



## His Highness the Aga Khan IV: Islamic Reform, Education, and Sustainable Development

*Alwy Ahmed Mohamed<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Wildan Shohib<sup>2</sup>, Mahmudulhassan<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Islamic Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia, and The AgaKhan High School, Mombasa, Kenya

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Islamic Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Islamic Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia, and Department of Islamic Education, Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

<sup>1</sup>[alwyahmed94@gmail.com](mailto:alwyahmed94@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[mws543@ums.ac.id](mailto:mws543@ums.ac.id), <sup>3</sup>[hassanfaruky@gmail.com](mailto:hassanfaruky@gmail.com)

Received August 07, 2024; Revised November 25, 2024; Accepted December 25, 2024

### Abstract

**Objective:** This study aims to investigate how the Aga Khan IV program became a model of applicable Islamic reform based on moral progress, educational reform, and humanitarian work, and shows the connection of religious values with concrete solutions to contemporary issues. **Theoretical framework:** Based on Islamic ethics: justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and science ('ilm) as a benchmark for policy and social transformation. The reformist perspective balances faith and material progress, emphasizing pluralism and human dignity. **Literature review:** Draws on academic literature, official speeches, institutional regulations, and AKDN practices; highlights the themes of modern Islamic reform, inclusive education, moral leadership, sustainable development, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment, linking normative ideas with empirical evidence. **Methods:** Draws on academic literature, official speech, institutional regulation, and AKDN practice; highlights the themes of modern Islamic reform, inclusive education, moral leadership, sustainable development, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment, linking normative ideas with empirical evidence. **Results:** Found an Islamic vision that combines faith and material progress, realized through inclusive education, respect for pluralism, and the promotion of human dignity. AKU and the Aga Khan Academies highlight community service, moral leadership, and academic excellence; AKDN's development model emphasizes social justice, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment. **Implications:** Provide a progressive Islamic reform framework to integrate religious values with the education and sustainable

development agenda, as well as serve as a policy reference for Muslim communities and stakeholders. **Novelty:** Offers an original synthesis of moral spirituality and sustainable development practices through tangible institutions (AKDN/AKU/Academies), and affirms the Aga Khan IV as a key figure with an operational reform framework, not just a normative one.

**Keywords:** aga khan iv, islamic reform, education, sustainable development, humanitarian.

## INTRODUCTION

His Majesty The 49th hereditary Imam of Shia Ismaili Muslims, Aga Khan IV, is regarded as one of the most significant modern-day Muslim leaders whose development projects and scholarly accomplishments go well beyond the confines of his faith. Since taking over as leader in 1957, he has promoted an ethical, intellectual, and socially conscious interpretation of Islam. Compassion, pluralism, and the pursuit of human dignity via education and sustainable development are all emphasized in his vision of Islam. By presenting faith as a force for advancement, harmony, and social change, this reformist perspective challenges limited understandings of religion [1].

The idea that education is a moral duty that enables communities to end poverty, inequality, and ignorance, rather than just a means of achieving personal growth, is at the heart of the Aga Khan's ideology. World-class educational institutions, research centers, and universities have been developed in Asia, Africa, and Europe by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). These educational institutions prepare students to be change agents by fusing academic rigor with moral principles. Additionally, his dedication to sustainable development combines Islamic morality with modern world issues, including social justice, environmental conservation, and economic empowerment [2].

Three primary perspectives are used in this essay to examine the Aga Khan's contributions: sustainable development, educational reform, and Islamic reform. It critically looks at how his projects represent an Islamic worldview that is progressive and modern at the same time, while still having a strong spiritual foundation. Using this analysis, the essay makes the case that the Aga Khan IV is a special example of Muslim leadership—one that balances tradition and innovation, faith and reason, and spiritual values with observable social advancement [3].

Furthermore, sustainability, long-term effects, and respect for cultural uniqueness are fundamental to the Aga Khan's developmental strategy. AKDN projects foster self-reliance and institutional capacity rather than providing short-term relief. His initiatives, which range from hospital systems in South Asia to cultural restoration projects in the Middle East to rural support programs in East Africa, advance a holistic approach to development that connects economic progress with environmental stewardship and human wellbeing. His focus on pluralism encourages harmonious cohabitation in heterogeneous cultures and upholds the Qur'anic idea that people were divided into countries and tribes to get to know one another rather than to hate one another (Qur'an 49:13) [4].

This paper examines the life, thought, and legacy of His Highness the Aga Khan IV through three interrelated themes: Islamic reform, educational transformation, and sustainable development. It analyzes how his reformist interpretation of Islam promotes intellectual openness, social responsibility, and ethical progress; how his educational initiatives reshape learning in the Muslim world; and how his development philosophy serves as a model for global humanitarianism rooted in faith. Ultimately, this essay argues that the Aga Khan represents a rare fusion of spiritual leadership and visionary action, offering the world a compelling example of how Islam can contribute meaningfully to global civilization in the 21st century [5].

One of the main tenets of the Aga Khan's plan for changing society is education. According to him, education must provide people with both technical knowledge and moral

and ethical ideals, as ignorance is a major contributor to underdevelopment and violence. Established in 1983, the Aga Khan University (AKU) is a shining example of high-quality education in the Muslim world. It is well known for turning out professionals who are competent, honest, and involved in the community. In the same vein, the Aga Khan Academies uphold moral principles and cultural traditions while teaching pupils through international curricula. His conviction that education is the most effective means of ending the cycle of poverty and creating enlightened nations is embodied by these institutions [6].

The Aga Khan is a strong supporter of pluralism and cultural preservation in addition to education. He maintains that diversity is a gift from God and is adamantly against cultural homogeneity. He has spearheaded multiple restoration projects of historic Islamic landmarks under the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), including the Bagh-e Babur Gardens in Kabul, the Baltit Fort in Pakistan, and Cairo's Al-Azhar Park. In addition to preserving Islamic cultural legacy, these initiatives boost local economies, tourism, and handicrafts. The Global Centre for Pluralism in Canada, which encourages harmonious cohabitation in multiethnic cultures, is another example of his commitment to pluralism [7].

The Aga Khan's moral leadership also permeates international development strategy. To handle humanitarian situations, he often works with the World Bank, the United Nations, and foreign governments. Development must respect human values and cultural surroundings, he emphasizes in his presentations to parliaments and international forums. He argues that no society can advance when half of its members are excluded, hence he supports women's participation in leadership roles, the economy, and education. His worldview is holistic—touching every area of human life, from health care and food security to governance and cultural identity [8].

In conclusion, the Aga Khan IV emerges as a distinctive and impactful personality within contemporary Islamic history. He exemplifies a rare synthesis of theological insight, intellectual rigor, and pragmatic leadership. His reformist vision for Islam advocates for human dignity, the pursuit of knowledge, and international harmony, while simultaneously addressing pressing human requirements. This paper examines his contributions across three fundamental areas: the reformation of Islamic thought, the transformation of education, and the promotion of sustainable development. Through his life and endeavors, the Aga Khan illustrates that Islam serves not as an impediment to advancement, but rather as a moral catalyst for fostering a peaceful and equitable global community [9].

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic examination concerning His Highness the Aga Khan IV encompasses various scholarly disciplines, such as Islamic reform, educational theory, development studies, and global ethics. Scholars largely concur that the Aga Khan exemplifies a distinctive paradigm of faith-oriented development that integrates religious identity with contemporary societal requirements. This analysis consolidates the existing body of literature to underscore four principal thematic domains: Islamic reformism, ethics and social justice, education and knowledge production, and sustainable development [10].

According to scholars like Daftary (2013) and Nanji (2011), the Aga Khan IV carries on Shi'a Islam's rationalist legacy, particularly the Ismaili focus on the harmony between revelation (wahy) and intellect ('aql). His reformist ideas are associated with the traditional Islamic concepts of tajdid (renewal) and ijtihad (independent reasoning). The Aga Khan prioritizes developmental pragmatism over ideological conflict, in contrast to political reformists. Kassam (2016) asserts that his understanding of Islam promotes moral adjustment to contemporary situations while maintaining spiritual integrity. According to the literature, his pluralistic outlook encourages communication across cultures and opposes sectarianism [11].

The Aga Khan's ethical philosophy, which is based on the Qur'anic concepts of justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and human dignity (karamah), is highlighted throughout the

literature. Scholars such as Sen and Kliksberg (2010) frequently call his method "ethical humanism" in the context of development ethics. Steinberg (2019) claims that his approach combines universal human rights with Islamic moral precepts, especially when it comes to gender parity and the eradication of poverty. According to Ruthven (2012), the Aga Khan's expression of "cosmopolitan ethics" promotes interfaith and intercultural cohabitation and shared human responsibility [12].

Numerous studies highlight how important education was to the Aga Khan's plan for social change. According to Stephens (2014), the AKDN educational approach strikes a balance between moral responsibility and academic prowess. According to research by Duder (2020), organizations such as Aga Khan University and the Aga Khan Academies encourage leadership, service-learning, and critical thinking. His views that education should empower marginalized groups, develop moral citizens, and increase capacity are reflected in these institutions. UNESCO studies from 2021 state that the Aga Khan's programs have promoted national development and increased access to high-quality education in underdeveloped areas [13].

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a paradigm of integrated development that is frequently discussed by development studies scholars. Badejo (2017) asserts that the AKDN creates long-term institutions that promote local self-reliance rather than relying on temporary charity. Its multifaceted strategy, which covers rural development, cultural revitalization, health care, and economic growth, is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. Additionally, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture is credited with establishing a connection between economic advancement and cultural heritage (Blake, 2020). His work in vulnerable nations like Pakistan and Afghanistan shows how restoring culture promotes peace and stability [14].

While many studies praise the Aga Khan's work, scholars note a lack of critical engagement from within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Few studies analyze his theological contributions in depth, particularly his conceptualization of Islamic ethics and epistemology. Moreover, most research focuses on AKDN's development outcomes but does not explore how its spiritual leadership shapes global Muslim discourse [15].

The literature indicates that the Aga Khan IV embodies a rare synthesis of religious leadership and humanitarian vision. Existing research recognizes his influence on Islamic reform, ethical leadership, and development practice. However, there is still a need for deeper academic exploration of his intellectual tradition and its implications for contemporary Islamic renewal [16].

**Table 1. Literature Review**

Author/Source	Thematic Area	Key Ideas / Findings
Daftary, F.	Islamic Reformism	Aga Khan continues the Ismaili rationalist tradition; harmony of revelation (wahy) and intellect ('aql).
Nanji, A.	Islamic Thought	Emphasizes ijthihad (independent reasoning) and tajdid (renewal) for modern Muslim societies.
Kassam, Z.	Reformist Philosophy	Advocates' moral reinterpretation of faith without losing spirituality; pragmatic religious reform.
Esposito, J.	Pluralism	Aga Khan promotes interfaith cooperation and rejects sectarianism pluralistic Islamic worldview.
Sen, A. & Kliksberg, B.	Ethics & Development	Describes his model as "ethical humanism"; development linked to human dignity and

