

The Language of International Development

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to introduce translators to current issues in international development and some of the related English and Spanish terminology. Selected English terms that are commonly used by international organizations are defined and possible Spanish translations discussed. The definitions and translations, which can be found in the attached glossary, are taken from a variety of sources, but are not necessarily an exhaustive list of possibilities.

1.2 Sources of Terminology

The information provided is based on the writer's 13 years of experience translating from Spanish into English for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo [BID]). The focus is therefore on the IDB and Latin America, but an effort was made to include terminology from other international organizations.

The main sources used for this presentation are the 2000 Annual Reports of the IDB and the World Bank (Banco Mundial), the World Development Report of the World Bank and the Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo [PNUD]).

1.3 Background on International Organizations

The IDB, the World Bank and the UNDP are all international organizations, that is, institutions whose members are governments. Each operates completely independently. The World Bank is one of two institutions, along with the International Monetary Fund (Fondo Monetario Internacional [FMI]), founded in 1945 at a conference held in Bretton Woods, a ski resort in New Hampshire, and known as the "Bretton Woods institutions." The IDB was founded in 1959 by members of the Organization of American States (Organización de los Estados Americanos [OEA]) but is not affiliated with the OAS.

Both the IDB and the World Bank lend money to their borrowing members, but their purpose is not to generate profits for their shareholders but to further socio-economic development in developing countries by providing loans and other funding. They are called "development banks" (bancos de desarrollo), as opposed to "commercial banks" (bancos comerciales). Note also the Spanish term 'banca', which refers to banks collectively, as in 'la banca comercial'. The World Bank operates in all the regions of the world, while the IDB exclusively serves Latin America and the Caribbean and is the number one lender to the region.

The UNDP is the United Nations's largest source of assistance for development and serves developing countries worldwide.

2. Selected areas of development

According to its Annual Report, the IDB has five key areas of activity: poverty reduction and social equity, modernization of the State, economic integration, the environment and the private sector. The World Bank and UNDP have similar focuses. Given our time constraints, we will take a look at the first two.

2.1 Poverty and Social Equity

From its inception, the IDB has sought to help reduce poverty levels, and has repeatedly reasserted its commitment to pay special attention to the needs of “low-income groups” (grupos de bajos ingresos, de ingreso bajo), in other words, the poor. Likewise, the World Bank's overall purpose is to “reduce poverty and improve living standards”: its mission statement is “we dream of a world free of poverty.” UNDP also has “a major mission to help eradicate poverty.”

Absolute vs. Extreme Poverty

The first step in addressing poverty is to determine the “poverty line” or “poverty income threshold” (umbral de pobreza; línea de pobreza), which of course varies from one country to another. “Absolute poverty” (pobreza absoluta) is defined by the UNDP as the “income or expenditure level below which a minimum, nutritionally adequate diet plus essential non-food requirements are not affordable.” Examples of “non-food requirements” would be clothing, shelter and so on. “Extreme poverty” (pobreza extrema; indigencia [sometimes]) is a subcategory of absolute poverty, usually defined as the level below which adequate diet alone is not affordable. Note that the descriptive expressions “dire,” “abject” or “grinding” poverty do not have such specific meanings.

Based on the poverty line, statistics can be computed on the “poverty rate” (tasa de pobreza), the percentage of the total population living below the poverty line. Reference is also sometimes made to the “incidence of poverty” (incidencia de la pobreza), referring to its intensity in general.

For example, in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, some two thirds of the population lives in poverty. The poverty rate of Bolivia, the second poorest, is 44%, but in rural areas it can leap to 90%, illustrating regional disparities within countries. The Central American countries in general also have high poverty rates of around 50%, with the exception of Costa Rica (only 11%).

The Fight Against Poverty

In the “fight against poverty” (el combate contra la pobreza), “poverty alleviation” (mitigación o alivio de la pobreza) is sometimes distinguished from “poverty reduction” (reducción de la pobreza), especially at the IDB, even though the two expressions are sometimes used synonymously.

