**Opus Prize Nomination**

Nominator Information

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Nominee Information

Nominee: Father Godfrey Nzamujo

Organization: Songhai Centre

Website: [www.songhai.org](http://www.songhai.org)

Address: BP 597, Ouando, Porto Novo, Republic of Benin

Phone (Songhai administrative offices): 011-229-20-24-60-92 or 011-229-20-24-68-81

Email: nzamujo@songhai.org or gnzamujo@yahoo.com

Age: approximately 63

Faith affiliation: Catholic (Dominican priest)

Awards or recognition: Fr. Nzamujo received the 7th Leadership African 93 Award by the Hunger

Project in Tokyo in 1993.The Songhai Centre has achieved recognition by the United Nations as a Center of Excellence for Sustainable Development. In 2000, Songhai Centre received the Excellence Award by the Benin national lottery for its leading role in the development of agriculture and animal husbandry and also was awarded the “Best Local Initiative Prize” for setting up profitable agricultural systems at the Hanover World Exposition in Germany. In 2008, Songhai received the Award on Special Achievements in Agricultural Entrepreneurship” by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the Special and Steady Achievements for South South Cooperation Unit of the UN. In 2010, the Centre received a letter of appreciation from UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon after his three-day visit to the center.

How the nominee’s core values align with the opus prize: *see pages 2-3*

How the nominee’s business principles align with the Opus Prize: *see pages 3-4*

Nominator Relationship to Nominee

I first met Fr. Nzamujo in summer 2007 when Gonzaga University offered its first faculty-led study abroad experience in Benin. I have co-led or led a study abroad experience to Benin each summer since then. While in-country, we stay at the Songhai Centre in Benin. A highlight of our visits is always the personal time we have with Fr. Nzamujo. In summer 2012, when we did not have enough students to offer a student experience in Benin, Gonzaga provided support for me to travel to Benin, Songhai Centre hosted my visit, and (with two colleagues) provided consultation to Songhai Centre on issues related to developing a health center and developing written materials about the center. I have come to admire Fr. Nzamujo’s vision, values, energy, kindness, and humility. In my eyes, he is a hero and most deserving of an Opus Prize.

**How the Nominee’s Core Values Align with the Opus Prize**

When I first read the core value of the Opus Prize Foundation, Fr. Nzamujo immediately came to mind. His work is innovative, has a humanitarian focus, and is guided by entrepreneurial and servant leadership principles. While is difficult to fully represent this amazing individual in just few short pages, from my perspective, he exemplifies each of these values:

Social Entrepreneurship

Fr. Nzamujo is a charismatic and visionary individual who helps young African men and women realize their potential by developing economically and environmentally sustainable agribusinesses and cottage industries. His vision is to prevent the migration of African young people from the villages to big cities by making rural settlements economically viable. These “green villages” will be largely founded on agricultural production in order to both be self-sufficient and provide food security for other areas in Africa. Key words in Fr. Nzamujo’s vocabulary are “innovation, integrated projects (agriculture, industry, and service), and perseverance.”

Transformational Leadership

In addition to teaching young people skills that will lead to self-sufficiency for both themselves and their community, Fr. Nzamujo emphasizes the development of “human capital,” including cultural, social, spiritual, technical, organizational, and economic skills so that young people will have a “innovative state of mind” that will enable them to be “masters of their own development,” and “productive actors of rural development.”

Substantive Sustainable Change for the Better

Fr. Nzamujo sees the development of human capital as the key to “raising Africa up” – making individuals less dependent on their governments for day-to-day needs, and make Africa less dependent on outside help for meeting its basic needs. The Songhai model demonstrates that “despite a myriad of constraints, it is possible for agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa to develop, prosper, and become attractive.” Songhai Centre provides a culture of success that increases both self-confidence and skills that enable young people to “generate economic, social, and moral wealth that be shared with the rest of the world and in so doing becoming a positive force in a globalizing world.”

Faith that is Lived

Fr. Nzamujo’s faith is manifest is his daily interactions with individuals at Songhai Centre – from his students to government officials. His perseverance in pursuing his vision of increasing Africa’s self-reliance exemplifies beliefs in a higher power and the power of prayer. Fr. Nzamujo sees his work with Songhai Centre as a vocation and true calling.

Service

Fr. Nzamujo and Songhai Centre particularly emphasize developing the capacities of youth, women, and farmers – segments of the population frequently undervalued in Africa. His visions of “green rural cities” and African self-reliance resonate with themes of social justice: lifting up and bringing dignity to populations that have been traditionally ignored and/or exploited. His work is serving not only individuals but, indeed, all of Africa – and all of the world.

Unsung Activities

Fr. Nzamujo is humble. While he responds to opportunities to communicate and share his vision and the Songhai story, it is clear that he would much rather be working alongside Songhai trainees in the farm fields than speaking to a room of officials. The latter is done simply because it is necessary for feeding the vision – and enabling others to learn and benefit from his accomplishments. Despite his humility, however, Fr. Nzamujo has “business smarts” and the capacity to manage a grant the size of that which comes with an Opus Prize.

Dignity of the Human Person

Fr. Nzamujo’s work is all about promoting the dignity of the human person – as well as that of the African continent. Africa’s long history of slave trade, colonialism, wars, famine, and unstable governments is partly responsible for the hopelessness of much of the African population. By developing human capital and helping individuals learn the dignity and value of work, Fr. Nzamujo and Songhai Centre are not only raising Africa up, but also raising up individual Africans.

**How the Nominee’s Business Principles Align with the Opus Prize**

The Songhai model exemplifies the business principles that are essential to Opus Prize aspirations:

An entrepreneurial approach

The Songhai Centre describes itself as “an incubation/training, human resource development center.” Songhai promotes an entrepreneurial spirit by leading by example and providing training programs for young people to build their technical and human capacities. Songhai promotes a sense of creativity and innovation and leadership attitudes that bring positive developments to the lives of African people.

A commitment to integrity

Songhai describes its teachers as “producers and not talkers” and “barefoot researchers.” Songhai also describes itself as a “service center” – providing services such as marketing, input procurement, networking, loans, and advisory services that enable its program graduates to be successful. The promise and integrity of Songhai’s business practices have earned it partnerships with various agencies of the United Nations, the Beninese government, the African Development Bank, Benin’s Ministry of Education, and a range of other international partners.

A focus on excellence and results

As noted above, Songhai fosters its graduates’ success by providing them with a range of supportive services. Songhai reports that, since 1987, over 2600 individuals have been trained and over 1700 have created their own businesses. By using “secondary production” processes to turn agricultural output into food products such as jams, syrups, flour, and packaged rice that are of better quality and less expensive than those of competitors, Songhai shows that its production model is a viable and needed approach to ensuring decent income and working conditions for farmers and producers – and without degrading the natural environment. The positive results of Fr. Nzamujo’s Songhai approach has resulted in the development of five additional Songhai centers in Benin, five in Nigeria, one in Congo Brazzaville, one in Liberia, and one in Sierra Leone.

Administrative capacity

Songhai Centre is directed by Fr. Godfrey Nzamujo, who has completed advanced studies from US institutions in chemistry and microbiology, systems engineering, electrical engineering, computer services, mathematics, theology, and economic philosophy. He recently completed a PhD in management science. Each sector and each physical site of a Songhai Centre has its own skilled director. Songhai Centre has a board of directors, as well as advisory groups in both the US and France. The organization is accustomed to managing large sums received from a variety of different governmental and private sources.

**Information about the Organization with which the Nominee is Affiliated**

Name: Songhai Centre

Address: BP 597, Ouando, Porto Novo, Republic of Benin

Brief history and mission: Songhai Centre was founded by Fr. Godfrey Nzamujo in 1985 on one hectare of marshes given to him by the Beninese government. He started producing crops, vegetables, fruits, and fish with six de-schooled youth. Today, in its four main centers only, Songhai works on over 550 hectares of land and 46 of water, has approximately 400 employees, 500 trainees at any one time, 20,000 visitors per year, and has created a network of over 250 farms producing according to the Songhai model, delivering training, and sharing knowledge and experience. The organization has grown from one to five centers across Benin, five in Nigeria, two in Congo Brazzaville, one in Liberia, and one in Sierra Leone. In 2008, Songhai signed an agreement with the UN to replicate its model in 11 other African countries, and is currently working to open 11 new centers in Benin, including four with the Beninese government. Songhai describes itself as “a catalyst of rural transformation through productive and decent work.” Its motto – “Africa stands up” – is consistent with its purpose statement: “Building the capacities of African local communities in agriculture, agribusiness, and cottage industries to enable them to overcome poverty, and become innovative actors of development by productively and sustainably producing, processing, and marketing their own production, and by sharing knowledge with each other.”

Notable impacts: Songhai Centre currently provides meaningful and decent employment to more than 400 individuals in Benin alone. Of its more than 2600 graduates, over 1700 operate their own successful enterprises. Songhai has developed several different breeds and species of animals and vegetables that are specifically adapted to their agro-ecologic area. In 2010, the Porto Novo center produced more than 500 kg of fish, more than 26,000 tons of chicken, and over 1.6 million eggs. Crop production at its Savalou location is equally impressive. This production of high-quality, inexpensive food has obvious positive impacts on nutrition in Benin. These results have led to the adoption of the Songhai model in several African countries and have it earned it several impressive partnerships and recognitions.

Geographic scope of work: Songhai currently operates throughout sub-Saharan Africa. It also has received inquiries and interest from the governments of Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Ghana, Togo, China, and Viet Nam.

Awareness of the organization locally, nationally, and internationally: The Songhai Centre and its model is *very well-known* throughout Benin and Nigeria. I would characterize the model as being *well known* in other African countries, particularly west Africa. There is limited awareness of the Songhai model elsewhere. I would speculate that there is more awareness of Songhai in Asian countries than in Europe or the US.

How the work of the nominee and organization are inspired by faith: Fr. Nzamujo is a Domincan priest whose work is supported by his church and superiors and informed by his faith. He describes his work in Benin and with Songhai Centre as a vocation and as a calling.

Who is served by the work – and how many: In Benin alone, Songhai Centre employs more than 400 individuals and is working with more than 500 trainees at any one time. The Centre hosts more than 20,000 visitors each year. The ripple effect of its work is profound: program graduates have meaningful employment, provide employment to others, and help feed the populations in their local community as well as throughout Benin.

Role of the organization in community organizing or advocacy: I am not aware that Songhai Centre has been involved in any formal community organizing/political activities. However, through its mission and its work, Songhai advocates for individual/community self-reliance, dignity, and decent work.

Development of the organization over time: As described in the first paragraph in this section, Songhai Centre has grown from a one hectare farm on the outskirts of Porto Novo to five centers in Benin and several more in other countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Starting with a focus on farming, Songhai now offers development programs in clean energy, aquaculture, mechanics, hospitality services, computer services, and retail.

How the organization has served as a model for other organizations: The Songhai Centre in Porto Novo can be thought of as “headquarters” and as a “demonstration project.” Each Songhai Centre in other sites, while built on a common vision and set of values, takes advantage of the resources in its area and is adapted to meet the constraints and advantages of its unique environment.

How the organization’s work has led to fundamental and sustainable improvements in the lives of the people served: As described above, Songhai Centre provides regular, decent employment for the workers at its centers. Its graduates are able to develop sustainable and profitable businesses that support themselves and their employees – and improve the lives of their community through the goods and services they provide, as well as through their purchasing power. The ripple effects of Songhai Centre truly are endless.

**Budget and Fiscal Information**

1. Approximate annual budget: 3,350,000,000 CFA = $ 6,907,810 US (Investment = $2,062,030 US; running = $4, 845, 780 US)
2. Primary sources of funds: Beninese government, United Nations, other governments, private donations, goods and services.
3. Fiscal soundness: very sound
4. Approximate staff size: 400 employees in Benin, including approximately 8 departmental heads, as well as directors at each center.
5. The organization is approved to raise and receive funds from the US
6. The organization projects helping with the development of additional Songhai Centres throughout Africa; however these can be considered “independently owned and operated” by the country in which they are located.
7. The organization has a governing board comprised of primarily Beninese citizens and international advisors. I am not privy to the specifics of its make-up.
8. I have been assured by Fr. Nzamujo, as well as by informed individuals in the US, that Songhai Centre has a solid succession plan.
9. Other relevant information: Fr. Nzamujo and his work embody the Opus Foundation values of integrity, honesty, trust, innovation, and teamwork. He is an inspirational leader whose humanitarian work should serve as a model for other. If one believes that “peace begins with a full belly,” Fr. Nzamujo’s work is profoundly important to all of us.