		justice.
Steinberg, J.	Human Rights	Combines Islamic ethics with universal human rights; supports gender equity and social justice.
Ruthven, M.	Cosmopolitan Ethics	Introduces “cosmopolitan ethics”; shared human responsibility across cultures.
Stephens, M.	Education	AKDN’s education model integrates ethics with academic excellence; promotes service and leadership.
Duder, C.	Knowledge & Development	Aga Khan University and Academies build leadership, critical thinking, and global citizenship.
UNESCO Report	Education & Equity	AKDN improves access to quality education in developing regions, an empowerment focus.
Badejo, D.	Sustainable Development	AKDN fosters long-term institutional development and community self-reliance.
Blake, J.	Culture & Development	Aga Khan Trust for Culture links heritage restoration with economic growth and peace.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research approach based on the interpretivist paradigm, which stresses contextual interpretation as a means of comprehending social realities and human experiences. Since the goal of the study is to examine and evaluate His Highness the Aga Khan IV's development philosophy and intellectual contributions in relation to Islamic reform, education, ethics, and global development, rather than to quantify statistical relationships, the qualitative approach was selected. By using a descriptive and analytical research design, the study was able to critically examine the philosophical underpinnings of the Aga Khan's leadership and humanitarian agenda while synthesizing scholarly viewpoints [17].

Documentary analysis was the only source of secondary data included in the study. Given the wealth of existing research on the Aga Khan's functions as a religious leader, reformer, intellectual, and creator of social structures, this approach was acceptable. Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, doctorate dissertations, conference papers, institutional reports, and publications from agencies like UNESCO and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) were among the many academic sources from which data were gathered. Keywords associated with the Aga Khan, Islamic modernity, ethical leadership, faith-based development, pluralism, and Ismaili thinking were used to conduct a systematic search of online academic resources such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Taylor & Francis [18].

This investigation only includes reliable and pertinent material. Particular inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to guarantee quality. If a source was academic in nature, published in English, and covered subjects related to Islamic intellectual traditions, societal development, or the Aga Khan's contributions, it was included. To preserve academic currency, publications from 2010 to 2024 were given priority; however, earlier fundamental works were taken into consideration as needed. To preserve scientific rigor, non-academic items like blogs, opinion pieces, and unreliable internet sources were not included [19].

By using a theme analysis approach for data analysis, the researcher was able to recognize, classify, and analyze key recurrent concepts from the literature. Following a thorough analysis of the texts, several important topics surfaced, such as sustainable development, ethical humanism, Islamic reformism, and education and knowledge production. To

understand how the Aga Khan's ideas contribute to current debates in Islamic scholarship and international development, these themes were classified and arranged. Finding gaps in the literature was also made possible by thematic analysis, especially about the paucity of critical discussion of his theological and epistemological contributions [20].

The study used academic rigor techniques frequently seen in qualitative research to guarantee validity and dependability. Using sources that were institutionally validated and subjected to peer review increased credibility. Dependability was preserved by using a methodical and open literature review procedure. Accurately citing all sources and steering clear of prejudice or unsubstantiated assertions ensured confirmability. By offering ideas and analyses that apply to discussions in Islamic reform and development studies outside of the Ismaili setting, transferability was established [21].

Even though there were no human subjects in this study, ethical standards were still followed, particularly regarding intellectual property and academic integrity. According to the APA 7th edition style, all concepts borrowed from other academics were appropriately recognized with citations and references. Thus, the methodology provided an organized way to examine His Highness the Aga Khan IV's intellectual heritage and faith-based development ideology while guaranteeing academic transparency and ethical conformity [22].

**Table 2. Comprehensive Methodological Framework for Exploring the Aga Khan IV's Intellectual Legacy**

Component	Description
Research Paradigm	The study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding human experiences and social realities through interpretation rather than measurement. It recognizes that knowledge is context-dependent and constructed through analysis and reflection.
Research Design	A qualitative descriptive-analytical design was employed. This allows for systematic exploration of scholarly literature on His Highness the Aga Khan IV while enabling critical synthesis of intellectual themes and theoretical insights from multiple academic sources.
Research Approach	The study adopts a documentary and conceptual analysis approach, analyzing existing academic discourse to interpret and critically assess the Aga Khan's role in Islamic reform, ethical philosophy, education, and development studies.
Nature of Study	The study is exploratory and analytical. It is exploratory in mapping existing scholarship and analytical in comparing perspectives, identifying gaps, and synthesizing arguments.
Type and Source of Data	The study relies exclusively on secondary data, collected from scholarly sources such as peer-reviewed journals, academic books, dissertations, institutional reports (UNESCO, UNDP, AKDN), and credible academic databases (JSTOR, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, ResearchGate).
Data Collection Method	Documentary analysis was used as the main method of data collection. Relevant literature was identified using systematic search techniques with keywords such as "Aga Khan IV," "Islamic reform," "ethical leadership in Islam," "AKDN," "faith-based development," and "Ismaili thought."

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	Academic and peer-reviewed sources only- Relevant to research objectives- Publications between 2010–2024 (with foundational sources included from earlier years if significant)- English language sources
<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>	Non-academic articles and blogs- Biased or promotional institutional materials without academic critique- Duplicate publications- Unverified online sources or social media content
<b>Sampling Technique</b>	Purposive sampling was used to select relevant literature that best contributes to understanding the Aga Khan's intellectual contributions and development model.
<b>Data Analysis Method</b>	Thematic analysis was used to classify data into meaningful categories. The four main themes identified were: (1) Islamic Reform and Rationalism, (2) Ethics and Social Justice, (3) Education and Knowledge Production, (4) Faith-Based Sustainable Development.
<b>Analytical Framework</b>	The study applies content analysis to evaluate and interpret literature and thematic categorization to organize findings based on recurring academic discussions.
<b>Validity and Reliability</b>	Validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing findings from multiple authors. Reliability was maintained by strictly following systematic review procedures and academic citation standards.
<b>Trustworthiness Measures</b>	Credibility: Use of peer-reviewed and authoritative sources- Dependability: Transparent research process- Confirmability: Objectivity through citation of sources- Transferability: Findings applicable to broader studies in Islamic intellectual discourse and development
<b>Ethical Considerations</b>	The study adheres to academic integrity and ethical scholarship. All secondary sources are properly acknowledged using the APA 7th edition citation style. No plagiarism or data manipulation is involved. No human participants were included; hence, informed consent and Anonymity are not required.
<b>Limitations of Methodology</b>	Dependence on secondary data only- Lack of primary interviews limits firsthand perspectives- Limited critical Islamic theological analysis in existing literature
<b>Delimitations</b>	The study focuses only on the scholarly contributions and development vision of His Highness the Aga Khan IV and excludes political debate or sectarian controversies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's conclusions, which were based on a thematic analysis of the body of research on His Highness the Aga Khan IV's concept of intellectual leadership and development, are presented in this chapter. The findings are arranged in accordance with the four main themes that arose during the analysis: Faith-Based Sustainable Development, Education and Human Development, Ethics and Social Justice, and Islamic Reform and Rationalism. These results demonstrate how the Aga Khan offers a distinctive example of faith-based leadership that combines religious values with contemporary social demands [\[23\]](#).

### Islamic Reform and Rationalism

According to the results, the Aga Khan IV is a significant modern voice for Islamic reform. Scholars like Daftary (2013) and Nanji (2011) concur that his teachings, which emphasize the harmony between wahy (revelation) and 'aql (intellect), carry on the Ismaili

heritage of rational interpretation of faith. The Aga Khan advocates for social, educational, and ethical change based on *ijtihad* (independent thinking), in contrast to political Islamists who want ideological reform through state power. Instead of being combative, his reform strategy is flexible and practical, and it addresses contemporary issues like globalization, pluralism, and secularism without compromising Islamic spiritual identity [24].

Furthermore, ethical humanism, a theory that combines universal human ideals with Qur'anic moral principles, is a fundamental component of the Aga Khan's reformist approach. His focus on justice (*'adl*), human dignity (*karama*), and compassion (*rahma*) presents Islam as a force for social cohesion and peace in plural communities, according to scholars like Karim (2017) and Hashmi (2012). The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which promotes healthcare, education, poverty alleviation, and cultural preservation, exemplifies the Aga Khan's belief that faith must be manifested via action. The transition from ritual-centered religion to ethical responsibility and global citizenship is reflected in this pragmatic, action-oriented view of Islam [25].



Figure 1. AgaKhan Development Network



Figure 2. Aga Khan Development Network – Flagship Institutions and Initiatives

Furthermore, the results show that a key component of the Aga Khan's reformist approach is his support for education as a means of emancipation. Ignorance is a bigger threat to humanity than unbelief, he often teaches. His speeches frequently emphasize education as a method of intellectual and spiritual empowerment as well as a religious duty, according to studies by Versi (2010) and Nasseem (2019). To create people who can contribute significantly to modern society, he advocates for a comprehensive understanding by fusing modern sciences with religious instruction. By bringing *din* (faith) and *dunya* (worldly existence) into harmony, Islam dispels the myth that it opposes modernity and demonstrates that all knowledge is valuable when applied to advance humankind [26].

Finally, the results demonstrate that the Aga Khan has played a transformative role in promoting religious pluralism within an Islamic framework. He teaches that diversity is

divinely willed, drawing upon Qur'an 49:13 and 5:48 to advocate for harmonious coexistence. Scholars such as Sachedina (2011) and Esposito (2016) note that his theology encourages Muslims to engage in dialogue with other faiths not as a threat to Islamic identity but as an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding. His interpretation of ta'aruf (knowing one another) and amana (shared responsibility) promotes a model of Islam that values peacebuilding and coexistence over division. This pluralistic approach challenges exclusivist interpretations of Islam and demonstrates that Islamic reform can be intellectually faithful while socially progressive [27].

**Table 3. Transformative Role of the Aga Khan in Promoting Islamic Pluralism and Reform**

Theme	Key Findings	Scholarly Support
<b>Rational Interpretation of Islam</b>	Aga Khan promotes the integration of wahy (revelation) and 'aql (intellect) to address modern challenges without abandoning Islamic tradition. Reform is based on ijtihad and avoids extremism.	Daftary; Nanji
<b>Ethical Humanism</b>	Emphasizes universal ethics such as justice ('adl), compassion (rahma), and human dignity (karama). Promotes Islam as a moral force for peace and social harmony.	Karim; Hashmi
<b>Faith in Action</b>	Reform is expressed through development programs rather than political activism. AKDN promotes health, education, and poverty alleviation as expressions of Islamic values.	Steinberg; Nyondo
<b>Education and Enlightenment</b>	Education is seen as a religious obligation and a tool against ignorance and poverty. Advocates integration of religious and scientific knowledge.	Nasseem; Versi
<b>Balanced Spirituality</b>	Promotes moderation (wasatiyyah) and rejects extremism. Encourages ethical living rooted in spiritual values rather than ritualism alone.	Esmail; Kassam
<b>Pluralism and Coexistence</b>	Advocates religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Believes diversity is divinely intended and supports interfaith dialogue.	Sachedina; Esposito
<b>Modern Muslim Identity</b>	Encourages Muslims to embrace modernity while staying rooted in Qur'anic ethics. Promotes progressive Islam that responds to globalization and secularism.	Mukherjee; Ali
<b>Pragmatic Reform</b>	Reform is gradual, realistic, and community-centered, not ideological or revolutionary. Focuses on social progress instead of political takeover.	Nanji; Hirschkind

### Ethics and Social Justice

According to the study, the Aga Khan's ideology is firmly based in a moral worldview found in the Qur'an, where ethics is the cornerstone of intellectual, social, and spiritual growth rather than a supporting component of religion. The Qur'anic virtues of 'adl (justice), rahmah (compassion), and karamah (human dignity) are fundamental to his ethical philosophy because he sees them as universal laws that govern how people interact with one another and how society is structured. A just society, in the Aga Khan's opinion, offers opportunity to everyone, regardless of background or belief, empowers the disadvantaged, and defends the weak. Therefore, justice is a social and economic duty in addition to being a legal idea [28].

