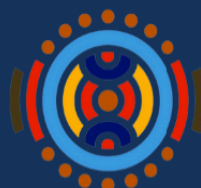Zero to Digital

Benefits of
Digitizing a Language

TRANSLATION
COMMONS

2022-2032 | INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF
Indigenous Languages

Benefits of Digitizing a Language

INTRODUCTION

ZERO TO DIGITAL

This document is a companion to the series of guidelines entitled *Zero to Digital*, addressing language digitization practices, authored by Translation Commons. For context, readers should first view the *Introduction to the Zero to Digital Guidelines*. The complete series is available on the Translation Commons website.

The *Zero to Digital* guidelines are designed to be practical, adaptable, and rooted in international best practices. Developed through Translation Commons' Language Digitization Initiative—an effort aligned with UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages—these resources aim to empower indigenous and minority language communities to bring their languages online.

The *Zero To Digital* series of guidelines offers any interested language community a path to digitization and the use of computer capabilities in their native language. This document explains many of the potential benefits of digitizing your language.

BENEFITS

The benefits of rendering a language in digital form will depend on the goals of its speaker community. These may include celebrating the beauty of the language, maintaining knowledge systems, disseminating values, sharing stories and histories, facilitating environmental stewardship and thought leadership, and expanding trade, education, employment, entertainment, health, and safety. With software applications and products that support their native language, communities can benefit from greater access to social connectivity and commercial and services opportunities. Digitization allows a community to avail itself of an ever-expanding set of computer-based tools for language maintenance, revitalization, and education. Given the ubiquity of smartphones among youth, digitization may be a natural avenue to engage them with their native language. Greater exposure via digital platforms can lead to more opportunities and demand for native speakers.

When language communities take their place on the global stage via digital platforms, it benefits the broader world. Their experiences, knowledge, and unique worldviews will be a significant contribution to the rest of the world, and the resulting synergies may bring new solutions to the world's problems. Digitization facilitates the preservation and publication of this information, making the breadth and nature of human language available to the world and preserved for humanity's benefit in ways we cannot yet predict.

An important aspect of digital communications is its immediacy. Real-time communications can be critical for emergency or disaster information and to prevent misunderstandings when there is potential for conflict. Timely native language weather and market data makes agricultural and other businesses significantly more efficient.

The capability to use their native language on digital systems enables communities to directly and in writing accurately express their viewpoints, represent their requirements, defend their interests, and gain community consensus. This may help influence government policies in support of Indigenous communities and tip businesses toward inclusion.

To summarize, some of the benefits gained by language digitization are:

● Enable monolingual speakers to easily access, create, and exchange native language content.

● Connect community members across diaspora

● Preserve native knowledge systems, culture, history, art, medicine, wisdom, values, and worldview.

● Increase access to medical and healthcare information.

● Support lifesaving emergency and disaster communications.

● Expand both local and e-commerce.

● Create new avenues for sharing art, thought leadership, and philosophies.

● Develop native-language educational materials and improve consistency of language usage (spelling, grammar, etc.).

● Improve relations and communications with neighbors.

● Improve dispute resolution.

● Enable advocacy and access to legal and governmental procedures in the native language.

● Increase access to online translators and interpreters.

● Support digital translation tools to make information in other languages available in the native language.

● Bring recognition of native language, culture, and wisdom to others.

● Enable marginalized or minoritized groups to sustain or revitalize their language even though engulfed by dominant groups.

● Expand the role and visibility of Indigenous communities globally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS