

Client satisfaction

A participatory social monitoring and quality control tool in the context of rural development projects

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In the private sector client satisfaction (CS) is a proven concept applied in the private sector for improving relations between companies (delivering goods or services) and their clients. Up to now, CS has little been used in the rural setting, particularly in development projects. Probably because the prevailing perception that rural people are “beneficiaries” and not “clients” of development interventions. Consequently, institutions delivering infrastructure or rendering services to rural communities do so on behalf of a financing institution. Therefore they feel mainly accountable to them. The following case from Bolivia shows how CS applied in the context of rural development improves the quality of projects and increases the accountability of service providers towards rural people as their clients.

The rural development setting is changing; demands of and from the beneficiaries are emerging. In Bolivia, the local population has to present proposals to the



Discussion between farmers and service provider during CS assembly.

municipalities and defend them to be included in the municipal Annual Operational Plan. They also have to contribute increasingly with own inputs, sometimes even in form of cash. This means that they are considered as clients who are in a position to demand the delivery of good quality services.

A rural project’s impact depends on the quality of planning (pre-investment) as much as on execution (investment). A chief element of quality lies in a proactive attitude both of the service provider (consultant, NGO, etc.) and of the client (community, interest groups, users, etc.). This means that projects are rather “processes” than “works to be delivered”, requiring the

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establishment of a constructive dialogue between the service provider and the community.

There are already firms (consultants and others) looking for new markets, participate in bidding contests, and become involved in processes previously unknown in Rural Development. They increasingly ask questions like: What is my market? What are my key competences? Who are my competitors? What are new trends with donors? Is my work well esteemed by the municipality, by the community?

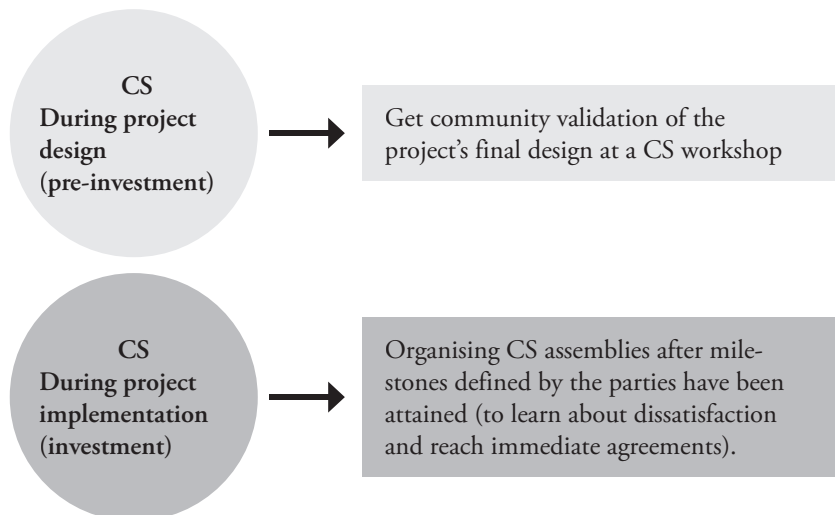
The programme *Agua Tierra Campesina* (ATICA) developed the methodology of “Qualified Demand” (“Enfoque Demanda Caliificada”) for a demand-driven elaboration and implementation of rural development projects. One main feature of this approach consists in maintaining the genuine demand of the community throughout the whole process of elaboration and implementation of a local project. As part of the Qualified Demand approach, ATICA proposes to use client satisfaction as a tool for social control carried out by the people concerned. This should:

- strengthen the service provider’s view about his clients, (concerned groups, community, users, etc.),
- better adapt the project planning and implementation processes to the new roles of the involved entities, communities and municipalities, and
- further communication flow and decision-making all along the design and implementation stages of the project.

When can Client Satisfaction be applied?

The CS tool aims at improving the delivery of services and goods to clients. It is applied at various stages of a project:

Chart 1: Client Satisfaction before and during project implementation

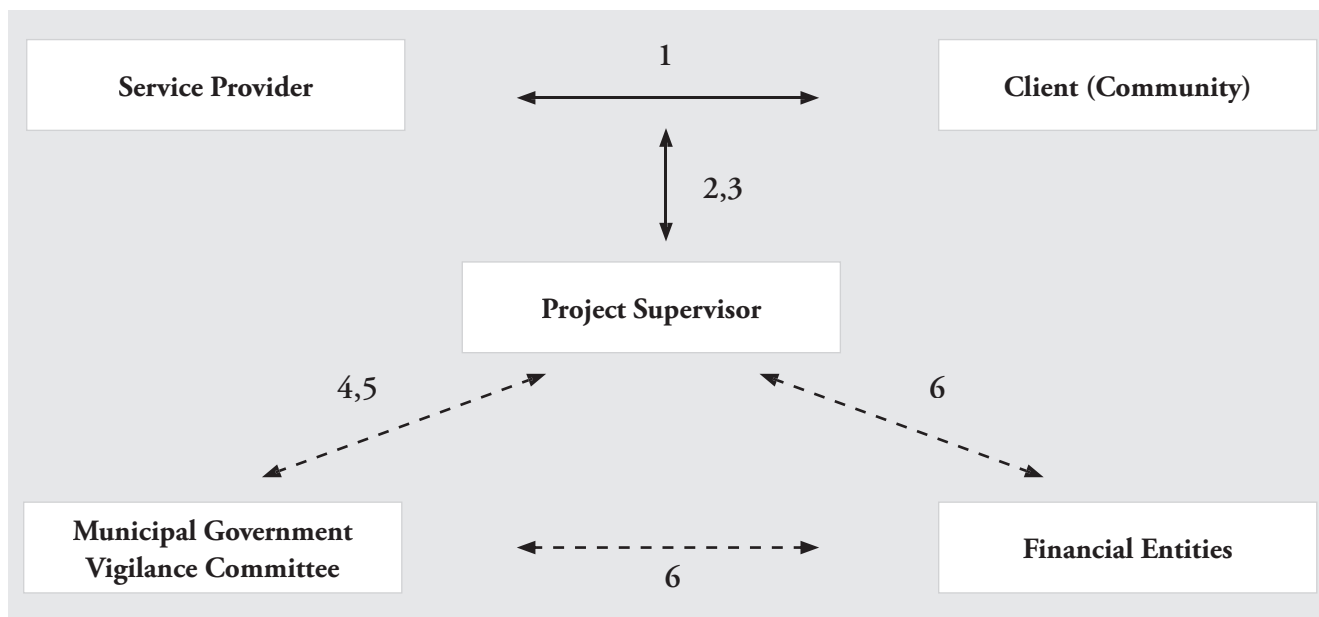


During **pre-investment**, the key moment in CS is a workshop in which the community can validate the project’s final design. The service provider contracted to work out the project presents the final document to the community, giving the participants (villagers, representatives from farmers associations and the municipality) the opportunity to express their conformity or their dissatisfaction with the project’s design. At the end of the workshop, the community leaders sign the project document (in case accepted) as well as a report on the outcome of the workshop that includes conformity/dissatisfaction aspects and agreements (see format below).

During **investment** or project implementation, CS gains greater importance depending on the type of project, agreements between the parties or significant problems, which may arise and require immediate solving.

In order to get the commitment of the service provider to implement the CS tool, it needs to be included in the terms of reference for project implementation and in the contract. An initial “start-up assembly” with the participation of community members, service provider, municipal government, and other players is necessary to share the CS objective and scope, as well as to agree on implementation modalities. During this assembly, a joint review of the information available about the project and the corresponding commitments is carried out.

Graph 1: Diagram of roles of players involved in CS.



Note: The dotted line indicate relationships between CS actors and other actors not directly involved in CS. Relationships between CS actors are shown with continuous lines.

During project implementation, several monitoring CS workshops are realised to guarantee social control of the process. In addition, agreements are reached between service providers and clients which allow for making small adjustments and solving (unforeseen) problems that arise during implementation. Within the framework of the Bolivian Popular Participation Law², CS could be understood as complementary to the existing social control committees (Vigilance Committee). However, in addition to controlling the proper use of municipal funds, such a Vigilance Committee could also check community satisfaction regarding the result of development projects.

² Bolivia's Popular Participation Law of April 20, 1994 aimed to decentralize public investment to municipal government and institutionalize decentralized participation for grassroots organizations in urban and rural areas. The law transferred nearly all governmental infrastructures to the 311 newly established municipalities and gave them responsibility for most public services and development projects. The national government began distributing 20 % of national tax revenue to the municipalities.

Who is involved in cs?

First of all, CS refers to the relationship between service providers and clients. The service provider is expected to be interested in client satisfaction and to create real feedback spaces. The more the service provider commits himself to apply the CS tool seriously, the more the client will gain trust in such feedback spaces. For a successful implementation of the CS tool, it is important that all participants clearly understand their role in the process as shown in graph 1.

Roles:

1. CS Implementation: The service provider and client are responsible for implementing CS.
2. Verifying if CS is being implemented.
3. Following up appeals in case CS fails to work or if dissent arises on an issue.
4. Receiving and reviewing the supervisor's reports.
5. Second level of appeal in case the supervisor fails to solve disagreements arising in CS implementation.
6. Promoting CS (through contracts and agreements).

Implementation of CS – an example from villa Serrano municipality

Project: Construction and management of water ponds (water deposits) in the Huerta Mayu community, Municipality of Villa Serrano, Department of Chuquisaca

Participants: Clients, Service Provider, Municipal Council, Vigilance Committee, Municipal Technician, Supervisor, Technician ATICA

1. Start-up Assembly (beginning of project implementation).

- a) Presentation of project by service provider
 - ✓ Contract amount
 - ✓ Implementation period
 - ✓ Staff responsible for implementation
 - ✓ Project implementation logistics: Camp, team, personnel lodging, etc.
- b) Presentation and agreement on the implementation plan
 - ✓ Activities to be carried out and outcomes to be achieved
 - ✓ Implementation schedule
 - ✓ Responsibilities of the implementing entity and of the clients
 - ✓ Requirements for local contributions (labor, material and money)

2. Intermediate CS Assemblies (during implementation of project)

- a) Presentation of progress in project implementation, (example)
 - ✓ Laying out the location of water ponds
 - ✓ Initiation of training: water pond management and use
 - ✓ Completion of application organic fertilizers to peach trees
 - ✓ Etc.
- b) Articulation of (dis)satisfaction by the community and service provider
- c) Building consensus on agreements between the service provider and the community to solve aspects of dissatisfaction
- d) Drafting and signing a CS Report (see Box 1)

3. Final CS Assembly at the moment of temporary handover of project

- a) Final report after project implementation
- b) Clients voice their (dis)satisfaction
- c) Building consensus on agreements between service provider and the community to solve aspects of dissatisfaction
- d) Drafting and signing of CS report

Stakeholders appraisal statements on CS:

Communities: *“During project implementation, CS provides an important space to talk about the good things and the bad things; one gets more information about the project; both parties (community and service provider) improve.”*

Service Provider: *“Communication with the community is improved; the schedule of activities can be fine-tuned; project quality can be verified; a better service is provided.”*

Supervisor: *“CS contributes to taking care of the community’s expectations within a framework of project budget constraints. It is also useful to reformulate the project according to the community’s needs; the need for participation in the project preparation and implementation processes becomes evident.”*

Mayor: *“The municipal government wants all players to participate and so be able to work better. These players help us to better conduct the projects by engaging everyone in a proactive manner. Thus, responsibilities are fully shared.”*

Municipal Liaison ATICA: *“In many occasions, we have heard bitter complaints that the institutions that have worked in a specific area for several years, did not leave behind any evidence of development. Therefore, CS has become a very important instrument for service providers and clients, so that they are able to develop projects with greater coherence and shared responsibility.”*

Encountered difficulties

- While introducing the CS tool, it is often difficult to reach consensus between communities and service providers without the presence or the facilitation of a third party (e.g. municipal technician, supervisor or ATICA liaison).
- In some cases, the subsidy dynamics of rural development institutions limits active participation of organized groups and communities. Community members do not see themselves as clients and/or are afraid to lose a project if they put forward their dissatisfactions.
- When dealing with a collective client (e.g. irrigation associations), internal power relationships may adversely affect a full and honest articulation of opinions within a group and only the opinions of the leaders are heard.
- Organizations that have been working in an area for a long time and thereby having established good relationships with local leaders, may consider unnecessary to implement a CS system even when becoming a contracted service provider. The organizations assume that, given the already existing trustful relationship, all issues will be brought up without the need to resort to CS.
- On some occasions, the community’s complaints are based on its own failing to comply with demands and so the providers point them out. Therefore, the agreements reached during a CS meeting also help reinforce the commitment of the community.



Farmers and service provider conduct quality control at water pond construction site.

