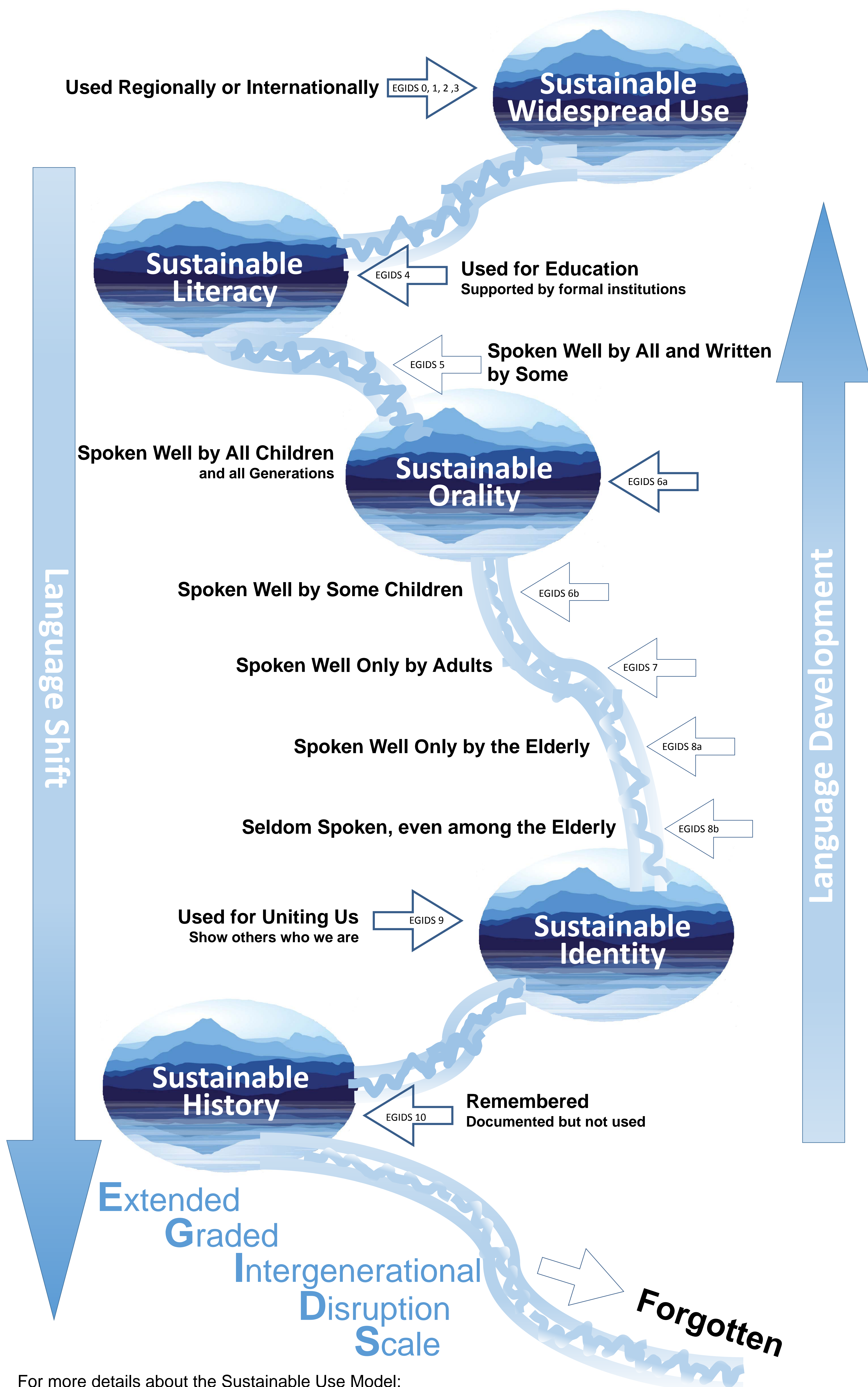


# Where is Our Language Going?

Stephen M. Echerd, SIL International

*The key focus of minority language development must be on achieving a sustainable level of language use.*



The Sustainable Use Model for Language Development (SUM) is a framework that assists Language community Leaders to:

- Understand the current situation for the use of their language.
- Understand “best practice” for developing their Language.
- Identify a way forward in identifying, prioritizing, and planning their language development activities.
- Monitor and evaluate their language development efforts for effectiveness in producing their desired results.

## Key Concepts of the SUM

1. Minority language communities today face unprecedented pressure to abandon their local Language and identity.
2. Language development efforts by individuals rarely produce sustainable results. Sustainable language development happens when community takes action.
3. Language development must take into account all the languages used by members of the community.
4. The current vitality of the Language determines both prospects for maintenance and potential for development.
5. There are four levels of Sustainable Language Use
  - Sustainable History
  - Sustainable Identity
  - Sustainable Orality
  - Sustainable Literacy
6. Except for these 4 Sustainable Levels of Use, all other levels of language use are transitory. Without some intervention each will decay to the next lower level of use (or beyond).
7. Once the current level of use is identified, a community can determine which of the sustainable levels of use it desires to work towards and a language development program can be designed.
8. To achieve sustainability, there are five conditions that need to be met: The FAMED Conditions

## The FAMED Conditions

FAMED conditions help identify which components of sustainable use may be lacking in each context. All five FAMED conditions must be satisfied in order for language use to be sustainable.

<b>Functions</b>	The Language in question must be useful. Uses (functions) for the Language at each sustainable level must exist and be recognized by the community.
<b>Acquisition</b>	A means of acquiring the needed proficiency to use the Language for those functions must be operational.
<b>Motivation</b>	Community members must be sufficiently motivated to use the Language for those functions.
<b>Environment</b>	The external environment (for example: policy, attitudes of the majority community) must not be hostile to the use of the Language for those functions.
<b>Distinct niche</b>	Members of the community expect one another to keep the functions assigned to the Language distinct from the functions for other languages the community uses.

## The “Planning the Future of Our Language” Process

To help Leaders of minority language communities to learn the Sustainable Use Model (SUM) and to apply it to their language situations, SIL International developed and tested a process we call “Planning the Future of Our Language”. Experienced language development consultants have taught this process to hundreds of Community Leaders in South America, Asia, and North America. In places where Leaders have acted following this framework, communities have been energized to take action to preserve and pass on their language to their children, grandchildren, and future generations.

For more details about how your Native/First Nations Leadership can begin the “Planning the Future of Our Language” process:

E-mail: [Language-Future@sil.org](mailto:Language-Future@sil.org) Telephone: 1 (469) 507-3366

For more details about the Sustainable Use Model:

M. Paul Lewis and Gary F. Simons. 2016. *Sustaining Language Use: Perspectives on Community-Based Language Development*. Dallas, Texas, USA: SIL International.