



THRIVE LOCALIZATION STRATEGY DOCUMENT

MARCH 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The development of the THRIVE Localisation Strategy has been a collaborative and consultative process, made possible through the valuable contributions of many individuals and organisations. With a funding support from FCDO, CAFOD assigned as a lead agency for the development of Localisation Strategy under the THRIVE Consortium, contracted a highly experienced independent consulting firm, named PRECISE – for the development of a high-quality strategy for the successful implementation of localisation within THRIVE program. This comprehensive localization strategy was developed in March 2025, through an inclusive process involving key stakeholders from across the THRIVE consortium and local actors.

CAFOD extends sincere appreciation to all THRIVE Consortium members Goal, Mercy Corps VHF Suisse and CAFOD, and their downstream partners ACRA, ADA, AFAA, CDOM and Stop Poverty Communal Initiative for their steadfast commitment and for generously sharing their time, insights and effort to ensure the process of the THRIVE Localization Strategy. Their contributions helped ensure the strategy is grounded, relevant, and aligned with local realities. We also acknowledge the programme teams and field staff who facilitated consultations and helped ensure inclusive participation throughout the process.

Special thanks are extended to various stakeholders, non-THRIVE partners and international organizations who willingly accepted to be part of the process, providing key informants and participation in the THRIVE Localization Strategy Development FORUM with demonstrated resourcefulness from the wealth of experience, expertise, and knowledge. The motivation and interest demonstrated particularly during the interviews and the FORUM would need to be kept alive. To all key informants and delegates to THRIVE Localization Strategy development FORUM thank you for the rich inputs and support.

We are grateful to the donor, FCDO for supporting THRIVE’s vision for locally led, sustainable development. Their guidance and encouragement have reinforced our collective commitment to shifting power to local actors and enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of our interventions.

This strategy aims to provide a coherent roadmap that aligns with the consortium’s operational realities and the broader localisation commitments within South Sudan. It is both a reflection of THRIVE’s values and a forward-looking framework for partnership and empowerment. Ultimately, it seeks to foster a more locally owned, sustainable, and context-driven development process that places communities at the heart of decision-making and step forward in building resilient, self-reliant communities across the Greater Upper Nile Region.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACRA	Agency for Child Relief Aid
AFAA	Alliance for Action Aid
ADA	Africa Development Aid
BYDA	Bahr-el Ghazal Development Agency
CAFOD	Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CTP	CAFOD & TROCAIRE in Partnership
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
GOAL	An international humanitarian and development organization
HLA	Humanitarian Leadership Academy
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
ICR	Internal Cost Recovery (operational cost-sharing)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
INGO	International nongovernmental organization
LNNGO	Local and National NGOs
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan
RRC	Relief Rehabilitation Commission (South Sudan)
SRRA	Sudan Relief Rehabilitation Association
THRIVE	Transforming Household Resilience Through Inclusive Economic Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CAFOD in collaboration with THRIVE Consortium Members retained the Services of an external consultant from PRECISE a Regional Agency providing services in organizational development strategic planning systems change and research to support the development of the THRIVE Localization Strategy in March 2025.

Localization in South Sudan has been undertaken by international humanitarian agencies, which have formulated and enacted a range of initiatives, forums, and platforms for engagement and dialogue in Juba and some of the State headquarters. Invariably, local and national organizations take part by attending such forums and platforms; but do not play any roles in the leadership decision-making and planning processes in the humanitarian systems.

Overall, even though some INGOs have local and national organizations as partners, to which INGOs have invested resources for capacity strengthening to some degree. This notwithstanding, local and national organizations involved take part more in short-term humanitarian activities. Such activities target specific community localities and cohorts in the population such that none of the local and national organizations have a long-term and national perspective in implementing such activities.

In addition, the localization engagement does not always directly engage the local communities, *Duty-Bearers*, and a link between the local and national organizations and donors, on the one part. On the other, the localization model in place has not created spaces, scope, and defined functions and roles for the local and national organizations to drive locally owned and locally led humanitarian systems and intervention responses.

The findings gathered in the process of the THRIVE Localization Strategy Development process have been analyzed and synthesized to indicate the nature of local civil society and the typology of local and national organizations in South Sudan. This will facilitate new perspectives for innovation in engaging them in the localization processes. Some pitfalls, gaps, and key elements in localization have been identified and have been presented analytically in this strategy to facilitate their being addressed.

The comparative advantage of the THRIVE Consortium Program members and partners has been documented alongside the key themes of the THRIVE Localization Strategy and related Recommendations to link the space of reflecting for execution, and innovation towards a more effective model that will catalyze the pace in localization, informed by intentional co-creation, co-ownership in the approaches and processes, as well as creating evidence-based functions, roles, scope of authority, and responsibility for leadership, decision-making, organizing and coordinating locally owned-locally led humanitarians systems under the THRIVE Consortium Program.

The Localization strategy carries five key recommendations thus; THRIVE Consortium Program

- Prepares a system-wide introductory process for systems change mechanisms to address presumptions and gaps
- Invests in Capacity Strengthening & co-shared dialogue engagement
- Engages and enhances forums for Trust-building relations & communication management between parties
- Invests in local leadership capabilities for locally-led, locally-owned humanitarian systems
- Promotes knowledge Development promoting continuing learning on localization approaches, mechanisms, & evidence gathering on impact outcomes linked to advocacy and resource mobilizing

The THRIVE Localization Strategy aligns with the THRIVE Consortium Program and the relevant national localization initiatives of the Humanitarian Country Team, the Localization Working Group, NGO FORUM including the Global Charter for Change, the Grand Bargain, and Pact for the Future among others.

The THRIVE Localization Strategy document outlay is thus:

Section 1.0 presents this Executive Summary. **Section 2.0** provides an overview of the Operating Context. **Section 3.0** provides a Background of Local and National Organizations in the context of localization in South Sudan. **Section 4.0** Provides a glimpse on the Evolution of Localization in South Sudan while **Section 5.0** summarized some Preconditions for Localization.

Section 6.0 provides the THRIVE Localization Strategy Theory of Change Statement, THRIVE Localization Vision, and Themes.

Section 7.0 presents Assumptions, and **Section 8.0** presents Risks and Disruption. **Section 9.0** provides the proposed Recommendations. **Section 10.0** provides a Summary Conclusion.

The THRIVE Localization Strategy document has taken account of the THRIVE Consortium Program setup for relevant to South Sudan and increasing the pace of a systems change in localization embracing the stated overall Program Theory of Change amplifying its transformation toward locally owned and locally led humanitarian systems. This document will serve as a reference for THRIVE Consortium Members, Partners, donors and other actors in localization not only in implementation but also as a guide to a systems change learning from the wealth of knowledge and best practices to be generated during the execution of the Strategy for scaling to local communities and among other actors.

2.0 CONTEXT OF OPERATION

2.1 Setup for Developing THRIVE Localization Strategy

CAFOD & TROCAIRE in Partnership retained an external from PRECISE, a Regional Agency providing technical support services in organizational development, socio-economic development, and research on peace to facilitate the development of the THRIVE Localization Strategy. This task was undertaken in March 2025 involving THRIVE Consortium members, their partners as well as, local and national organizations including other agencies and platforms engaged in localization in South Sudan.

The localization strategy development process was consultative using adaptive learning and participatory approaches to collect qualitative data and informed evidence on localization based on the experience of the key informants and their organizations. The process also elicited quality information from a desk literature review process, references to this are included in this document as footnotes citing key documents. Those included in the process of data and information gathering were THRIVE Consortium members, of GOAL, CAFOD, Mercy Corps, and VSF Suisse, and their partner local and national organizations, non-THRIVE organizations, the NGO Forum, the Grand Bargain, Localization Working Group representation, Humanitarian Country Team, representation, among others with interest and interventions on localization in South Sudan.

Key informant interviews were conducted among the THRIVE members and Partners in the Consortium using an open-ended question protocol. This sought to examine the understanding of localization as a concept, its principles, pillars, approaches, and processes, as well as inherent practices, pitfalls, and challenges that have been encountered by the organizations and staff under the THRIVE Consortium Program. Other agencies engaged in Localization were identified and key informants were interviewed with the same protocol for comparative data gathering and expansion of perspectives on localization in the context of humanitarian actors in South Sudan.

A one-day Localization Strategy Development Process Forum was organized in Juba, bringing together delegates from over 12 different interested agencies focusing, or engaged in localization in South Sudan. The Forum used participatory plenary discourse, and syndicate group tasks to review and validate key findings from the data collection process. Based on their practical work in South Sudan, delegates informed the process with experiential evidence on the issues and enriched the findings used to develop the Localization Strategy document. The findings and outputs of the Forum were systematically analyzed, drawing out themes informing the strategy, and the core element for the strategic plan are defined by the key subtitles to the sections of the strategic plan test.

This is a program strategy and its key elements include the factors informing localization as a concept, its principles, process, and approaches. A concise review of the evolution of localization in South Sudan is provided. Some key factors to put into consideration before, during, and after the implementation period of the THRIVE localization strategy have been summarised as part of the background.

Background desk literature review included examining The Grand Bargain Commitments, Charter for Change, Pact for the Future, Community-Led Development, Anticipatory locally-led humanitarian response, and a review of localization as a concept, its principles processes, and inherent implications in the context of South Sudan. The below introduction summarizes key issues for consideration under the THRIVE Localization Strategy.

The consultant used outputs from the process to analyze, and synthesize relevant findings. These were used to develop a draft Localization strategy. The THRIVE Consortium team reviewed the draft and provided useful feedback and insights that were incorporated into the revision for the final document. A popular version was designed from the final THRIVE Localization Strategy Document

2.2 Overview of South Sudan

2.2.1 State of the Country

The Republic of South Sudan is situated in the Greater East and Horn Region of Africa. It is a neighbour to Sudan in the north and northeast, Ethiopia on the east, Kenya in the southeast, Uganda in the South, DR Congo, and the Central Africa Republic in the west. It has a land size of 644,329 km, and a population of slightly over 12 million (*AfDB 2025*). 42% of the total population, comprises children 0-10 and form the largest cohort of the population; 38% of the population are adolescents and youth. 49.5% of the population or 6.1 million comprises women and girls while the male population is nearly the same number. Its composite

ethnic groups include the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk Azande, Lotuko, and Bari; and these can be further clustered into 64 main tribes¹.

South Sudan is severely underdeveloped with a ranking of 185 out of 189 on the Human Development Index (2023). Many parts of the country lack basic amenities, trained competent, and committed personnel to deliver basic services, and supply of adequate quality inputs and resources for providing those services. Children, women, and girls are disproportionately affected by a lack of basic services²². The latest IPC report available (November-December 2024) indicates that 47 percent of the population is rated at an IPC of Phase 3 and 1.71 million people facing critical levels of acute food insecurity at IPC Phase 4. Women and girls are marginalized in access to basic social services in all categories.

The country has led to deep levels of multidimensional poverty, low human and land productivity, spiralling inflationary factors on the economy; high dependency rates at the household level, and very low levels in the delivery of social services have led to a situation of high levels of fragility. Natural disasters including flooding and drought, and the effects of climate change have been recorded to be on the rise, and have caused increased demand for humanitarian aid across many communities.

2.2.2 *Stalling of Peace Processes and Governance*

Since 2018, the government and the opposition have been engaged in peace negotiations under the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS, *signed September 12, 2018*)². This initiative has experienced periods of serious tension between the R-ARCSS peace parties on the agreement. Some of its achievements facilitated relative peace in localities where conflict was the severest. This has created spaces under which the peace parties can work together.

However, given the developments of conflict in the Greater Upper Nile region and continuing tension at the national level, there is a possibility that the cardinal pillars of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan, (*and the outcomes of the Tumaini Initiative*) might begin to shift, due to the lengthy period this process has taken and the transfer of power dynamics that have a likelihood of emerging in the jostling for the next elections.

It appears that the unfinished process of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan has stagnated³. Inherent continuation of conflict incidences of all types and in particular the Greater Upper Nile situation, have created a hindrance. The postponement of elections, and adversarial politics, contribute to a serious breach in safety, security, human rights, and overall, the peace process might lead to an eventual collapse into anarchy. These and other factors indicate a stalling of governance and pose a question on the future of the country.

The humanitarian situation in South Sudan is also exacerbated by conflict in neighbouring countries, especially in the Sudan. A large number of refugees and asylum seekers are reported to have fled into South Sudan and into northern Bahr-el-Ghazal and the Greater Upper Nile. By February 2025, the UNHCR and IOM report that about 1m of this category of people have arrived in South Sudan.

2.2.3 *Humanitarian space with displaced communities, refugees, returnees, and asylum seekers*

Reports by the UNHCR (2025) indicate that South Sudan itself has 2.3 refugees, the majority of them in the neighbouring countries. South Sudan also has internally displaced persons out of conflict, the natural and climate-related disasters. On refugees and asylum seekers, UNHCR reports indicate that the majority of refugees arrive from Sudan and are in Northern Bahr-el Ghazal, and the Northern Upper Nile, Maban, Renk, Ruweng, among other localities in South Sudan.

The IOM reports that with instability in some regions of Ethiopia, Darfur, and the Central Africa Republic, it is expected that refugees and asylum seekers might also come into South Sudan which by January 2025, had reached slightly over 1 million refugees⁴. This situation creates specific humanitarian crises, which can best be addressed by agencies operating in South Sudan.

¹African Security Sector Network, (2024). *Communities of South Sudan*. https://www.africansecuritynetwork.org/HSGO/ss_communities.html

²Horn Policy Brief reportage, <https://horninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/No.-17.-The-Revitalized-Agreement-for-Resolution-of-Conflict-in-South-Sudan-R-ARCSS-1.pdf>

³ACLEDA (January 2025). *South Sudan's peace process stagnates as violence grips Greater Upper Nile region*. <https://acleddata.com/2025/01/31/south-sudans-peace-process-stagnates-as-violence-grips-greater-upper-nile-region/>

⁴Relief Web (January 2025) ... *South Sudan Hits Record One Million New Arrivals from Sudan Crisis* <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-hits-record-one-million-new-arrivals-sudan-crisis>

CTP, GOAL, and other agencies with their partners are operational in the Greater Upper Nile region. In South Sudan, humanitarian crises are more frequent and sporadic due to the diversity of causes of conflict in the communities. 43% of the conflicts in South Sudan occur in the Greater Upper Nile region⁵. This provides a vantage point from which to leverage humanitarian action. Therefore, developing a robust Strategy on how to work with local and national organizations is placed in even greater demand.

2.2.4 *Continually rising cost of operations*

South Sudan therefore experiences complex emergencies rooted in fragility, the frequent triggers of natural disasters, such as floods and drought as indicated in this summary. Frequent local conflicts and the overall tension caused by competition over commonly shared local resources often trigger emergencies. As a result, in nearly all its regions and states, humanitarian needs exist (*OCHA, HRP 2024/2025*).

Due to fragility and conflict, supply routes are affected, raising the cost of goods, supplies, and transportation. In some localities state and non-state actors levy operating agencies fees, and charges not directly connected to the delivery of humanitarian services. With the reduced supply of inputs, such as fuel, support services to humanitarian services such as core cost and risk management, become more costly.

In humanitarian response, both local and international organizations and the UN Agencies have been affected by the impact of the continued inflation in the country. Moreover, operations in different localities have operational challenges due to political interests, conflict, and natural disasters causing poor access to locations due to inadequately developed waterways, road, and air transport infrastructure that confront operating agencies. The requirement for permits and clearances of different types direct from the government, and at times by a local context strongman, or authority has increased the frequency of delays slowing the pace of movement of inputs, and the cost of operations.

The highlighted factors in the operating context affect both local and national organizations in one category, and the international organizations in the same way. With economic pressure slowing down goods supply and inputs, this scenario will need monitoring to identify patterns and trends that might cause disruptions to program execution. Localization as a process, will be affected by increased operating costs, as funding must be high enough to meet this, as well as facilitate INGOs to support core operational costs for the resilience of LNNGOs.

2.3 **Shrinking Humanitarian Aid**

2.3.1 *Demand for functional reforms to make humanitarian systems cost-effective with impact*

Overall, for humanitarian systems worldwide and in South Sudan, there is a great demand for reforms towards localization, cost-effectiveness, and impact. The increase in conflict and disasters has also raised the demand for humanitarian systems to provide social and survival support to needy communities. In South Sudan for instance, the majority of beneficiaries are internally displaced communities, refugees, and returnees from other countries (*1 million from Sudan– Relief Web 2025*); as well as host communities. In conflicts and or disaster situations, refugees and returnees often come with nothing to start life on.

2.3.2 *Shifting in funding and shrinking of aid*

With the shifting in funding and shrinking of aid such as the case of the dismantling of the USAID, and the reduction of Aid by the EU, this has severe implications. Traditional donor-led funding is therefore diminishing, creating huge gaps in government budgets, as well as in other forms of multilateral and bilateral aid, reduced funding to the UN and INGOs. The shift into social impact investment is gaining currency among other options in sources of funding⁶. The competencies and models for diversifying funding are becoming high in demand⁷.

The impact of shifting funding, and shrinking aid not only on agencies that had access to such aid having to lose staff, resources, funding, and other implications; but more so on beneficiaries of humanitarian aid, many among them being the most vulnerable households, children, women, young people and in particular those affected by climate and natural disasters, local and politically motivated conflicts and multidimensional

⁵ACLEDD (January 2025). *South Sudan's peace process stagnates as violence grips Greater Upper Nile region*. <https://acleddata.com/2025/01/31/south-sudans-peace-process-stagnates-as-violence-grips-greater-upper-nile-region/>

⁶Sir Roland Cohen (2016). *Impact Investing Is the Future*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgWJZiRL7BQ>

⁷Sir Ronald Cohen (2014). *The Future of Impact Investing Keynote Address with Sir Ronald Cohen*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iD7zQgU9EW0>

poverty. Operating agencies in South Sudan are increasingly experiencing the impact of shifting funding, and shrinking aid.

2.3.3 Funding gaps

Some of the observable implications include but are not exclusion to funding gaps among many international organizations, leading to the reduction of technical, and management staff, and reduced funding for local and national organizations. The abruptness of the USAID stoppage of USAID created a massive disruption to cashflows. For agencies to fill the funding gaps, they need time and an increased fundraising effort in a dire situation.

2.3.4 Increased insecurity and instability

With the advent of reduced and shrinking funding for humanitarian systems, fragile and economically unstable countries, might drift further into newly increased insecurity and instability related to inadequate and inoperable humanitarian systems⁸ and enhanced multidimensional poverty levels, food, and nutrition insecurity as well as increased mortality due to a weakening of available health services. This is a plausible status for South Sudan given that it has also lost access to oil wealth in the Sudan.

2.3.5 Innovating Models for diversified resource mobilizing

Over the last 25 years, civil society, NGOs, and faith-based entities at all levels have struggled with a continuing shift in their traditional funding base. New forms of funding have emerged but due to the diversity of values. At times, a conflict of values, policy, and interests between sources of funding and these entities appear to have hindered such an exploration. The shift in funding has lately been complicated by shrinking funding, more pronounced in 2025 on account of the stoppage of USAID⁹.

Resource mobilizing continues to be a significant part of operations that links to organizational and institutional resilience. This is an important aspect of priority capacity and organizational strengthening among local and national organizations in South Sudan. The THRIVE Consortium members have an opportunity during the localization strategy to strengthen the most appropriate competencies for an opportune future in resource mobilizing among the partners in the THRIVE Consortium Program.

The options around alternative funding and diversification seem not to have been adequately explored and exploited. A significant shift by governments, philanthropy, and venture capital into social impact investment has created new opportunities linked to social impact which includes impact on the environment and climate issues. Part of this has created what donors and philanthropists refer to as Environmental, Social, and Governance and Social Impact Investment strategies¹⁰. This shift has gained pace with no turning back and has increasingly precluded traditional funding to NGOs.

To tap into social impact investment requires a shift in values, approaches, and competencies in resource mobilizing. It requires a different set of means and tools to track monitor and measure impact. This calls for a paradigm shift in fundraising and resource mobilizing. It demands the innovation of new models for diversifying resource mobilizing. THRIVE Consortium members and partners have the opportunity while working on localization and shifting power in the humanitarian system to also engage donors with support from FCDO to address the future of resource mobilizing for local and national organizations with the resilience of these organizations and sustainability in mind.

2.4 Continuing Increase in Humanitarian Needs

According to OCHA, South Sudan, humanitarian needs are driven by an increased population, (12.1m *AfDB 2024*); and in the context of fragility, this has led to increased population, constant community-based and politically motivated conflict; displacement, and dislocation of communities; an increase in refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries and an influx of returnees; including also a loss of social coping mechanisms among host communities. Often returnees, refugees, and asylum seekers arrive with nothing other than the clothes they wear, presenting a dire need for humanitarian support¹¹.

Humanitarian needs in South Sudan continue to be dire, driven by a range of factors. Among the key factors to this are increased population, loss of social coping mechanisms among host communities caused by

⁸The Guardian (2025). *EU will struggle to fill gap left by USAID as European countries cut their budgets*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/apr/15/eu-struggle-fill-gap-usaid-european-countries-cut-budgets>

⁹Brookings (February 2025). <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-comes-after-a-usaid-shutdown/>

¹⁰Social Impact Investment Taskforce Report (2014). *Impact Investment: The Invisible Heart of Markets*. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/user_upload/Impact_Investment_Report.pdf

¹¹UN OCHA (2025), *Humanitarians Needs Response Plan 2025*. <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1223/document/humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-south-sudan-2025/article/part-1-humanitarian-needs>

constant community-based and politically motivated conflict; displacement, and dislocation of communities; an increase in refugees, returnees, and asylum seekers, and competition over limited shared resources among host communities.

The impact of climate change and natural disasters have become more frequent affecting food production, and livestock. These factors cause community displacement and instability. When communities return to their homelands, they come with almost nothing to find their homes destroyed and have to start from scratch. The process of receiving them resettling, and reintegration has humanitarian challenges as they need assistance. South Sudan is also host to displaced persons from the war in Sudan and this adds to the factors in humanitarian crises in South Sudan.

UNOCHA reviews indicate that approximately 9.3 million people, or 69% of South Sudan's over 12 million population, will require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2025 (*HRP 2025*). It is estimated that due to climate change natural disasters displacement cause thereof. 2.9 million people among them the most vulnerable individuals, including women, children, and displaced populations, will need support with life-saving assistance, protection, and access to basic services¹².

In this context given the socio-political, economic, and evident conflict patterns and trends inside and in the neighbouring countries to South Sudan, not only in 2025, but also for the next three to seven years, the humanitarian context will continue to be challenging. This calls for reflection on how to improve the humanitarian systems to be more effective locally-owned and locally-led. It is in this space the THRIVE Consortium aspires to implement its localization strategy. It will build on its experience, expertise, comparative advantage, and networks in South Sudan with local and national organizations including other actors focusing on localization. With this robust data on its Localization strategy The THRIVE Consortium will be instrumental in catalyzing a faster pace in localization develop enhanced knowledge and tools that facilitate improvements to execute localization better.

At the local level food insecurity, public health challenges such as inadequate access to wash and potable water, climate shocks, and inadequate delivery of basic services are evident. It is in this space that THRIVE Consortium seeks to leverage improvements in the humanitarian systems to enhance the role of local and national organizations to play a lead role. This is where localization seeks to make an impact. The THRIVE Localization strategy development is set in the foregoing operating background.

2.5 Response to the Emerging Factors in the Operating Context

Operating agencies whether UN, INGOs, or LNNGOs will need to build on innovations, agility, and preparedness to address the key factors emanating from the operating context. The emergent factors also reflect the impact of shrinking aid and funding to operating agencies. The key factors can be summarized thus: -

- **Fragility and political instability** as defined by political and economic instability, conflict, and human mobility in the essence of displaced communities, refugees, returnees, and asylum seekers;
- **Increased humanitarian needs** caused by an increase in the population, an increase in the influx of refugees, returnees, and displaced communities including increased frequency of natural and climate-related disasters;
- **Shrinking funding** caused by global funding shifts, donor policies, increased disasters, and conflict worldwide;
- **Shift in different types of “new” funding options**, as demonstrated by the trend toward a preference for more private sector and social impact investment approaches;
- **Increased risk factors and cost of operations** as experienced by the THRIVE Consortium members partners as well as overall operating agencies in South Sudan, and at the local and national organization level, this has a greater implication as they lack funding to core costs and the means (measures and competencies to mitigate risk).
- **Demand for reforms in the humanitarian systems and overall humanitarian sector** as demonstrated by the need for stronger localization and strengthening LNNGOs to be resilient, take on functions and roles in leadership, decision making, execution, and accountability in the humanitarian sector in their context;

¹²UNOCHA (2025). *Humanitarian Needs Response Plan*- <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-issued-december-2024>

Response in this context will require co-created, co-owned collaboration by donors, INGOs, LNNGOs, communities, and the “*Duty Bearers*” at the national regional, sub-regional, state, and county levels in South Sudan. The response mechanisms need to focus on addressing the emergent issues identified in this analysis. Donors, INGOs, and LNNGOs would need to spearhead the response mechanisms that aim at enhancing agility and the creation of needed pathways for effective localization processes, approaches, and methods. In these spaces, competencies for diversifying funding are high in demand.

For operating agencies and local and national organizations as is the case of the THRIVE Consortium Program, working in Consortia, and partnerships offers opportunities for shared risks and shared operating costs and might create added advantage in operating within spaces of shared synergies. THRIVE Consortium members and partners will need to include skillsets for resource mobilizing. This way donors, INGOs, LNNGOs, Communities, and *Duty Bearers* step-up in response to the emergent impact of shifting funding and shrinking aid.

3.0 LOCAL AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN LOCALIZATION

3.1 The Background of Local and National Organizations in South Sudan

Before the creation and emergence of both faith-based and other civil society entities, the roles played by civil society in raising community voices were ably played by local traditional authorities at the early stages. At the local household, community settlement area, and clan level, the role of the traditional local authority was highly regarded, to be legitimate, credible, and accepted at the local society level as providing justice and interested protection of rights at the local level¹³. The role of local traditional authorities was more prominent and integrated with local governance before and during the period of the liberation (1980-2005). The local traditional authority is reported to have also collaborated with the church and para-church entities when responding to humanitarian needs¹⁴.

This role is demonstrated in many local peace initiatives and negotiations for humanitarian response on behalf of communities such as in the Wunlit Peace and Reconciliation Conference (1999) spearheaded by the New Sudan Council of Churches¹⁵; Panakar Peace Conference 2002, Mapel Conference, and other People-to-People Peace initiatives particularly in the Greater Jonglei and Northern Upper Nile, among others. The role of the church, para-church and faith-based entities, and international agencies was crucial in the facilitation of these initiatives¹⁶.

Even though most of these initiatives had a peace banner, the majority of them integrated local traditional authority to address humanitarian action, the rights of beneficiaries, negotiation for priorities, access, and distribution of relief. In that regard, the role of local traditional authorities was significant¹⁷. However, the role of the local traditional authorities has been eroded by the setup of formal local and national organizations, government structures, and the power of INGOs¹⁸. Ongoing community-based, and politically motivated conflict, especially in the Greater Upper Nile (*John Ryle 2017*) has also eroded the space and roles of local traditional leaders and the local and national organizations¹⁹. Other formal initiatives in the humanitarian systems have not provided much space for local and national authorities and entities²⁰.

3.2 Young and Developing Civil Society

3.2.1 Typology of local and national organizations

The civil society in South Sudan is young and developing²¹. The older type of civil society in South Sudan comprise faith-based entities such as church-based Diocese, and para-church organizations such as the Catholic Bishops Conference, New South Sudan Council of Churches; and the Catholic Secretariat among others.

The emergence of local and national organizations began more formally at the beginning of 2000. Some local organizations Such as BYDA, Aweil Development Organization, and others emerged during the period

¹³Rift Valley Institute (2018). *South Sudan Customary Authorities Project reports*. <https://rftvalley.net/projects/sudan-and-south-sudan/south-sudan-customary-authorities-project/>

¹⁴Knowledge, Evidence, and Learning for Development (2017). *Local governance in South Sudan- Overview*.

https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/articles/online_resource/Local_Governance_in_South_Sudan_Overview/26430451?file=48079669

¹⁵NSSC (2024). *From warriors to peacemakers: people-to-people peacemaking in southern Sudan*<https://www.fmreview.org/ouko/>

¹⁶Relief Web (June 2018). *Church and Conflict in South Sudan* <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/church-and-conflict-south-sudan>

¹⁷UNDP South Sudan (2023). *Role of Traditional Leaders in Peace, Security and Development: National Conference*

¹⁸Swiss Journal of Sociocultural Anthropology (). *Between Community and Government Traditional Authorities in Post-Conflict Southern Sudan*.

¹⁹The Chiefs Speak - John Ryle (May 2017). <https://johnryle.com/?article=the-chiefs-speak>

²⁰Summary on -South Sudan Peace Agreements (2029) https://www.africansecuritynetwork.org/HSGO/ss_peace_agreements.html

²¹South Sudan Civil Society Forum. *Global Development Institute (2018). Civil Society: Who are the voices that are rebuilding South Sudan?*

of the war of liberation²². At the time, South Sudan had begun to formulate some semblance of governance structures, and SRRA (*now RRC*), was charged with the responsibility to register local organizations other than the church. Given the context of their operations at that time many of the newly formed civil society local organizations faced many challenges and obstacles among them experienced a lack of a formal operating framework, difficulties in access to communities, lack of funding, and limited cohesion in the sector²³.

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, the majority of the local organizations, such as BYDA and others ceased to operate, leaving just a few such as NILE HOPE. The best of the skilled personnel in these earlier local organizations were absorbed into the newly formed government structures. Therefore, in South Sudan operating local organizations have had two major phases. The phase before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the phase soon after 2013. Apart from the faith-based entities, the majority of the current local organizations mainly originate from 2013.

A cursory review of civil society based on desk literature review during the localization strategy development reveals that, in South Sudan could be clustered in the spheres of, *local community-level organizations*, *location-based in-state and in-county level organizations*, and *national (predominantly Juba-based) organizations*. These spheres denote the space of engagement and interaction with international organizations and the potential influence an organization has, that can contribute to its work in creating change. The inter-organizational communication, engagement, relations and interaction is inconsistent and weak; therefore, they do not operate as a commonly locally-led civil society.

Primarily, even though the Juba-based organizations might be considered “*national*”; their scope in structural, organizational, funding base and human resource might not be sufficient to operate beyond the Juba level and perhaps in a single locality or two inter-state locations. For instance, an organization with its presence in Juba might have personnel and some operating team in Akobo and Ayod (*viz. NILE HOPE*) or Malakal and Bentiu. In such a case, the organization is regarded to be national on the basis that, it is founded and led by nationals, as opposed to the scope of its operations²⁴.

It is also noted that, among the emerged breed of local civil society organizations are women-led local organizations that are proactively taking lead roles in the civil society space. Their roles include representation of women in forums, at state and national level, complementing government, faith-based entities, and the INGOs in addressing local community priorities in especially gender-related, community health, food, and nutrition security work. The local and national organizations, across their landscape, do not operate as an inter-related, interlinked, and collaborative civil society.

3.2.2 Some dynamics and needs in local and national organizations

The foregoing review indicates that there are gaps in how local and national organizations communicate, share information, engage to interact and relate with each other as organizations. Reported evidence from key informants during the development of this localization strategy indicates that local and national organizations perceive one another as competitors for visibility, influence, opportunities, and resources from the INGO community²⁵. Moreover, the majority of the local and national organizations are found to operate mainly in the main towns among them Juba, Wau, Malakal, Rumbek, Akobo, Aweil, Yambio, Yei, and Boma among other centres. The THRIVE Consortium Program will need to explore the scope of reach among the partners they engage with at the local community level for grassroots engagement.

Literature review and key informant interviews during the development of this localization strategy indicated weaknesses and threats in some key areas. Overall, this includes the fact that local organizations have experienced limited internal growth and development. Respondents pointed to aspects of limited institutional-level systems growth and development. This extends also to include inadequacies in internal organizational strength in governance, leadership, direction setting, management which includes clear developed policies and guidelines for their operations.

²²SRRA/RRC Records

²³JSTOR (Nov. 1, 2016, pp. 9-12). *The Role of Civil Society in South Sudan: Challenges and Opportunities*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05156.6?seq=4>

²⁴N. KISUKE (2024) *PRECISE Working Papers – a mimeograph*.

²⁵*Conciliatory Resources: Accord Issue 29 (Sept 2020) International support for civil society involvement in peacemaking in South Sudan*. <https://www.c-r.org/accord/pioneering-peace-pathways/international-support-civil-society-involvement-peacemaking-south>

Local organizations also experience drawbacks and pitfalls in terms of building and retaining adequate levels of operational resources, and competent human resources. When asked to indicate the internal need for capacity strengthening, responses obtained more often depicted the acquisition of equipment, utilities, and assets; but few stated the need for the establishment of systems-wide aspects in local and national organizations.

Key informants also indicated that local and national organizations also have limited capabilities, essential systems for resource mobilizing, human resource management capacities, technical capabilities in program, budgeting and budget management; financial accounting, management; procurement and logistics; as well as in organizational communication and relations management. The gaps also include capabilities for principled organizational culture and professional conduct to forestall factors and attributes of organizational and professional integrity. As a result, some aspects of institutional and organizational growth have been stunted and affect the immediate future in the context of shrinking aid and shifting traditional funding.

These aspects notwithstanding, in practice, INGOs undertake organizational capacity assessment, to identify gaps and the needed capacities before engagement with local and national organizations. The organizational capacity assessment is framed under the commitments to humanitarian accountability standards. The tools for organizational capacity assessment are designed as guidelines by the INGOs conducting the organizational capacity assessment, in line with their capacity strengthening and partnership guidelines. In this respect, inherent guidelines are top-down, i.e. from INGO to LNNGO.

The localization strategy development data-gathering process explored the linkages of local communities, and *Duty Bearers* in existing localization processes. Findings indicated that, in line with the scope for localization, local communities and *Duty Bearers* are not included as part of inherent capacity assessment processes. Therefore, the information, knowledge, and competencies required for them to engage in a localization process are rarely explored and examined for inclusion. Even though this is not intended to disenfranchise any of the key local players, inherent organizational capacity assessment processes and the subsequent intervention do not embrace the scope of how local communities and *Duty-Bearers* are to be engaged for localization. This is a significant gap in the current localization interventions in South Sudan.

The localization strategy development process further sought to establish how current capacity strengthening interventions were designed. Findings indicated that existing interventions in capacity strengthening were designed as manuals, field guides, and handbooks such as; CAFOD's Capacity-strengthening and Localisation - Perspectives from CAFOD and its local partners, TROCAIRE's Partnership in Practice Steps to Localisation, Danish Refugee Council's Guidance Note on Locally-led Mutual Capacity Strengthening, among others. At this level, the pace for inclusion of local and national organizations in determining and leading their internal systems strengthening is less diffused, even though the INGOs have not intentionally elected to make any such exclusions.