Box 1: CS Report of the intermediate assembly: Water Pond Project Huerta Mayu

Location: Community of Huerta Mayu, Municipality of Villa Serrano, Department of Chuquisaca
 Project: Construction of water ponds
 Date: November 6, 2001
 Participants: 21 community members involved in the project

Conformity Aspects:

- 1) The progress made is according to plan and the ponds are becoming a reality
- 2) I agree that the tractor (caterpillar) will return to better compact the soil and to clean up
- 3) The employees of the construction company are working well and we have a good coordination with them
- 4) The operator and his assistant worked well, and they treated us well
- 5) The engineer showed us how best change the location of the pond

Dissatisfaction aspects	Agreements
1. I would like to expand the well a little bit	1. We will wait for the company to carry out the volume calculation, and based on the corresponding reports, the decision on whether or not to expand the well will be taken.
2. They have marked down the well location at my animal's exit point	The company will mark down Damian Soliz's well location at a point where it does not affect the animals' exit.
3. I would like to move the well some 4 meters so that the road does not run into it.	The company will assess the feasibility of changing the well location after a site inspection .
4. The gravel and sand brought by the company is dirty with sludge	The company will take steps to change the source of the material. The community will be in charge of getting sand from the river to ensure better quality.

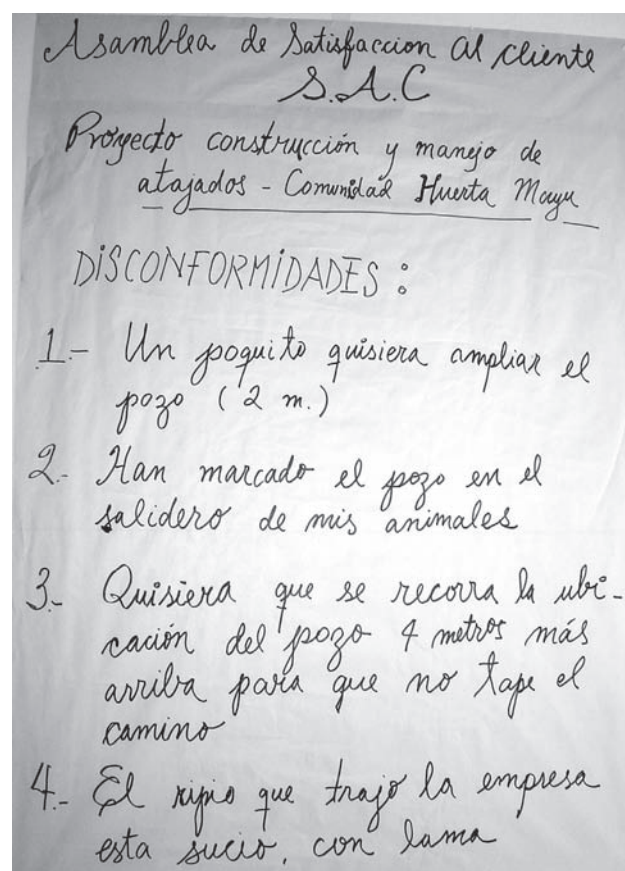
Signatures: **Rodrigo Pasquier**
 Project Technician, Company ECC
 (Service Provider)

Silverio Soliz
 President Project Implementation Committee
 Clients Representative)

Lessons learnt

- CS is a simple social monitoring and control tool applied by the parties that are involved in planning and implementation of rural development projects (both infrastructure and services). It aims at detecting problems and finding short-term solutions in a pragmatic manner (it focuses more on "action" than on "opinion").
- The experience shows that the CS tool is mainly appreciated:
 - a) by the rural communities as a monitoring and social control tool. CS improves their capacity to express their demands and dissatisfactions and thus contributes to their empowerment.
 - b) by the Vigilance Committees as a social control tool.
 - c) by the project supervisors as a means for better justification of their order to change project implementation.

- d) by the municipal government for establishing better communication flow between all parties.
 - e) by service providers as a communication tool and – in a few cases so far – as a source of information to improve the quality of their services.
- The service providers' attitude towards the community becomes more "formal" by using the CS approach. Therefore, monitoring of the commitments made by the two parties is easier. The service provider is more likely to respect deadlines and to provide good quality services. Both parties are satisfied and conforming with the delivered project.
 - CS can mobilize indigenous knowledge; when a company cannot find a solution to a problem, peasants sometimes can. In addition, peasants often have better ideas on how to reduce costs. In this sense, CS provides a platform for a "dialogue among various know-hows".
 - Communities acquire experience in dealing with service providers that will guide them in the planning and implementation of future projects and in their interaction with new implementing entities. With time, communities are expected to get access to a more efficient and client-oriented market of service providers.
 - Through CS, the service provider improves its performance and increases the array of solutions to offer, and thus becomes more competitive. It can be expected that a service provider can use a good record of CS to improve his possibilities of getting new assignments by winning bidding contests. However, this is a longer-term process which also requires that financing institutions consider CS as an important criterion in the evaluation of service providers.



CS report Huerta Mayu Community.

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