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Aga Khan's Big Deal

From a repatriation mission to a generous friend of East Africa with millions of dollars invested in the region, the Aga Khan and his apex institution, the Aga Khan Development Network has a long-standing relationship with the region with both social and economic interventions.

by **Kimani Chege** — July 10, 2018

His Highness Aga Khan meets Uganda President Yoweri Museveni



At the peak of the authoritarian rule of Uganda's Idi Amin, hordes of Ugandans of Asian origin were kicked out of the country after receiving 90 days' ultimatum to leave. Some of these people's forefathers had established roots in Uganda for almost a hundred years but the executive order ignored the vital role the community was playing, particularly in the country's economic prosperity.

It was during this period, 1972 to be exact, that a young Aga Khan made a frantic call to then Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau – father to the current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau – to allow the repatriation of some of the communities to Canada. A long-term friend of the Canadian, the Aga Khan convinced the Prime Minister that the group to be resettled in Canada was well educated and carried special business skills that would benefit the host country.

Since then, the community that settled in Canada as well as other countries outside Africa have always come back home to enrich East Africa through skills as well as doing business. Uganda has in turn worked on erasing its dark past and has managed to cement its relationship with the Aga Khan and his Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN).

AKDN activities in the country now extend from infrastructure projects such as the Bujagali Hydropower station that is providing nearly 50 percent of the country's electricity to an early childhood education programme which has benefited over 60,000 boys and girls. AKDN's work also ranges from an economic development project that provides essential anti-malarial pharmaceuticals that have treated over seven million people to an advanced nursing studies programme that provides professional career development and clinical training to hundreds of nurses.

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As part of Uganda's 55th Independence Day celebrations, on October 8, 2017, the Aga Khan was conferred with the Most Excellent Order of the Pearl of Africa the country's highest honour, by His Excellency President Museveni of Uganda.

The other East African countries have not been left behind with major social and economic engagements with the Aga Khan. Kenya has granted His Highness recognition granted to the highest officers, Chief of the Order of the Golden Heart of Kenya (CGH, 2007) as well as the honorary citizen of Kisumu city. Tanzania has also granted the Aga Khan honorary citizenship.

This marked a long-standing relationship between the Aga Khan and East Africa. The region has been a major beneficiary of both direct assistance from the Aga Khan as well as assistance from the communities who in the past have benefited from the good work of the Imam of Ismailia Muslims.

Aga Khan has not just benefited Ismailia communities, but his work which straddles numerous geographical locations, and sectors has touched all the aspects of life of East Africa. This has touched on common aspects of the economies of the region. For example, in southern Tanzania, micro saving skills among women in Lindi and Mtwara has helped communities, of whom about 43% did not have access to financial services, meet their basic needs. In Kaloleni, Kilifi and Kinango, three of Kenya's poorest and most drought-prone districts, the work by the Aga Khan agencies to build dams and small farm reservoirs that provide access to water for domestic and productive use in the target communities, has helped numerous households increase their agricultural production and incomes.

Activities of the supreme leader have been many and impactful. These are found in all sectors of East African economies including agriculture, tourism, media, finance, insurance telecommunication, and manufacturing. They are divided into three main categories based on the work they do all under the umbrella of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN).

AKDN annual budget for not-for-profit activities is approximately \$600 million – mainly in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The AKDN works in 30 countries around the world, and employs over 80,000 paid staff, mostly in developing countries. While the agencies are secular, they are guided by Islamic ethics, which bridge faith and society.

His entities include the Aga Khan Foundation, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance, Aga Khan Education Services and Aga Khan Health Services. All these have a great presence in East Africa each with specific role.

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In all these investments, the Aga Khan network has had a personal touch beyond the general development. For example, Muriuki Njonjo, Head of Public Relations at BlitzCrypto, a former student of University of Waterloo in Canada is a graduate of the famed Aga Khan Academies.

During his time in the Mombasa Aga Khan Academy, he was introduced to an intensive and specialized education system that has since catapulted him to the global arena as he undertook an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma. After initiating several projects for the community around Mombasa, Njonjo was lucky to be enrolled to the Canadian University where during the stint was able to initiate a Mombasa version of TEDx talk show known as TEDxYouth event.