Examples of some inherent opportunities available for the THRIVE localization strategy implementation indicate a range of system change needs. This therefore requires a systems-wide approach not only for the LNNGOs, but also for the THRIVE Members and the humanitarian systems level at the national and international levels, which would require advocacy; and at the community and *Duty-Bearer* level, who invariably have roles in humanitarian action and therefore have capability needs. The local opportunities include but are not exclusive to addressing inherent *imbalances and inequalities*, addressing the need for *defining and establishing a common level of understanding, knowledge, and preparedness for localization as a process with principles, pillars, and approaches*; adapting in a relevant manner to contextualize the localization processes.

The opportunities also comprise establishing clarity on *the required preparedness*. This must be examined from the community and *Duty-Bearer* level, then at the THRIVE Consortium Partner level; at the THRIVE Member level, and also at the Humanitarian Sector systems level, engaging other actors. Key elements guiding preparedness would have to carefully examine and clarify preparedness in the context of, *before, during, and after localization* in a defined context, space in time, and with a definite number of LNNGOs in their defined community and *Duty-Bearer* locality; and establishing the *fundamental competencies and skillsets required* at each of the key levels.

Another key element is co-creation a *defined set of attributes that defines the status of the achievement of localization and its impact*. This would have to relate to attributes in the defined context, space in time, locality, and with a definite number of LNNGOs in the targeted community, and collaboration with the

defined Duty-Bearer. This would be a prerequisite to implementing effective localization with impact as can be seen in a learning Model by Somaha Stiftung²⁶.

In addition, key informants and the THRIVE localization strategy development Forum and process identified the need to identify *clear levels at which localization processes will be executed*, especially, *defining the functions, roles, and the levels at which the localization engagement approaches will take place*. This might require *exploring the phases, stages, and steps of engagement and the determined, entry and exit levels in the localization process*. In executing the localization approach and processes in the THRIVE Consortium, with Partners and the relevant communities, and *Duty-Bearers* at the local level. This requires framing how to engage and be inclusive with the *local community, Duty Bearers, Donors, and other actors* in localization. This would include the *phases, stages, and steps* of implementing localization.

The foregoing analysis synthesizes the findings during the THRIVE localization strategy development process. It indicates aspects for which the preparation and execution of an all-inclusive premise for a systems-wide change approach in implementing the THRIVE Consortium localization strategy. This way THRIVE Consortium will have to prioritize the opportunities in its execution plan to be effective as a co-created, co-shared locally-owned, and defined locally-led approaches and processes in localization.

3.3 Summary on the Origin of Localization

Speaking at an engagement forum of the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, Tom Fletcher, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, urged that *“Humanitarians need more to shift power to those they serve” (HLA March 2025)*. This reinforces the mandate and mission: to make learning, leadership, and resources more accessible to first responders on the front lines²⁷.

Since 2017, CAFOD, Tearfund, Christian Aid, OXFAM, and other organizations have led in forums focusing localization in South Sudan and elsewhere in their work to champion the agenda for localization. The origin of localization occurred soon after the crafting of the Sustainable Development Goals, at the World Humanitarian Summit (2016) urged humanitarian agencies. This was further catalysed by The Grand Bargain, Charter for Change (C4C), and other initiatives spearheaded by the USAID. Localization as a theme in South Sudan has a series of research papers by the Feinstein Centre, Tufts University focusing localization of humanitarian assistance²⁸.

Other entities, among them Frontiers in Political Science- Refugees and Conflict Journal have generated relevant case studies that inform localization in South Sudan²⁹. The studies had a particular interest, to highlight factors such as the systematic exclusion and marginalization of local and national actors from the humanitarian systems at the decision-making and leadership level, capacity strengthening needs and increasing funding to local humanitarian actors, and creating more equitable partnerships.

By 2019, CAFOD, published an account on, “Missing Out”, to point out that the ambition for localization as was initially envisaged, responding to the World Forum calls that localization should be accelerated. Overall, CTP has continued to invest resources on documenting localization processes, best practices and developing practice guidelines for use in strengthening localization³⁰. CTP is also open to learning from key roles and alliances its members engage in among the Humanitarian Country Team, Localization Working Group, Charter for Change, and the Grand Bargain among others³¹. Even with these initiatives, the pace for localization is perceived to have been slow in South Sudan as is the case elsewhere. The next section explores some of the aspects which when addressed can enhance the pace of its execution.

3.5 Localization concept, principles, common ground in knowledge, process, and approaches

A cursory literature review, during the THRIVE Localization Strategy development process, indicates that the ambition for localization suggests a shift toward attaining a transformed system-wide model that is more efficient and effective in humanitarian action. This comprises shifting of power for leadership, decision-making, and direction setting, over and above the transfer of financial resources and some technical skills. It also comprises shifting from the traditional humanitarian system with its short-term focus on supply-

²⁶Somaha Stiftung Model. (2024) <https://somaha-stiftung.ch/en/localization-as-a-funding-concept/>

²⁷Humanitarian Academy Newsletter, (March 2025)

²⁸Feinstein International Centre (2022). Localization: Views from South Sudan. <https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Localization-SouthSudan-4.29-final.pdf>

²⁹Frontiers in Political Science- Refugees and Conflict Journal (2021) Making Localization Work

³⁰TROCAIRE (2019). Partnership in Practice Steps to Localisation; See- CTP (2023). Mapping of Funds, Forums, Platforms & Working Groups engaged in Localization -South Sudan

³¹Humanitarian Practice Network (2021). Capacity-strengthening and Localisation: perspectives from CAFOD and its local partners.

oriented actions by local organizations. In this therefore localization presents an opportunity and options for a shift of power to local actors who have invariably been largely excluded and decolonizing humanitarian structures and systems to make them more efficient and effective³².

Localization seeks a paradigm shift to long-term engagement, interactions, and relations that build trust for action with the most directly involved humanitarian responders in context; thus, addressing capacity gaps, defining functions, roles, and scope of authority and responsibility that local actors play in meaningful leadership, decision-making and with access to quality funding which comprises, operational cost and risk-sharing³³.

From this perspective, *Localization as a Concept*, its principles, pillars, approaches, and processes are not understood in the same way among any two or more individuals, or organizations. At the same time, the end-line attributes when localization is realized at any one level, locality, and context are rarely commonly defined documented, and shared. Invariably, the entry and exit phases, stages, and steps are hardly defined between any agencies undertaking localization thus, the spaces, scope, and synergies created by inherent partnership remain with gaps as identified earlier here.

As a result, a common ground of understanding is important for agencies engaged in localization to co-create a functional definition. The definition must appreciate localization as a concept, with principles, facets, and aspects that hold potential for it to be realized. The definition must also define the attributes that must exist when localization is realized in the context engaged agencies work. The definition would have to be instrumental to motivate sustained catalytic interest for sustaining system-wide change utilizing approaches that enforce resilience of defined attributes of localization in context. THRIVE Consortium would need to co-create the spaces and practical action for a documented common ground of understanding, shared information and knowledge, process, approaches, and competencies in localization.

3.5 Localization preparedness, knowledge, competencies, power, and risk sharing

Overall, localization has faced challenges including resistance, power dynamics, and structural inequalities between international humanitarian organizations and local and national organizations. Some issues raised include but are not exclusive to integrity issues at a personal, and professional level, organizational and personal conduct and behaviour issues, unpreparedness to appropriately address organizational relations and communication management, and inherent power relations and its management.

Localization has also been affected and influenced by the level of willingness to acknowledge, create intentional acceptance to cede power, and share risks. On account of their structural stature, resource base (funding, information, communication capabilities, and more competent human resources), technical expertise, and networks with each other and with donors, international organizations have power. This power is perceived easily due to the manner and conduct of business as they engage local and national organizations. The relationships of international organizations among themselves in forums, platforms, and engagements, therefore have dynamics and dimensions that inhibit inclusion.

On the other hand, local, national, and community organizations also have power borne out of their vantage point in knowing the local socio-cultural dimensions, dynamics, and conditions of society they come from and serve. Their niche in being local and the propensity to continue when international organizations leave provides a special niche of power in and over localities that international organizations might not otherwise have and the propensity.

The power basis is not the same in both categories but acknowledging power exists and needs to shift so that humanitarian systems become more relevant, efficient, and effective in context. Power is a dynamic creating dimensions in the conduct, behaviour, and transaction of organizational, professional, and personal relations. These dynamics have an influence and effect on how localization processes are managed and implemented.

In humanitarian systems, the situation before, during, and after humanitarian action poses risks and disruptions can occur. All organizations involved are exposed and can be vulnerable, just as communities affected by crises are. Acknowledging that risk and disruptions will occur posits the preparedness to mitigate. As all involved agencies are exposed, a shared risk approach would be most opportune to use as an approach for the benefit of the whole.

