Constant inquiry about appropriate methods and viable goals is a development philosophy especially well suited to health care professionals, who can afford no complacency about the end product of their efforts."

His Highness the Aga Khan's 1990 Aga Khan University Convocation Ceremony (Karachi, Pakistan)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/4407/

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on the essence of the Enabling Environment: enabling and assisting individual creativity

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on ensuring civil society's creativity and autonomy is not suffocated
See also: His Highness the Aga Khan explains progress depends on trusting people: delegating authority, discretion and decision making


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