Poverty alleviation consists of short-term measures (a “quick fix”) designed to provide a measure of immediate relief, such as school lunches for poor children;

poverty reduction, on the other hand, comprises long-term solutions, such as improved education and training, rural development and microenterprise development, which will be discussed shortly. The battle is thus waged on two fronts, and its long-term goal is the “eradication” of poverty (eliminación, erradicación de la pobreza).

Microenterprise Development

A microenterprise (microempresa) is not the same thing as a “small enterprise” or “small business” (pequeña empresa). Definitions vary by country, but in general, while a small business typically has fewer than 50 employees, a microenterprise has fewer than 10, usually unsalaried family members. It may even only consist of one person, say a mother working out of her home to produce woven textiles.

Another basic difference between the two types of enterprises is that small businesses are usually incorporated (constituidos legalmente), that is, officially registered as such. Microenterprises, on the other hand, are a huge part of the “informal” economy (economía informal, no estructurada), that mass of unregistered, unlicensed, unreported trade thriving on city streets throughout Latin America. In fact, in some countries, the informal economy has become a major source of employment.

“Microlending” or “microcredit” (microcrédito) consists of providing financial services such as lending on a very small scale to microentrepreneurs who would not otherwise have access to financing. Our weaver, for example, could never get a conventional loan from a commercial bank. Through a microlending program, however, she could join a group of other women, perhaps from her same neighborhood, and borrow an amount as low as \$50 to purchase more yarn at a better price and perhaps hire an assistant. She would then be able to improve the lots of two families.

Worldwide, microenterprise development has been found to be an effective means of improving employment and increasing income for the poor. Often cited for its success is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which has helped improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and their families.

Small enterprises are sometimes grouped with “medium-sized enterprises” (la mediana empresa) as SMEs (PyME, PYME, Pymes). They are also significant sources of employment and income, but generally receive support through government-sponsored programs for private-sector development.

Social Equity

“Social equity” (equidad social) refers to the special attention needed by society's most vulnerable groups to offset historic, economic and/or social imbalances. One example of such a group is “indigenous groups” (los grupos o comunidades indígenas, autóctonas), who tend to have much higher poverty rates than other groups and to live in more remote areas where access to basic education and health care services is more difficult.

Note that the term “indigenous people” (pueblos indígenas) is no longer used because it was open to interpretation as implying a separate political status for such peoples; hence the more generic “indigenous groups.”

Gender Equity

Another important example is gender equity. It is important to understand that in the social sciences, “gender” has a different connotation than “sex”: where “sex” means the way we are born (i.e., male or female), “gender” means how we are raised. For example, in some countries, women have higher illiteracy rates than men because girls are expected to care for younger siblings. This is an example of a “gender issue.”

Although gender issues usually refer to women, as in the case of gender bias or gender disparities, they can also sometimes refer to men. In El Salvador, for instance, as ex-combatants in the devastating civil war the country endured for over 10 years, men face particular health and employment problems that women do not.

There has been much controversy among Spanish linguists about how to render the English term “gender,” culminating with the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1996. The Spanish terminologists at the UN who worked on a glossary for the UN conference struggled to provide various renderings depending on the context, such as *por sexo*, *de la mujer*, etc. But when the Spanish-speaking delegates to the conference saw the glossary, they demanded that it include the term *género*. This usage has actually been documented in original Spanish source texts in the social sciences. A revised version of the glossary had to be published with *género* added to all the entries for “gender.” In cases where the meaning of “gender” overlaps with that of “sex,” *sexo* can still be used, as in *desglose por sexo* for “gender breakdown.” If it is clear that the text only refers to women, then *de la mujer* will sometimes work, as in *promoción de la mujer* for “gender development.” An interesting rendition of the term “gender bias” into Spanish is *sexismo*. In other instances, though, *género* is used, as in *análisis de género* for “gender analysis.”

Mainstreaming

Another term that comes up in discussions of poverty reduction and equity is “mainstreaming” or bringing a particular group or sector into formal or official systems. In the case of a microenterprise, for instance, it means eventually qualifying for credit in the traditional banking system. Suggestions for Spanish are to use *incorporar a* or *integrar a* with a reference to the context, such as *incorporar al sistema formal*, or using the expression *hacer partícipe*.