"Since joining Waterloo, I have been involved in the organization of the annual TEDx event, I have delivered a start-up pitch for funding at Velocity, the world's largest free business incubator, and I have been privileged to join the first incorporated block-chain community management firm in North America as the Head of Public Relations," notes Njonjo.

Just like Njonjo, the Aga Khan network has had tremendous impact on the communities across the East African region. The Aga Khan himself spent his formative years in Nairobi and is quite well-versed with life of people in the region.

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is a private, not-for-profit, non-denominational international development agency that works to improve the quality of life of communities in remote and resource poor areas. In East Africa, AKF works with partners to improve quality of life by promoting and developing innovative solutions to the challenges of development in Kenya, Tanzania

and Uganda. Reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of development, AKF's programmes in the region encompass education, health, early childhood development, rural development and the strengthening of civil society.

Building on this historical presence in the region and working closely with the Ministries of Education in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, the Foundation aims to enable more children to access education, stay in school longer and attain improved learning outcomes.

While tackling education in the region, the entities are aware on the need to provide healthy diets to the families. The Aga Khan Foundation established the Coastal Rural Support Programme, Tanzania, or CRSP(T) in 2009, to support the Government of Tanzania's national strategy for growth and poverty reduction. CRSP(T) currently operates in two of Tanzania's poorest provinces, Mtwara and Lindi where it is working to increase production and productivity of important staple food crops like rice, and cash crops like sesame, by training farmers on new farming techniques and technologies.

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The Programme also helps to build relationships between farmers and agro-traders and processors to provide new, higher value markets for produce. In order to help rural communities, particularly women, manage risk more effectively CRSP(T) promotes community-based savings groups (CBSGs) in its Programme areas. To date, CRSP(T) has reached approximately 150,000 beneficiaries (over 50 percent female), with an annual budget of approximately \$2.5 million.

Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) is the commercial arm of the Aga Khan's work. Today, the project companies of AKFED are dedicated to promoting private initiative and building economically sound enterprises in Kenya and throughout the developing world. Surpluses generated by the Fund are reinvested in other economic development initiatives under the AKFED umbrella. These are found in all sectors of East African economies including agriculture, tourism, media, finance, insurance, telecommunications, and manufacturing.

Some of the companies under AKFED umbrella include Nation Media house, the leading media house in Eastern Africa, Jubilee Insurance, the oldest composite insurance company in Kenya with 80 years of experience, Diamond Trust Bank (DTB) a fully-fledged commercial banking group in East Africa with branches in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, Serena Hotels with nine hotels, resorts, lodges and camps in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. AKFED also owns IPS group of companies which comprise of several food and agro-processing industries that produce meat, fruit and vegetable products for local, regional and international markets. These companies include: Farmers Choice Ltd. (FCL), Premier Food Industries Ltd. (PFIL) and Frigoken Ltd. (FKL).

In health, Aga Khan Health Services run and manage the Aga Khan University hospital, one of the largest non-profit, private healthcare systems in the developing world. In Tanzania, the expansion of AKDN's East Africa Integrated Health System includes an investment of \$83 million, to establish a network of 35 outreach health centres and an expansion of the Aga Khan Hospital in Dar es Salaam. In Uganda, the expansion of AKDN's East Africa Integrated Health System includes a \$100 million investment in a new hospital in Kampala.

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The commemoration of His Highness the Aga Khan's Diamond Jubilee is in keeping with a longstanding tradition of marking historic milestones of the Ismaili Imam.

The commemoration is an opportunity for the Ismaili community and those serving the agencies and institutions of the Imam to express their appreciation for His Highness's leadership and commitment to improve the quality of life of the community and those amongst whom it lives. It is also an occasion for His Highness to recognise the friendship and longstanding support of leaders of state, government, and other partners in the work of the Imam, and to set the direction for the future, including the launching and laying of foundations for major new initiatives and programmes, guided by the social ethic of concern for the vulnerable in society.

This historic commemoration began on 11th July, 2017 and concludes on the 11th July, 2018.

During the year, His Highness has accepted invitations from various Heads of State and has undertaken formal visits to

countries which have longstanding and close relations with the Imam. During these visits, in addition to meeting with members of the Ismaili community, he has engaged in activities related to the projects and initiatives of the Ismaili Imam including those of the AKDN.