³²Centre for Disaster Philanthropy Resources, (2024). Localization

³³IASC (2022) Guideline on Provision of Overheads to Local and National Partners <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/resources/localization/>

3.6 Collaborating to Address Presumptions and Assumptions on Localization

At the core of these aspects of challenges is the inherent lack of preparedness, at all levels on how to conduct localization from the point of view of levelling expectations and hopes and a glaring lack of commonly shared knowledge on what localization is, its principles, processes and a co-determined approaches and direction how it could be done. Moreover, some silent presuppositions in the background have created misunderstandings arising from factors such as:

- ❖ *International organizations have the knowledge, resources, competencies, the capabilities required; and are the ones responsible for undertaking, and ensuring localization is in place;*
- ❖ *Local, national, and community-based organizations are the ones to be localized during humanitarian action and development interventions;*
- ❖ *Localization will take place when international organizations use capacity strengthening, partnership, and collaboration engagements with local, national, and community organizations;*
- ❖ *Localization has to do with access to funding, equipment, facilities, and utilities facilitated by international organizations to local, national, and community organizations;*

In addition to these presuppositions, the required preparation, knowledge, competencies, and implications localization demands and creates have not been explored fully at the international organization level, as well as by the local and national organizations. The below sections explore some of the key pre-conditions for localization to consider.

4.0 EVOLUTION OF LOCALIZATION IN SOUTH SUDAN

4.1 Summary of the evolving localization landscape

Localization in South Sudan began in 2017 with CAFOD, Christian Aid, OXFAM, Tearfund among others taking lead roles in different actions, studies, reviews, and evaluations. Some of the outcomes of this evolution have been documented to provide status update reports lessons and best practices to share with other agencies. UN agencies and donors among them ECHO have supported localization and championed the inclusion of the localization agenda in humanitarian systems in South Sudan.

In 2023 CTP conducted a systematic broad mapping of the landscape of funding, forums and working groups actively working on localization among actors in South Sudan³⁴. The status of localization in South Sudan was strengthened by the engagement of The Charter for Change, and Grand Bargain, among others, including informed literature from research and journals that reviewed progress on localization. Invariably the role of local, national, and community organizations in the processes addressing localization has been limited to just a few organizations attending forums, and platforms. On the other hand, international organizations create top-down opportunities for engagement with these entities through capacity strengthening and partnerships of one form or another in humanitarian action.

Based on the evolution the Humanitarian Country Team has designed a Localization Vision and Strategy. The Localization Working Group in liaison with the NGO Forum, and the South Sudan Humanitarian Fund has encouraged and promoted the engagement of local, national, and community organizations in the localization dialogue. In 2024, a South Sudan Localization Lab was launched.

Broadly localization has not been approached with adequate preparedness at all levels to create a common ground in knowledge and share a common understanding of the required preparedness, competencies, and engagement in a co-shared exploration of the implications, risks, disruptions, and aspects of shifting power. Local and national organizations continue to be subcontractors to international organizations and receive limited support for operational costs and risk-bearing. There are power, structural, resource inequalities, and imbalances, as leadership and decisions in the humanitarian systems and in the sector as a whole remain in the international organizations³⁵.

Moreover, localization has been primarily discussed and included as part of partnership and partnering, and capacity strengthening interventions by INGOs with targeted local and national organizations. Invariably then, communities and Duty-bearers have not been included in localization. Moreover, localization at the state, county and community levels has been expressed in forums at the main urban settings only. This has led to a situation where only very few local and national organizations with a presence and capability to operate in the few states level urban centres such as Malakal, Wau, Rumbek and Juba among few others.

As a result, local and national organizations are not in leadership and experience a measure of exclusion, as they have no room and power in decision-making in the humanitarian system. This has undermined the opportunity in which local and national organizations have not gained access to spaces and functions in which they play significant roles in the humanitarian system³⁶. The factors raised here need to be addressed to foster better engagement in partnering, coordination, and collaboration between INGOs and LNNGOs.

This will require setting up intentional localization strategy approaches that are all-inclusive. Such strategic approaches need to have the capacity to co-create clearer functions, roles, and processes with a defined scope of responsibility, and authority for local and national organizations. This would be a pillar for transformative engagement in the follow-up mechanisms and accountability for transformative reform of the humanitarian system in South Sudan and bring LNNGOs to spaces of leadership, decision-making, and management of processes in humanitarian systems in a resilient manner³⁷. This would contribute to the co-creation of pathways for addressing inherent power dynamics and provide pathways in reforming inter-organizational transactional practices, communication, and relations management, and also transforming the type and quality of partnership and partnering processes between INGOs and LNNGOs.

4.2 Growing local potential for locally-led, locally-owned humanitarian responses

Given the foregoing context in humanitarian action and basic services, over the last 7-9 years, local organizations have emerged. The local civil society has re-emerged having been diffused first during the

³⁴CTP/Merl (June 2023). *A Mapping Exercise: South Sudan Localisation Funds, Forums and Platforms*

³⁵Kemmerling, (2024). *Spotlight on Humanitarian– Development– Peace Nexus Implementation in South Sudan: Localisation from a Decolonial Perspective*

³⁶Humanitarian Aid International, (September 2024). *An Unfinished Agenda Beyond 2026*

³⁷InterAction, (2023). *Report of InterAction's Mission to South Sudan.*

formation of government in the period 2005-2006. The remaining few had their growth and development affected negatively by among other factors, the eruption of conflict and political upheavals of 2011-2013.

The current local civil society has grown out of increased humanitarian needs in a very unstable context. Invariably many of the local organizations do not raise their own funds, but rather, they have been partners to international organizations. Some of the local organizations have been resilient in a very competitive operating environment.

The engagement in such partnerships has been through either memorandum of understanding or contractual engagement.

On this basis, the local organizations have had limited power in determining the cause of intervention as well as the future of the interventions in the context they implement. The limited power for decision-making and space for local organizations to have scope for the determination of the direction of interventions has predominantly led to stalled growth and development of the local organizations.

4.3 Engagement of local and national organizations in localization

In South Sudan, the organizational model of local and national organizations tends to aspire to be the exact copies of INGOs. Founders of local and national organizations motivated and driven by the need to address crises in the target localities, do not have adequate time to learn and embrace the competencies required and set up operating systems needed for running local and national organizations based on principles of organizational management. Local and national organizations focus on immediate and short-term action to alleviate priority needs during a crisis.

Given these conditions, most of the local entities have gaps in their growth and development and thus encounter operational pitfalls from time to time. They have not made inadequate investments to support internal organizational growth and development which includes structures, policies, systems, principles, processes, operating manuals of various types, and measures to ensure quality and compliance with professional work ethics, statutory, accounting governance, organizational and professional conduct and behaviour. These aspects were corroborated by the THRIVE Localization Strategy development Forum.

As international humanitarian organizations assess humanitarian needs; the tools used do not have components to the growth and development of local and national organizations is not an immediate focus as this aspect is not a direct priority in crisis terms. When organizational capacity assessments are done, the tools, criteria, and parameters for what to be assessed originate from the international organizations, this is top-down in demand, approach, and process. The process does not give local organizations room and space to lead and decide on how they intend to grow and develop their organizations.

As a result, when capacity strengthening and partnering considerations arise, a growth and development approach is not factored in. The relevant interrelated priority needs for the growth and development of local and national organizations are not put into perspective within the context of operation. Assessing the needs for organizational growth and development would take a collaborative organizational review perspective between the assessor and the targeted organization being assessed. The outcome would be a collaborative set of commonly agreed priorities on the specifics of where strengthening and capabilities in systems and competencies are needed and what it would take in terms of planned interventions, the needed amounts of time, and effort to address the needed types and levels of capacity to enhance growth development and realize expected operational efficiencies.

In the process, local and national organizations continue to operate below capacity. Invariably, it is recognized that capacity strengthening, partnering, and localization are symbiotic processes for local and national organizations. It would appear that the humanitarian system and international organizations would have to consider intentional counterbalancing approaches that appropriate how collaborative growth and development can take place while also undertaking relevant interventions and supporting meaningful locally-led organizational growth and development, that aligns with the principles of localization. This would perhaps be the most appropriate approach, given the context of South Sudan where competencies and a range of organizational management skillsets are dire.

4.4 Localization Strategy that works

A localization strategy that works will have to take into account the factors raised in the foregoing discourse contributing, and addressing barriers to localization. The processes, approaches, and methods would need to bear appropriately relevant values, and principles that challenge the status quo for systems change. This

calls for innovatively putting in practice intentional, inclusive, engagement approaches with local, national, and community organizations.