2.2 Modernization of the State

The second key area of international development we will examine is modernization of the State. Many Latin American and Caribbean countries have been burdened by oversized, inefficient bureaucracies and money-draining State-owned enterprises. The countries have therefore increasingly sought assistance to streamline government, divest themselves of enterprises better run by the private sector and improve efficiency in those services government should provide.

In 2000, new IDB programs for modernization of the State (*modernización del Estado*) totaled close to US\$2 billion. These projects cover a broad range of areas

from public sector management, especially fiscal management and decentralization, to judicial reform. Note that when it refers to the government of a nation, the term “State” is capitalized in both English and Spanish.

Also note that in many cases “government” as an adjective should be rendered ‘del Estado’, ‘estatal’ or even ‘público’ rather than ‘del gobierno’ or ‘gubernamental’. For example, “government institutions” can be translated as ‘organismos estatales’ or ‘organismos públicos’.

Respective Roles of the Public and Private Sectors

A central aspect of this process has been determining the respective roles of the public sector (el sector público) and the private sector (el sector privado). “Privatization” (privatización) is the process through which State-owned enterprises, such as mining concerns or power utilities, are sold to private companies. The money earned by the State from such sales can then be used to reduce the fiscal deficit, the shortfall in the State coffers, or to supplement social sector funding.

Governance

Another key concept in modernization of the State is that of “governance.” This is another term that is complex to render into Spanish. Let us first look at its meaning. The World Bank defines the term as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.” Governance is important because economic development is linked to the quality of government.

Good governance requires robust, effective legal systems, honest management of public funds and institutions, and social equity; it begins with strong institutions. The term “governability” is now being used as a synonym for good governance; in this context, it therefore means not whether a country can be governed, but how well it is governed.

The Spanish translation of “governance” varies: suggestions found in World Bank, IMF and UNDP glossaries and other documents include ‘gestión pública’, ‘gestión del sector público’, ‘buen gobierno’, ‘ejercicio del poder’, and ‘función de gobierno’. It is interesting to note, however, that the original Spanish agreement reached at the 1996 Summit of the Americas featured ‘governabilidad’ as the central issue; in it, the 23 heads of State and government pledged to strengthen political institutions, reform public administration and decentralize the State. In other words, they were referring to “good governance” or “governability.”

It should be noted, however, that according to a recent report in the Spanish daily *‘El País’*, the preferred term for “governance” in Spain is ‘governanza’. The Real Academia Española has formally accepted that term and changed its entry for the modern acceptance of ‘governabilidad’ to refer readers to ‘governanza’ as the expression of choice in continental Spanish. The *El País* article acknowledges, though, that *governabilidad* is widely used in Latin America.

Accountability

There is some confusion even among English-speakers about the difference between “responsible” and “accountable.” According to Webster’s Third International Unabridged, “Responsible may differ from accountable in centering attention on a formal organizational role, function, duty or trust (‘while held responsible for the bank’s operations, the president has powers largely nominal’); *Accountable* may be used in situations involving imminence of retribution for unfulfilled trust or violated obligation (‘the president is invested with certain important political powers, in the exercise of which he is accountable only to his country in his political character and to his own conscience’).”

The lack of “accountability” is often mentioned as a factor in poor governance, meaning that government officials are not obliged to account for their actions or inactions, that is, are not held responsible. Suggestions for Spanish are: ‘responsabilidad funcional’ or ‘rendición de cuentas’, although the latter usually refers to accounting for money.

Strengthening of Civil Society

The “civil” in “civil society” comes from the Latin *civilis*, which means “citizen.” “Civil society organizations” (CSOs) (*organizaciones de la sociedad civil [OSC]*) encompass basically all noncommercial and nongovernmental entities, from religious organizations to political parties, universities, sports clubs, neighborhood associations, etc. International organizations recognize that since the State and the market cannot take care of everything, healthy development of civil society is essential for democracy to flourish.