In keeping with historic tradition and past practice, the year-long Diamond Jubilee has been an occasion for the Ismaili community to offer voluntary service and material gifts to the Aga Khan as an expression of its love and appreciation. These gifts will be used by His Highness to underwrite significant development projects and initiatives of the Imam. Historically, such projects have included the establishment, amongst others, of schools and institutions of higher education, hospitals, poverty reduction programmes, and economic development agencies that serve the development plans of the nations the AKDN operates in.

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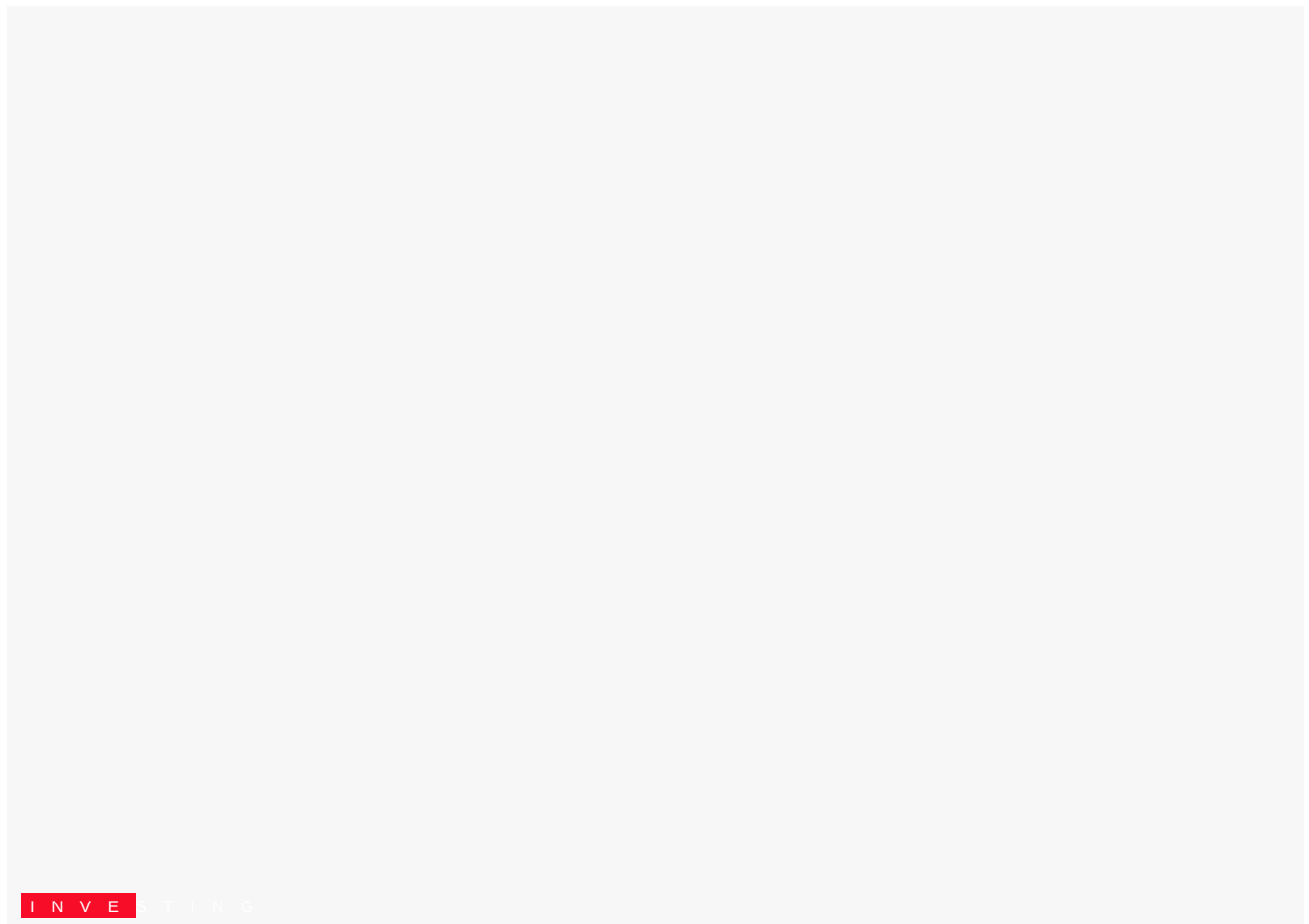
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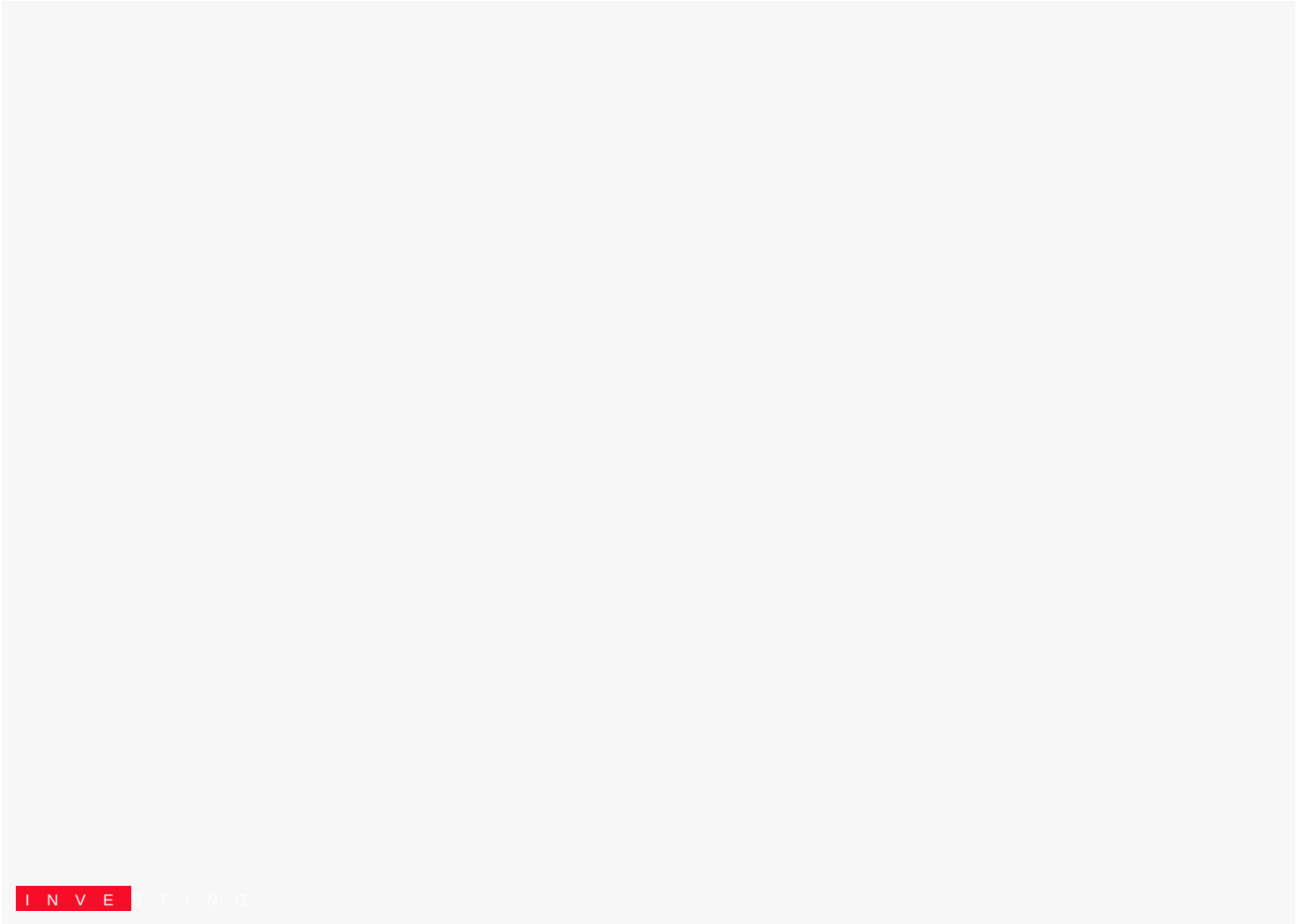