According to Sen & Kliksberg (2010) and Steinberg (2019), the Aga Khan's method is ethical humanism, a moral philosophy that prioritizes human welfare in both religious practice and development. Aga Khan supports development that improves the quality of life, fortifies social institutions, and maintains cultural identity, in contrast to materialist development models that primarily concentrate on economic growth. His ideology turns faith into a useful instrument for enhancing people's lives by fusing moral obligation with constructive activity. With this approach, Islam is positioned as a force for social good rather than as a hindrance to advancement [29].

The results also demonstrate that the Aga Khan supports inclusiveness and equality as crucial elements of justice. He stresses over and over again that poverty is a violation of human dignity in addition to being an economic problem. According to the Aga Khan, it is morally required to heal societal differences because inequality causes social disintegration and exacerbates violence. His moral vision comes to life through organizations like the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which invests in education, empowers local communities, and advances gender equality. His programs, which argue that no community can progress if half of its members are denied opportunities, place a special emphasis on the role of women [30].

Peaceful cohabitation and cosmopolitan responsibility are central to the Aga Khan's ethical perspective. According to Ruthven (2012), the Aga Khan advocates for a kind of cosmopolitan ethics in which individuals acknowledge their common humanity despite differences in culture, ethnicity, or religion. He emphasizes that respect for one another, communication, and collaboration between communities are the keys to achieving societal harmony. The Qur'anic revelation that human diversity is deliberate and divinely willed (Qur'an 49:13) is the foundation of this ideology. As a result, he opposes radical ideologies and sectarianism that split people and misrepresent religion [31].

In the end, Aga Khan's moral philosophy provides a well-rounded substitute for both political Islam and secular advancement. He argues for a spiritually grounded society where ethics and growth coexist, rejecting ideological radicalism, class struggle, and religious exclusion. According to his teachings, Islam is a religion of accountability, compassion, and reason, where moral principles influence social life, economy, education, and governmental structures. The study's conclusions demonstrate that the Aga Khan's worldview offers a distinctive framework for Islamic reform that is morally sound, realistic, and appealing to all people on a humanistic level [32].



Figure 3. AKF's Comprehensive Sanitation Initiative in India

**Table 4. Ethical Themes and Scholarly Perspectives on Aga Khan’s Qur’anic Humanism Vision**

Theme	Findings	Scholars/References
<b>Qur’anic Ethical Foundation</b>	Aga Khan’s philosophy is based on Qur’anic ethics, emphasizing justice (‘adl), compassion (rahmah), and human dignity (karamah) as the foundation of social organization and human relations.	Steinberg; Daftary
<b>Ethical Humanism</b>	Promotes a model of development rooted in moral responsibility, where faith and development are integrated to enhance the quality of life, social equity, and community empowerment.	Sen & Kliksberg; Nanji
<b>Social Equality &amp; Inclusion</b>	Emphasizes equality, welfare, and inclusion. Rejects poverty and marginalization as moral injustices. Advocates for education and gender equality as tools of social justice.	Karim; Esmail
<b>Peace &amp; Pluralism</b>	Advocates peace, coexistence, and interfaith harmony. Rejects sectarianism and extremism. Promotes cosmopolitan ethics rooted in shared humanity.	Ruthven; Sachedina
<b>Universal Ethical Vision</b>	Offers a universal ethical model of Islam that rejects political extremism and secular materialism. Promotes dignity, s	

### Education and Human Development

The results show that the Aga Khan IV's intellectual and developmental worldview is centered on education. According to Stephens (2014), his method sees education as a holistic instrument for human growth that fosters intelligence, moral principles, and social responsibility rather than only as a formal academic learning process. His ideas are consistent with traditional Islamic intellectual traditions that emphasize the pursuit of knowledge, or 'ilm,' as a means of prayer and humanitarian service. As a result, education is regarded as a basic human right rather than a privilege [33].

The findings also demonstrate how the Aga Khan has formalized his educational system through international projects such as the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), Aga Khan Academies, and Aga Khan University (AKU). These schools seek to develop moral leaders who integrate social responsibility and critical thinking. According to Duder (2020), these educational initiatives promote leadership development, service-learning, and community involvement, showing how education can equip people to tackle real-world issues rather than just concentrating on academic success [34].



**Figure 4. The Institute of Ismaili Studies**

Additional evidence from the literature suggests that Aga Khan sees education as a tool for emancipation, especially for underprivileged groups in the Global South. His programs give to underprivileged neighbourhoods, rural residents, and women's empowerment. Esmail (2018) claims that in the Aga Khan's vision, education serves as a means of reducing dependency, ending poverty cycles, and creating a knowledge-based society. This method is an adaptation of Paulo Freire's philosophy of education as a means of achieving independence within an Islamic ethical framework [35].

The results also show that a distinguishing characteristic of the Aga Khan's method is the incorporation of spiritual and moral education. According to him, education must do more than just impart knowledge; it must also mould behavior and character. According to Stephens (2014), AKDN educational programs incorporate ethical education through a curriculum that supports compassion, pluralism, integrity, and stewardship. In addition to producing professionals, these ideals are meant to produce "agents of social transformation" who support just and peaceful societies [36].

