Indigenous languages support traditional livelihoods and lifeways that contribute to Indigenous Peoples’ health, cultural vitality and overall well-being.

Revitalizing Indigenous languages is a necessary step to connect people with their cultures and traditions. Arctic Indigenous languages have passed down stories, songs, teachings, and ideas for millennia which make up the cultures of the Peoples who speak them. The ability to understand Arctic Indigenous languages evokes a sense of belonging to place and community and supports an individual’s well-being and a People’s cultural vitality.

Similarly, generation upon generation have stored Indigenous knowledge in their languages. For example, the North Sámi language – which originated where winter lasts more than half a year in northernmost Scandinavia – contains more than 318 expressions related to snow and ice. The concepts encompass Indigenous knowledge about sustainability, human working conditions, and reindeer health that have contributed to prosperous reindeer herding since time immemorial.

Indigenous Peoples’ abilities to adapt their livelihoods in the face of continuous change is dependent on traditional knowledge embodied in Indigenous languages. Language loss has a direct correlation to loss of the practical skills needed to maintain traditional livelihoods.

Continuing to fish, herd, hunt and gather is important because subsistence diets support human health and environmental sustainability, while practicing the languages and activities connected to traditional livelihoods promotes cultural and social prosperity. Therefore, Indigenous languages are not just tools for communication but important components to preserve and develop Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge systems, health, and well-being.