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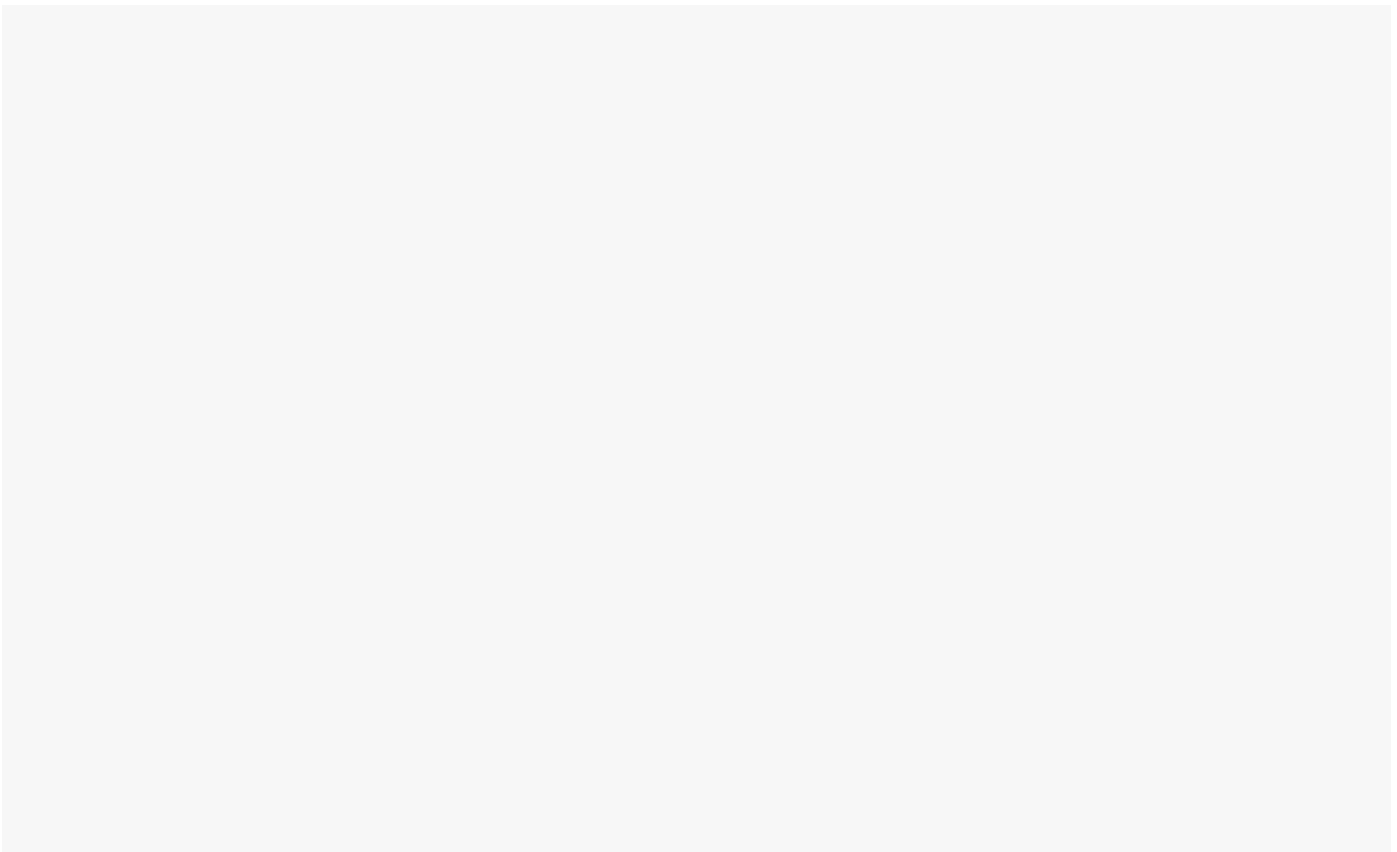
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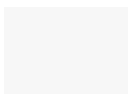
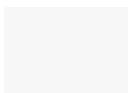
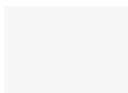
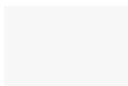
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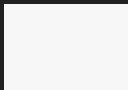
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