Finally, reports from UNESCO (2021) acknowledge the global influence of Aga Khan's educational programs across continents such as Africa, South Asia, and Central Asia. In vulnerable areas, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has increased access to high-quality early childhood education, teacher preparation, digital literacy, and postsecondary education. These initiatives have bolstered civil society institutions, encouraged human capacity development, and supported national education reforms. According to the findings, education is the foundation of the Aga Khan's model for long-term human advancement rather than only an institutional focus [37].



Figure 5. Aga Khan University, Nairobi, Kenya

### **Faith-Based Sustainable Development**

The results show that the Aga Khan IV has established a novel approach to development motivated by faith that combines contemporary development theory with Islamic principles. One of the biggest private development organizations in the world, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), operationalizes its strategy. In contrast to conventional faith-based organizations, the Aga Khan prioritizes long-term social change and institution-building over immediate help. According to Badejo (2017), AKDN programs are a unique model of ethical development based on Islamic ideals because they are intended to foster societal cohesiveness, human dignity, and self-reliance rather than dependency [38].

The study also demonstrates that AKDN functions using a multi-sector development framework that covers a wide range of topics, including microfinance, health, education, economic development, rural development, and humanitarian aid. The organization prioritizes areas impacted by poverty and violence, and it operates in over 30 countries in Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, according to AKDN publications (2022). This broad reach illustrates the Aga Khan's conviction that human ability and local leadership must be developed to solve both material needs and social systems [39].

One of the main conclusions is that the Aga Khan's development plan takes an ethical stance while discussing poverty alleviation and economic growth. His strategy supports rural entrepreneurship initiatives, small business assistance, and microfinance, all of which contribute to inclusive economic systems. According to Karim (2015), these programs enable local communities, particularly marginalized groups like women and rural farmers, to actively engage in economic life. In contrast to Western secular development, which frequently divorces principles from development tactics, the Aga Khan's model unifies development, ethics, and faith [40].

AKDN stands out for its dedication to heritage restoration and cultural development as a basis for identity and peace. According to Blake (2020), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) has rehabilitated public areas, ancient cities, and heritage sites in Afghanistan, Syria, Egypt, India, and Pakistan. In addition to conserving the Islamic architectural legacy, these cultural restoration initiatives boost employment, tourism, and community pride. The results demonstrate that the Aga Khan opposes ideologies of extremism and cultural erasure by seeing culture as a force for societal harmony and intercultural communication [41].

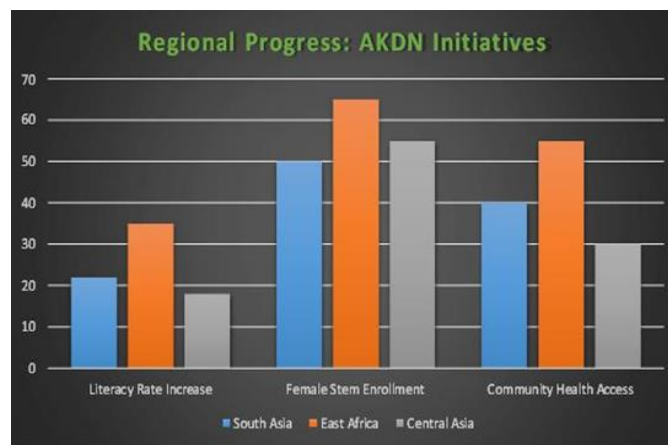


Figure 6. AKDN Education Metrics Across Regions (2010–2023)

Finally, the study found that Aga Khan's sustainable development philosophy aligns strongly with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). His initiatives promote environmental stewardship, community resilience, and social equity while maintaining respect for religious and cultural diversity. Esposito (2018) argues that the Aga Khan offers a global model of Muslim leadership that demonstrates how religion can contribute to peace, ethical governance, and sustainable development [42]. These findings ultimately confirm that the Aga Khan has reshaped the role of faith in development by showing that religion can be a force for global progress rather than division.

## CONCLUSION

According to the study's findings, His Highness the Aga Khan IV is a singular example of modern Islamic leadership that, by using a logical, moral, and development-focused approach, reconciles faith with modernity. The results show that while his focus on ethics and social justice is based on Qur'anic values of justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and human dignity (karamah), his philosophy of Islamic reform encourages ijihad (independent reasoning), pluralism, and intellectual engagement without political confrontation. His development vision places education at the center as a means of emancipation, empowerment, and social change, which results in the creation of international organizations that combine moral responsibility with academic brilliance. Furthermore, through the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), he has pioneered one of the most successful models of faith-inspired sustainable development, demonstrating that religion can be a force for peace, human progress, and global solidarity. However, despite significant scholarly attention to his development

initiatives, there remains a gap in deeper theological and epistemological analysis of his intellectual contributions, indicating the need for further academic exploration of his role in contemporary Islamic thought and renewal.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge Allah SWT for His endless blessings and guidance throughout this research. Special thanks to Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Indonesia; The AgaKhan High School, Mombasa, Kenya; and Islamic Arabic University, Dhaka, Bangladesh for providing access to valuable archival resources and academic support.

### Author Contribution

All authors made equal contributions to the main contributors to the study, all authors read and approved the final research, and all authors stated there was no conflict of interest.

### Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Alwy Ahmed Mohamed and Abdulrohim E-sor, "Zakat as a Legal Obligation in Sharia within the Context of Contemporary Taxation Systems," *Demak Univers. J. Islam Sharia*, vol. 3, no. 02, pp. 229–244, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.61455/deujis.v3i02.345>.
- [2] S. Dewji, "Aga Khan IV and Contemporary Isma'ili Identity: Pluralist Vision and Rooted Cosmopolitanism," *Religions*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040289>.
- [3] B. Yasmin *et al.*, "Cancer profile of Hyderabad, Pakistan 1998-2002," *Asian Pacific J. Cancer Prev.*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 474–480, 2005.
- [4] N. S. Ali, B. S. Ali, I. S. Azam, and A. K. Khuwaja, "Effectiveness of counseling for anxiety and depression in mothers of children ages 0-30 months by community workers in Karachi, Pakistan: A quasi-experimental study," *BMC Psychiatry*, vol. 10, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-10-57>.
- [5] A. A. Mohamed, M. W. Shohib, and ..., "The Contribution of KH Ahmad Dahlan's Thought to the Advancement of the Muslim Community in Indonesia," *J. World ...*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 153–164, 2024, <https://journal.walideminstitute.com/index.php/jwt/article/download/234/506>
- [6] Meti Fatimah, Edy Muslimin, Aminatus Sayidah, and Alwy Ahmed Mohamed, "Technological Mastery and Competence Development of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Wonogiri: Supporting SDG 4 on Quality Education," *Profetika J. Stud. Islam*, vol. 26, no. 01, pp. 245–258, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v26i01.11744>.
- [7] Nur Setia Abuabakar and Alwy Ahmed Mohamed, "Strategies for Cultivating Religious Character in Marginal and Minority Schools: A Case Study at Senior High Schools in the Kupang Archipelago," *Solo Int. Collab. Publ. Soc. Sci. Humanit.*, vol. 2, no. 03, pp. 341–354, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sicopus.v2i03.292>.
- [8] Nahrul Faidin, Tri Marhaeni Pudji Astuti, Sucihatningsih Dian Wisika Prajanti, Puji Hardati, and Alwy Ahmed Mohamed, "Shaping Children's Social Ethics in Female Migrant Families: Islamic Insights on Education and Gender within the SDGs Framework," *Profetika J. Stud. Islam*, vol. 26, no. 01, pp. 321–338, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v26i01.11124>.
- [9] Alwy Ahmed Mohamed, Triono Ali Mustofa, Mahmudulhassan, and Mariam Elbanna, "Negotiating Muslim Youth Identity in Southeast Asia: Psychosocial and Islamic Educational Perspectives," *Solo Universal Journal of Islamic Education and Multiculturalism*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 241–252, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.61455/sujiem.v3i2.410>.
- [10] Alwy Ahmed Mohamed, Md. Riazul Haque and Alaa Alkhateeb, "Islamic Law in Plural Legal

- Systems and the SDGs: A Comparative Analysis of Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Kenya,” *Demak Universal Journal of Islam and Sharia*, vol. 3, no. 02. pp. 183–198, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.61455/deujis.v3i02.412>.
- [11] Aisah Humairo Zen Kholis, Ainur Rhain, and Alwy Ahmed Mohamed, “Interpreting Faith and Good Deeds Through a Gender Lens: Insights from Thematic Qur’anic Exegesis,” *Solo Int. Collab. Publ. Soc. Sci. Humanit.*, vol. 3, no. 03, pp. 457–474, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sicopus.v3i03.360>.
- [12] S. Abid, A. B. Khalid, S. Awan, H. A. Shah, S. Hamid, and W. Jafri, “Value of Adjusted Blood Requirement Index in determining failure to control bleed in patients with variceal bleeding,” *Eur. J. Gastroenterol. Hepatol.*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 344–348, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1097/MEG.0000000000000275>.
- [13] L. Hakim, “Pemerataan akses pendidikan bagi rakyat sesuai dengan amanat Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional,” *EduTech J. Ilmu Pendidik. Dan Ilmu Sos.*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 53–64, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.30596/edutech.v2i1.575>.
- [14] S. Dewji, “The Aga Khan’s Discourse of Applied Pluralism: Converging the ‘Religious’ and the ‘Secular,’” *Stud. Relig. Relig.*, vol. 47, no. 1, pp. 78–106, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008429817713738>.
- [15] S. Resham, M. R. Raza, B. M. Qureshi, A. Rizvi, M. S. Ashraf, and S. Altaf, “Prognostic factors and their influence on therapeutic outcomes in children and adolescents with parameningeal rhabdomyosarcoma: A multicenter study from Pakistan,” *Pediatr. Hematol. Oncol. J.*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 6–11, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.phoj.2020.02.002>.
- [16] M. S. Yousuf, A. Saleem, A. Monem, Z. Nazir, and F. A. Khan, “Effect of Intravenous Paracetamol on Postoperative Recovery in Children Undergoing Hypospadias Repair under General Anaesthesia with Caudal Block: A Randomised Controlled Trial,” *J. Coll. Physicians Surg. Pakistan*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 11–16, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.29271/jcpsp.2025.01.11>.
- [17] J. Hussain, S. Sajjad, and K. Hussain, “Exploring the determinants of Suicide among Married Women in Chitral, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan,” *Pakistan J. Med. Sci.*, vol. 41, no. 5, pp. 1435–1440, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.41.5.9319>.
- [18] S. Mwanzi *et al.*, “Molecular profile of non-small cell lung cancer in a predominantly Black African population in Kenya: A single institution review,” *Transl. Oncol.*, vol. 55, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranon.2025.102348>.
- [19] F. Daftary, “The Ismailis: a Misrepresented Shi’i Muslim Community,” *Turk Kult. Ve Haci Bektas Veli - Arastirma Derg.*, vol. 2022, no. 102, pp. 11–26, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.34189/hbv.102.001>.
- [20] S. Mukherjee, *Universalising aspirations: Community and social service in the Isma’ili imagination in twentieth-century South Asia and East Africa*. Cambridge University Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316258798.007>.
- [21] R. Sajid, S. N. Adil, Z. Fadoo, S. Sabir, and M. Khurshid, “Use of Intravenous anti-D in patients with refractory and relapsed Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura,” *J. Pak. Med. Assoc.*, vol. 53, no. 11, pp. 537–539, 2003.
- [22] F. Y. Raudlotul and S. F. and J. Mohd, “Islamic Education: The Philosophy, Aim, and Main Features,” *Int. J. Educ. Res.*, vol. 1, no. 10, pp. 1–18, 2013, <http://www.ijern.com/journal/October-2013/18.pdf>
- [23] M. Umer, M. Y. K. Durrani, J. Saeed, and N. Uddin, “Our experience of treating adult bone lymphoma, A retrospective cross-sectional study in a tertiary care center, Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi,” *J. Pak. Med. Assoc.*, vol. 71, no. 8, pp. S83–S86, 2021.
- [24] A. N. Abbasi, S. Zahid, F. Karsan, N. Ali, and Y. Bhurgri, “Lymphoma cases referred to the radiation oncology service of a tertiary Referral University Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan: A retrospective study,” *Asian Pacific J. Cancer Prev.*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 107–110, 2010.
- [25] M. Usman, N. Syed, G. Kakepoto, S. Adil, and M. Khurshid, “Hematological and nonhematological toxicities of imatinib mesylate in patients with chronic myeloid leukemia and gastrointestinal stromal tumor,” *Indian J. Pharmacol.*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 192–195, 2007,

<https://doi.org/10.4103/0253-7613.36538>.

- [26] J. Jahroni, “Ritual, Bid’ah, and the negotiation of the public sphere in contemporary Indonesia,” *Stud. Islam*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 1–35, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v25i1.5308>.
- [27] R. S. Hamid, Tanveer-ul-Haq, I. Chishti, M. Azeemuddin, Z. Sajjad, and B. Salam, “Treatment of intracranial aneurysms using detachable coils; initial results at a University hospital in Pakistan,” *J. Pak. Med. Assoc.*, vol. 60, no. 8, pp. 638–641, 2010.
- [28] M. Wajid, S. Sattar, F. Khalid, and M. Q. Masood, “Efficacy and Tolerability of Semaglutide in Patients With Type-2 Diabetes Mellitus: Experience of a Tertiary Care Hospital, Pakistan,” *Clin. Med. Insights Endocrinol. Diabetes*, vol. 16, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/11795514231213568>.
- [29] M. Saeed, K. Khawaja, I. Rizwana, I. Malik, J. Rizvi, and A. Khan, “A clinicopathological analysis of ovarian tumours.” *J. Pak. Med. Assoc.*, vol. 41, no. 7, pp. 161–164, 1991.
- [30] S. Resham, R. Khan, S. Ashraf, A. Rizvi, and S. Altaf, “Clinical Features and Treatment Outcomes of Children with Anaplastic Large Cell Lymphoma in Pakistan: A Multicenter Study,” *J. Pediatr. Hematol. Oncol.*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 298–302, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1097/MPH.0000000000001451>.
- [31] Agustari, and Toni Kurniawan, “Strategi Kebijakan Pembangunan Sosial Melalui Gerakan Filantropi Islam Di Kabupaten Belitung,” *Fikri J. Kaji. Agama, Sos. dan Budaya*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 116–133, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.25217/jf.v7i2.2534>.
- [32] B. Tedja, M. Al Musadieq, A. Kusumawati, and E. Yulianto, “Systematic literature review using PRISMA: exploring the influence of service quality and perceived value on satisfaction and intention to continue relationship,” *Futur. Bus. J.*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1–9, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-024-00326-4>.
- [33] O. Jamy, A. Rafiq, A. Laghari, and T. Chawla, “Male breast cancer: A 24-year experience of a tertiary care Hospital in Pakistan,” *Asian Pacific J. Cancer Prev.*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 1559–1563, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.7314/APJCP.2015.16.4.1559>.
- [34] A. A. Abidin and M. A. Murtadlo, “Curriculum Development of Multicultural-Based Islamic Education As an Effort To Weaver Religious Moderation Values in Indonesia,” *Int. J. Islam. Educ. Res. Multicult.*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 29–46, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.47006/ijierm.v2i1.30>.
- [35] T. Burki, “Prince Karim Aga Khan IV,” *Lancet (London, England)*, vol. 405, no. 10484, p. 1048, 2025, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)00587-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)00587-2).
- [36] N. Khouri and J. Pereira Leite, “Lusophone Ismailis, the Aga Khan and Portugal: more than a century of history (19th-21st century),” *Melanges Casa Velazquez*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 299–324, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.4000/mcv.20283>.
- [37] H. Emadi, “Minority, Marginality and Modernity The Ismaili Community of Behsud, Wardak Province, in Afghanistan’s Polity,” *Int. J. Minor. Gr. Rights*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 713–741, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-bja10109>.
- [38] F. Dhalla, S. Lalani, A. Babul, and S. Daredia, “Devotional Literature and Songs of Worship as Complementary Texts for the Ismaili Muslim Community,” *Int. J. Relig. Spiritual. Soc.*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 19–43, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v13i02/19-43>.
- [39] K. Andani, “Evolving Creation: An Ismaili Muslim Interpretation Of Evolution” *Zygon*, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 443–466, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12774>.
- [40] F. Daftary, “The Ismailis: a Misrepresented Shi’ Muslim Community,” *Turk Kult. Ve Haci Bektas Veli - Arastirma Derg.*, vol. 2022, no. 102, pp. 11–26, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.34189/hbv.102.001>.
- [41] K. H. Karim, “Ismailis: A Pluralist Search for Universal Truth,” *Handb. Contemp. Islam Muslim Lives*, vol. 1, pp. 103–122, 2021, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32626-5\\_98](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32626-5_98).
- [42] B. Bolander, “Scaling value: transnationalism and the Aga Khan’s English as a ‘second language’ policy,” *Lang. Policy*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 179–197, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-017-9435-5>.