Common ground in knowledge, preparedness, competencies, and willingness to shift power, share risks, and increase cost-sharing will need to be put in place. Alongside this, forums and platforms for shared learning, synthesizing best practices, and sharpening approaches that address emerging implications of localization in context. Localization strategy that works will have to pre-empt attributes that define localization with co-created engagement Aspects to include in this would include, but not exclusive to the aspects defined in the below framework:

Suggested aspects that might clarify to define attributes in preparedness for localization

Aspect	Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An understood voluntary proactive inclusive and equal engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Offset structural and leadership inequalities ○ Strengthen institutional and organizational capacities for localization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Clarity of scope in functions, and roles in leadership and decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shared responsibilities for accountability ○ Co-create evidence-based guidelines for leadership & decision-making
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-created common ground in knowledge, understanding, preparedness, and competencies for localization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-create localization process, approaches ○ Enhance visibility, branding, linking local & national organizations with donors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Articulated willingness to address power dynamics and dimensions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Address power shifting, risk and cost-sharing ○ Build on inherent strengths, expertise, and experiences of each other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-created shared relations, communication management approaches and practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Openness to learning, giving, & receiving feedback for corrective action ○ Co-create agile humanitarian response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-create commonly analyzed pre-emptive action on risks, disruption, and cost-sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-create and execute action plans and budgets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-created a commonly shared understanding of the implications of localization at the organizational level and the community level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-create and implement mitigation plans ○ Co-create contextual relevance in humanitarian action ○
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-created common definitions of attributes of localization and means to track and measure when achieved in context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Document learning and lessons as localization processes are executed learning from outcomes and emerging issues thereof ○ Design localization progress assessment indicators, benchmarks, standards, and guidelines how to use them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Raised mutual awareness and learning between local, national organizations and international organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open sharing of interests, motivations values for integration of common purpose and effort avoiding duplication of effort and reverse delegation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shifting power, leadership and decision-making to local organizations in the humanitarian system ○ Co-share planning, linkage to donors and resource mobilizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthen locally-led action on humanitarian response ○ Enhance the use of local, indigenous & endogenous, know-how & knowledge ○ Create & promote genuine space for local and national organizations and communities ○ Create a genuine shift of resource power to local and national organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intentional locally-led contextualization of humanitarian norms and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Power and systems change shifting to and enhanced locally-led humanitarian systems
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○

5.0 PRE-CONDITIONS FOR LOCALIZATION

5.1 Localization trust-building and shifting power

At the outset, the literature review conducted during this localization strategy development process points out that agencies engaged in localization must first have a firm understanding that, local and national organizations themselves are *not being localized*, as they are already local. What is to be localized is the entire humanitarian system, on how its *leadership, relations, decision-making, trust-building, and delivery systems* are managed. This applies in all stages from resource mobilizing, and linkages in donor relations; to planning organizing, coordinating, and the delivery of humanitarian response to the affected locally.

This requires a shift in how leadership and decision-making are managed in the context of trust, relations, and communication at each level, and goes on to how resources and roles are designed and allocated. The shift should go further to include aspects of how power is used to *trust and relate* when engaging, interacting, and communicating, as well as how power in *leadership and roles, power over resources, and power for decisions planning, organizing, and coordinating humanitarian response* is used. This way of thinking suggests a shift in approaches in the model of working between agencies engaged in localization, in their context.

5.2 Scope in the functions and roles of local and national organizations

In South Sudan, localization has been characterized by high expectations, and pitfalls, and has attained only limited progress. At the international organization level, localization has been addressed in forums and platforms of one formation or another. Local and national organizations have engaged localization from the perspective of entering into partnership with international NGOs, or in capacity building set up in the form of workshops, or acquisition of material support, or in contexts of activity collaboration on behalf of the international organization they link up with

In these contexts, the local and national organizations have had limited scope in leadership, decision-making, and the scope for having a say in choice, and priorities being addressed in the humanitarian interventions they engage in. The relationship with international organizations has been predominantly top-down, and the structural links are mismatched and unequal.

Moreover, the past expression of localization had a focus on resources and activities. In this context, localization has been characterized by short-term action and supply-oriented engagement, with decisions on the set-up and evaluation of the humanitarian response being made by international organizations and donors, and not by the local and national organizations or by the community target groups³⁸.

5.3 Engagement in quality of leadership and decision-making by local organizations

The role of local and national organizations has therefore remained to be one of intervention execution, even when aspects of capacity building and partnership are built-in to the engagement any of them have with international organizations. Reported evidence during the THRIVE Localization Strategy Development Process raised aspects of inadequate trust, unequal relations, underdeveloped capabilities for relations and communication management, and trust building. Moreover, local organizations indicated that the question of internal operating costs and inherent risks in humanitarian operations are rarely brought to the table for discussion let alone addressing them.

At another level, local and national organizations pointed out that there has been limited preparedness, sharing of knowledge, the inadequacy in building competencies before and during any localization initiatives in the past. Some of the local and national organizations have participated in one or two forums and are members of some of the platforms engaged in localization.

This notwithstanding, key informants in the local and national organizations pointed out that in these situations, the leadership, resources, and decision-making are *“at the donor level”* and there is no room to participate in how the forums are run, other than attend meetings. The emphasis on capacity strengthening, partnerships, and collaborations seemed to be the only perceived aspect defining localization to these organizations.

³⁸Dickel D (2021). Making Localization Work: The Everyday Practice of Three NGOs in South Sudan and Northern Uganda. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 3:716287. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2021.716287

5.4 Quality funding, operational cost-bearing, and risk-sharing

The Global Humanitarian Overview Joint NGO Statement of December 2024 calls for *increased volume and quality of funding* to local and national actors, including Women's organizations, and the recognition of the role they play as first responders closest to those most affected³⁹.

Attributes of the roles local and national organizations play go beyond limited interactions, and assignment to few rigidly funded humanitarian activities in localities international organizations are not able to reach or operate during crises. There is a need to enhance the level of agility and room for more equal interaction and relationships between local and national organizations, partner humanitarian agencies, and donors as well as intentional engagement at the community and *Duty-bearer* levels.

Under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee initiatives, UNICEF and Development Initiatives undertook a mapping initiative on Cost sharing and Indirect costs in the interest of enhancing localization. This was motivated by the recognition that local and national organizations incur legitimate operational costs and encounter challenges when they have to provide humanitarian interventions. In this regard, at the donor and international organizations level, the recognition that cost-sharing and indirect costs are part of the humanitarian response process and therefore a legitimate budgetary factor needed for facilitating support to the resilience of local and national organizations they work with.

There is an imperative consideration in humanitarian action that international organizations and local and national organizations need to recognize and appropriate in pre-empting risk and disruption as a shared factor in humanitarian action. In this sphere, the *Risk Sharing Platform* comprising InterAction, ICRC, and others with the support of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, undertook a collaborative and consultative initiative to review and analyze risk in the humanitarian system.

This was based on the understanding that before, during, and after humanitarian crises a certain range, and levels of risks to which all humanitarian agencies and the humanitarian systems are exposed occur. In this case, it is in the interest of all agencies that risk is addressed. The work of the Risk Sharing Platform led to the co-creation of a Risk Sharing Framework.

The framework is applicable across all agencies including local and national organizations. In the preparation for undertaking localization, the aspect of risk review and analysis could benefit from the use of this framework. Moreover, during the design and development of partnerships, and the capacity strengthening engagements, risk and disruption are imperative aspects to include in the broader perspective to ensure local and national organizations have appropriate preparedness, capabilities, mitigation plans, and approaches on how to implement the mitigation processes.

6.0 THRIVE LOCALIZATION STRATEGY THEORY OF CHANGE

6.1 THRIVE Localization Strategy Theory of Change Statement

The THRIVE Consortium Program document has a stated theory of change. This could be reflected on in the context of the Localization Strategy thus:

IF THRIVE Consortium members and their partners enter into inclusive, equal engagements that embrace effectively managed organization relations, communication, and are open to learning, and **IF** engaged parties embrace proactive management of organizational, professional, personal conduct, and behaviour that promotes principles of localization, and **IF** engaged parties are proactively willing to cede power, embracing risk and cost-sharing, and have access to quality funding for humanitarian action, and have co-created common ground in understanding knowledge competencies, and have a commonly shared definition of the meaning, implications, and end-attributes of localization guiding their work, **THEN** a viable localization-driven equal engagement will co-create locally-led processes, approaches, practices, and knowledge development from engaged organizations transforming locally-led humanitarian action systems

³⁹Global Humanitarian Overview (December 2024). Joint NGO Statement

6.2 THRIVE Localization Vision

From the outputs of the THRIVE Localization Strategy FORUM in March at Juba, some ideas on the vision for localization were raised. These have to do with the conditions and attributes defining localization when it is realized. These could be summarized thus:

THRIVE LOCALIZATION VISION

Changed humanitarian systems and devolution of power for impact creating localization process.

This vision aligns with the overall THRIVE Consortium Program, appropriating GESI inclusion, equality and the principles of localization. It is also relevant to inspire the response to issues raised inter alia in the introduction section of this strategy.

6.3 THRIVE Localization Strategy Themes

This section sets out the broad themes of the THRIVE Localization Strategy.

6.3.1 Broad localization strategy themes

Theme 1: Humanitarian Systems change approaches for effective and efficient locally-led response.

Theme 2: Openness and willingness to shift power and create space and room with clear functions and roles for leadership, decision-making, and proactive action to address power dynamics and dimensions

Theme 3: Sensitive management of relations, communication, organizational, professional, and personal conduct and behaviour promoting inclusivity and equality.