Among CSOs are “nongovernmental organizations,” known by the abbreviation “NGOs,” (*organizaciones no gubernamentales [ONG]*). These are nonprofit institutions that provide various types of services at the international, national, regional, or local level, such as emergency relief (Red Cross) or education grants (Ford Foundation).

Other examples of CSOs are trade unions, credit unions, parent-teacher associations and cooperatives. International organizations and government agencies are increasingly turning to NGOs to help implement development projects. An example in the case of our microenterprise program would be a weavers’ cooperative or association.

Empowerment

The notion of “empowerment” may appear in this context. According to Webster’s Third Unabridged, the prefix “em-” in the verb “to empower” means “to provide with.” “To empower” thus means “to provide with power,” which can have two different interpretations: (1) to give official authority to, as in “under the new Constitution, local governments are empowered to manage public schools”; or (2) to give faculties or abilities to, as in “female soccer fans in the United States have been empowered by the success of the U.S. team.”

In the context of development, the “faculties or abilities” in question usually refer to citizens having a voice in local decision-making, the implication being that either they should have a voice, but don't, or could have a voice but for social reasons (such as lack of education), they can't. CSOs are often instrumental in empowering citizens.

For example, say our imaginary weaver is an indigenous woman: she thus belongs to two disadvantaged groups (women and indigenous communities). Statistically, she is likely to be poor and uneducated. Through the weaver's cooperative, she may get the opportunity to receive adult education. Empowered by literacy and economic opportunity, this formerly isolated, impoverished woman may then be more likely to exercise rights such as her right to vote, or to reach her potential, for instance by eventually becoming a small business owner.

The term “empowerment” has been challenging terminologists at international organizations for some time. A UN glossary goes so far as to suggest the following awkward paraphrase: *creación de condiciones para la participación plena en la sociedad (o el pleno ejercicio de derechos) (o la realización del potencial)*. Notice how this version reflects the idea of the power people “should” have to exercise rights (*ejercicio de derechos*) or “could” have to reach their potential (*realización del potencial*).

The Spanish term *potenciación* is frequently used, since it is conveniently packaged in a single word. For instance, the UNDP calls its “gender empowerment measure” (GEM) “*índice de potenciación de género*” in Spanish. Other international organizations and some NGOs have resuscitated the Spanish term *empoderamiento* as an equivalent of “empowerment,” sometimes even alongside *potenciación*.

Other possible renditions in Spanish are ‘*habilitación*’, ‘*promoción de la autonomía*’ or ‘*realización del potencial*’. Of course, as with any translation, the Spanish version of “empowerment” will depend on the context. For instance, the expression “empowerment of women,” defined by the United Nations as “the social, economic, political and legal enabling of women to act by granting or re-enforcing rights, abilities and access to facilities previously denied or restricted,” could be rendered as *participación de la mujer en la sociedad, pleno ejercicio de los derechos de la mujer, realización del potencial de la mujer, or emancipación de la mujer*.

Outreach

International organizations have also been placing much emphasis on public information and citizen involvement in local development projects. The term “outreach” frequently appears in this context. It means “the act of reaching out” or “the extending of services or assistance beyond current or usual limits.”

In the case of development projects, the idea is to actively promote them outside of the organization. The World Bank thus defines an “outreach program” as a set of “activities by a central authority [such as the central government or an international organization] to establish contact with and assist people or small business in rural areas.” Notice how this definition specifically refers to rural areas, where poverty rates are higher and information is usually particularly hard to come by and people hard to reach.

So we have three factors involved: providing information, working outside the organization, and promoting projects. These factors offer clues about how to render the term into Spanish:

Providing Information: Many United Nations agencies, such as the UNDP and UNICEF, as well as the World Bank, emphasize the information aspect of “outreach” by using *divulgación*: for example, *programa de divulgación* for “outreach program.” Another possibility along these lines is *difusión*, as in *Dependencia de Coordinación y Difusión*, the Spanish name for the UN Secretariat office called the “Coordination and Outreach Unit” in English.

Working Outside the Institution: Also frequently used is the term *extensión* or *extensionismo*, stressing the idea of extending beyond the usual limits (like the walls of a building), in other words, working outside the institution. For instance, the World Bank also uses *programa de extensión* or *de alcance exterior* for “outreach program,” in addition to *programa de divulgación*. Likewise, the IDB program called the “Youth Development and Outreach Program” is known in Spanish as the *Programa de Desarrollo y Alcance de la Juventud*.

Promoting Programs: The third factor, publicizing projects, is reflected in the translation of “outreach” by *promoción*. A UN agency involved in agricultural development, for example, refers to “outreach workers” as *promotores rurales* or *extensionistas*; the World Bank also calls them *promotores*, as well as *trabajadores*, *funcionarios de extensión*, *de divulgación*.

3. Conclusion

Since many of the terms used in international development are new coinages or existing terms being used with new meanings and are constantly evolving, few can be found in dictionaries. Internet resources can be very helpful, provided translators take care to use terminology found in reliable web sites and in the appropriate context.

The attached annotated bibliography lists a number of recommended web sites that provide information in both English and Spanish (and sometimes other languages as well). They are especially useful to ascertain current usage in development spheres.

THE LANGUAGE OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
 ENGLISH-SPANISH GLOSSARY
 with selected definitions

English	Spanish
absolute poverty <i>income level below which a minimum, nutritionally adequate diet plus essential non-food requirements are not affordable</i>	pobreza absoluta
accountability	responsabilidad funcional; ejercicio responsable de funciones; en contabilidad: rendición de cuentas
civil society organizations (CSOs) <i>all noncommercial and nongovernmental entities</i>	organizaciones de la sociedad civil (OSC)
commercial banks [collectively]	banca comercial
development bank	banco de desarrollo
empowerment	creación de condiciones para la participación plena en la sociedad (o el pleno ejercicio de derechos) (o la realización del potencial); potenciación, habilitación, promoción de la autonomía; realización del potencial;
empowerment of women <i>the social, economic, political and legal enabling of women to act by granting or re-enforcing rights, abilities and access to facilities previously denied or restricted</i>	participación de la mujer en la sociedad; pleno ejercicio de los derechos de la mujer; realización del potencial de la mujer; emancipación de la mujer
eradication of poverty	eliminación o erradicación de la pobreza
extreme poverty <i>the income level below which adequate diet alone is not affordable</i>	pobreza extrema; pobreza absoluta; indigencia [sometimes]
fight against poverty	combate contra la pobreza

gender

Note nuance in English: where “sex” means the way we are born (i.e., male or female), “gender” means how we are raised

[suggestions]

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| - gender breakdown | - desglose por sexo |
| - gender equity | - equidad de la mujer |
| - gender issues | - cuestiones relativas a la desigualdad entre hombres y mujeres, a las diferencias de roles del hombre y la mujer; a veces, discriminación sexual |
| - gender disparities | - desigualdades entre los hombres y las mujeres |
| - gender analysis | - análisis de género |
| - gender bias | - sexismo |

governance

manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development

gestión pública, ejercicio del poder, gestión del sector público, función del gobierno; [continental Spanish] gobernanza

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|---|--|
| - good governance, governability
<i>governance with robust, effective legal systems, honest management of public funds and institutions, and social equity</i> | governabilidad, buen gobierno, buena gestión pública |
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incidence of poverty <i>see “poverty rate”</i>	incidencia de la pobreza
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indigenous groups	grupos indígenas, autóctonos
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informal economy	economía informal
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Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (BID)	Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo
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International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI)
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low-income groups	grupos de bajos ingresos, de ingreso bajo
mainstreaming	incorporación, integración [al sistema formal, etc.]
medium-sized business, medium-sized enterprise	mediana empresa, la
microenterprise	microempresa
microlending, microcredit	microcrédito
modernization of the State	modernización del Estado
nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) <i>nonprofit institutions that provide various types of services at the international, national, regional, or local level</i>	organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG)
Organization of American States (OAS)	Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA)
outreach	divulgación, difusión, extensión, extensionismo, promoción, alcance exterior
poverty alleviation	mitigación, alivio de la pobreza
poverty line, poverty income threshold	umbral de la pobreza; línea de la pobreza
poverty rate <i>percentage of the total population living below the poverty line</i>	tasa de pobreza
poverty reduction	reducción de la pobreza
private sector <i>all privately-owned, commercially operated enterprises</i>	sector privado, el