Theme 4: Promoting visibility, branding, and linking local and national organizations with donors through co-shared planning, budgeting resource mobilizing, monitoring, and reporting.

6.4 Competitive and Comparative Advantages of THRIVE Consortium Program

The THRIVE Consortium Program has some key comparative advantages to build on. They comprise competitive advantages within and inherent comparative advantages. These could be summarized at the CTP level and also at the THRIVER Consortium level as profiled below thus:

6.4.1 Core Competitive and Comparative Advantages at CTP Level

- By engaging with local partners, CTP and THRIVE Consortium members have access and connectedness to local community realities enhancing the relevance of humanitarian response to target beneficiaries;
- Repository of valuable research, assessments, mapping, and other documentation on localization in South Sudan and elsewhere in the Greater Horn of Africa Region and internationally, as reference for learning and guidance;
- Presence, experience, and knowledge of South Sudan & Greater Upper Region;
- Partnership engagement with legitimate, respected local organizations, and open to learning from partnering;
- Proactively intentional continuing learning, knowledge development & documentation about localization in South Sudan;
- Competent personnel in capacity strengthening, localization, partnership/partnering, & humanitarian response;
- Holding lead portfolio on humanitarian & localization internationally and in South Sudan;
- Credible voice and stature in advocacy on localization & human development at the community level in South Sudan, at the state, national level, and internationally.

6.4.2 Core Competitive and Comparative Advantages at THRIVE Consortium Level

- Prioritizing Greater Upper Nile which accounts for over 45% of local conflicts hence humanitarian crisis
- Shared mutual values and principles about strengthening local and national organizations;

- Link to key platforms and forums focusing on localization, & humanitarian action – Humanitarian Country Team, C4C, Grand Bargain, Localization Working Group, etc.
- Synergy in organizing, coordinating, planning & common purpose with partners
- Competent personnel in capacity strengthening, localization, partnership/partnering, & humanitarian response;
- Engagement of THRIVE Consortium with other reputable, experienced agencies and forums in South Sudan;
- Shared mutual values and principles about strengthening local and national organizations.

7.0 ASSUMPTIONS

The THRIVE localization bears the following assumptions (*preconditions leading to accomplishing progress in localization*) on the progress in localization process in the next three years:

- That localization is a process with interlinked and interrelated facets expressed in the engagement between parties in their relations, communication, organizational, professional, and personal behaviour, in humanitarian systems and action;
- That a common ground in understanding, knowledge, and definition of localization, its attributes, and means of measuring it enhances the quality of implementing localization processes better;
- That, with willingness to shift power, accept and promote locally-led leadership, decision-making, defined core functions and roles in the localization and humanitarian system, and relations that are open to inclusivity and equity in leading systems change localization contributes to more effective humanitarian action;
- That THRIVE Consortium has the opportunity to innovate systems change in localization and humanitarian systems in South Sudan creating learning;
- That, attributes of localization are context-specific and the broad framework of relations, communication and behaviour change shifting power, and behaviour change, and committing to locally-led humanitarian systems will contribute quality outcomes
- That access to quality funding addressing risk and cost-sharing between local and national organizations, and international organizations will lead to effective localization and quality of partnerships between parties. Organization growth and development of local and national organizations.

8.0 RISKS AND DISRUPTION

RISKS	IMPACT	MITIGATION	DISRUPTIONS	IMPACT	MITIGATION
Decrease in access to quality and adequate funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Program/organization closure ▪ Continues community suffering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diversified resource mobilizing ▪ Innovation for increased local resource contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change e.g. flood, drought, and weather variability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Displacement of communities ○ Disruption in service delivery to review action ○ Emergence of new humanitarian crises ○ Increase demand for services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Early warning and preparedness to - -Engage host communities and local administrative authorities -Life-saving response
Insecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Affects organization performance ▪ Affects community/beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff safety, security and protection prioritized ▪ Liaison with local community leadership for support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displacement and dislocation of communities to new localities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loss of lives ○ Slow in-service provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Preparedness - -Engagement with leadership, of host communities and local administrative structures -Life-saving response

<p>Shifting and donor policy, interests, priorities, and focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Affects sources of funding ➤ Affects international organizations and their partners ➤ Reduced funding occurs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor trends and patterns in donor policy, interests, and priorities, ▪ Innovate evidence-based selling points of humanitarian actions for funding ▪ Improve organizational niche visibility and branding and value-added and value for money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political instability during elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unfavourable operating conditions ○ Political interference on service delivery 	<p>-Preparedness, - Engagement with local leadership, governing structures and advocacy with civil society</p>
<p>Inadequate and blocked participation of key stakeholders in localization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weak and or poor implementation of localization ▪ Slow pace and constrained localization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corrective actions to remedy pitfalls ▪ Re-engineer localization ▪ Innovation to address lack of participation and inherent challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of inputs, and means to secure them • Breakdown of infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stalled delivery of services ○ Dealy in organized and on-time delivery of services 	<p>-Early warning systems, alternative service delivery options -Engagement with local community leadership and administrative structures</p>

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations help point to the practical interventions and investments that THRIVE should implement to ensure localization at different levels (*National, State, and Community Levels, and with Duty Bearers and target Communities*). This provides open pathways to scaling up localization in South Sudan. They also point to options to facilitate advocacy, and lobbying at the local community level, county, state, national, and international levels. The recommendations also point to the plausible pathways toward partnerships, and collaborations that grow to institutionalize localization and reforms in humanitarian systems in South Sudan.

Recommendation 1: Systems change mechanisms to address presumptions and gaps

- It is recommended that the THRIVE Consortium Program prepares a system-wide introductory process that creates spaces for engagement at appropriately relevant levels at the community level, with *Duty Bearers*, between local and national organizations among themselves, between LNNGos and INGOs, and between TRHIVE Consortium Program with other actors in localization to facilitate addressing inherent presumptions to create a common ground in the knowledge of the principles, approaches, and purpose process and mechanisms of localization; defining a commonly shared appreciation of how to address power, cost, and risk-sharing in localization.

Recommendation 2: Invest in Capacity Strengthening & co-shared dialogue engagement

- It is recommended that the THRIVE Consortium Program invests in capacity building for local and national organizations to address aspects that undermine trust, enhanced partnership principles, and strengthen areas of organizational relations and communication, elements of organizational governance, leadership, direction-setting, decision-making enhanced beyond the founders, and CEO level; to achieve equal partnership, organizational resilience.

Recommendation 3: Engage and enhance forums for Trust-building relations & communication management between parties

- It is further recommended that engagement forums that enhance trust-building, including open dialogue on cost-sharing, risk-sharing, giving, and receiving feedback, and sharing with back donors.

Recommendation 4: Invests in local leadership for locally-led, locally-owned humanitarian systems

- It is recommended that the THRIVE Consortium Program invests in local and national organizations to drive localization with engagement, at the community, and local governing structures (*Duty Bearers*), documenting lessons and emergent issues related to power-sharing, power shifting, cost-recovery (ICR), and risk-sharing that enhance localization to realize locally-led, locally-owned humanitarian systems and enhance the scaleup of localization in South Sudan.

Recommendation 5: Promote knowledge Development promoting continuing learning on localization approaches, mechanisms, & evidence gathering on impact outcomes linked to advocacy and resource mobilizing

- It is recommended that the THRIVE Consortium Program develops case studies, to showcase lessons, working models, and best practices in localization partnering principles, guidelines on leadership, decision-making, and governance in locally-led humanitarian systems; the use of evidence in advocacy, lobbying, resource mobilizing, and relations management and new skill-sets and competencies for diversification of resource pipelines.

10.0 CONCLUSION

The THRIVE Localization Strategy Development process was very rich in all data collecting and review aspects. The highlight was the THRIVE Localization Strategy Development FORUM which brought together, a wide-ranging mix of organizations, and delegates with real-life experience, expertise, and engagement in localization. This made interactive engagement, validation of data, and shared knowledge. The outputs of the FORUM are part of the text in this strategy. This underscores the value of co-creating working documents.

The design of the THRIVE program approach brings together International organizations, which have a rich direct engagement in localization at the levels of research, engagement, implementation, and learning. The organizations have documented evidence on both what has worked, including pitfalls in localization. In addition, these international organizations are in partnership with reputable and legitimately operating local and national organizations.

The mix of organizations creates synergies well suited for localization practice, with the potential to particularly demonstrate how implementation at the local-led community level might work. The THRIVE Consortium members and partners have a legitimate reach at the community level, county, state, national, and international level; creating opportunities for advocacy, lobbying, resource mobilizing, and raising voices on localization that is locally led.

The recommendations raised in the THRIVE Localization Strategy will spearhead execution plans and the rolling out of the localization process. THRIVE Localization Strategy will be an agile guide, open to learning and adaptable in its content to the operating context.

The written text in the THRIVE Localization Strategy document is the original work of the Consultant.