privatization	privatización
public sector all government-run institutions	sector público, el
small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) or business (SMB)	pequeña y mediana empresa, la (PyME, PYME, Pymes)
small business, small enterprise	pequeña empresa
social equity	equidad social
United Nations (UN)	[Organización de las] Naciones Unidas (ONU)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD)
World Bank	Banco Mundial

Bibliography

Print Materials

INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, 2000 *Annual Report*.

Published in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Reviews the socio-economic situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Bank's key areas of activity, lending by country, and financial statements. Available free of charge (except for shipping). See IDB Internet site under "Internet resources" below.

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND, IMF GLOSSARY, ENGLISH-FRENCH-SPANISH, Washington, D.C., 1996.

Includes a multilingual index of abbreviations and acronyms and list of currency units of various countries and areas, which includes the adjective of nationality and abbreviation for each currency. Partly available online (see Internet Resources below).

LÁZARO CARRETAR, FERNANDO, "Novésimos", *El País*, January 7, 2001.

ORELLANA, MARINA and CHADBURN, JOHN, *Glosario Internacional*, Santiago, Chile.

Very helpful English-Spanish/Spanish-English glossary of "selected terms used in international organizations" by two retired United Nations translators with decades of experience. Update due out shortly.

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, *Human Development Report*, 2000. Published in Arabic, Catalan, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Detailed comparison of economic growth with social progress worldwide by country. Includes helpful glossary of "Selected Definitions." See Internet site below.

WEBSTER'S THIRD INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY-UNABRIDGED, Merriam-Webster, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1986.

WORLD BANK, 2000 *Annual Report*.

Published in English, French and Spanish, as well as German, Japanese, Portuguese and Russian and available free of charge (except for shipping charges). See Internet site below.

WORLD BANK, WORLD BANK GLOSSARY, SPANISH/ENGLISH-ENGLISH/SPANISH, Washington, D.C., 1996

WORLD BANK, 2000/2001 *World Development Report*.

Published in English, French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish, with a different focus each year. The 2000/2001 Report is entitled "Attacking Poverty" and looks at how the World Bank is "promoting economic opportunities, facilitating empowerment, and enhancing security for poor people."

"Technical Notes" at the end include definitions of indicators. Entire English, French and Spanish versions available online at <http://www.worldbank.org>, under "Publications."

Internet Resources

- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean: <http://www.eclac.org> and <http://www.cepal.org>
- Mostly Spanish-language publications, research and studies, projects, databases, news and more.
- Foreign Trade Information System (Organization of American States): <http://www.sice.oas.org>
- Excellent site with information in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish, including the full texts of international trade agreements (such as MERCOSUR agreements) and bilateral investment treaties, and links to official investment sites.
- Inter-American Development Bank: <http://www.iadb.org>
- English and Spanish information on IDB projects, publications, policies, research and statistics. The IDB Annual Report can be ordered or downloaded online (click on "Publications," then "Institutional documents").
- International Monetary Fund: <http://www.imf.org>
- Information, reports, statistics, news and publications, mainly in English, but sometimes in French and occasionally also in Spanish. IMF terminology database available at <http://www.imf.org/external/np/term/index.asp>.
- Pan American Health Organization: <http://www.paho.org>
- English and Spanish country health profiles, publications, library services and more.
- United Nations: <http://www.un.org>
- English, French and Spanish links to all UN agencies, including the UNDP.
- World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org>
- News, publications (including the Annual Report and World Development Report), topics in development, data on countries and regions, in English, French and Spanish.