
Social Audit Program for the Local Road Construction Project San Antonio del Monte Municipality, Sonsonate, El Salvador

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Summary

This social audit experience was used in the project to build a six kilometer local road in El Salvador. The project benefited 500 families directly and an additional 1,000 families indirectly, all low-income. Project duration was eight months, including training community delegates in the social auditing process and conducting supervision, evaluation, monitoring, and control of the physical work. This project helped enhance the municipal administration's receptivity to greater participation by the beneficiary population and contributed to improved project administration. This experience has the potential for replication through synergetic learning processes. This is true because of the tangible savings in investment and use of resources.

Background

San Antonio del Monte is a municipality comprising urban, semi-urban, and rural low-income populations; most of its inhabitants live in poverty. Past attempts to implement federal and municipal government funded public works projects were characterized by the lack of local participation and poor government control. These projects resulted in products of minimal or poor quality—and therefore short-lived—or in products that benefited only a small number of people.

CREA used several criteria in selecting the community that would participate in a pilot social audit project: 1) international organizations were already

operating in the municipality and collaboration was possible; 2) the mayor's office exhibited the political will to allow citizen participation and oversight; and 3) the municipality had sustained damage in the 2001 earthquakes.

The social audit program was applied to the sole municipal infrastructure project being implemented in 2002: the construction of a local roadway that would improve the local and pedestrian access of some 1,500 families to the municipal seat. A Social Audit Committee [Comisión de Contraloría Social], named by the Local Development Committee, had chief responsibility for the project. The Committee

had access to budgets, bidding documentation, invoices, and receipts for construction materials used. The Committee achieved a high degree of acceptance and receptivity to its work, despite initial resistance from some municipal authorities.

Objectives

The objectives of the Social Audit Program for the Construction of a Local Road, Municipality of San Antonio del Monte were: (i) conduct observation, monitoring, follow-up, and control of public management, in order to prevent inappropriate acts that would adversely affect the project; (ii) monitor bidding, contracting, and implementation over the course of the project to ensure compliance with legal and ethical standards.

Processes and Methods

Who

The main actors in the social audit program are:

The Municipal Mayor, the chief of the Institutional Procurement and Contracts Unit [Unidad de Adquisiciones y Contrataciones Institucionales (UACI)], the Local Development Committee [Comité de Desarrollo Local (CDL)], the Social Audit Committee, the beneficiary population, and CREA International of El Salvador.

The direct and indirect beneficiaries comprise some 1,500 low-income families with an average of seven members. Average family income is approximately minimum wage, unemployment is 40%, and the illiteracy rate is 30% (and higher for women). The

population has access to potable water, but lacks access to sewage and waste removal systems. While it has access to electricity, access to education and health care requires a 40-60 minute walk from the place of residence to the municipal seat.

The specialists who provided technical assistance to the project had expertise and backgrounds in citizen participation, adult education, social organization, and transparency. This contributed to their awareness and understanding that the project belonged to the community and was for the benefit of the community.

There was always a good relationship between the technical team and the population in general, owing to the fact that the team had worked previously in this municipality.

What

The main objective was to achieve greater transparency in the use of funds by evaluating different levels of funding authorization and management and make it possible to pay attention to more details relating to the infrastructure of the public works project.

The project anticipated that, as a result of transparency, the local six-kilometer road would be built with improved standards of quality, would meet the needs of the target population, and would be durable, thus benefiting future generations.

The concerted participation of the actors was key to achieving the stated goals and is described in the paragraphs below:

The role of the Municipal Mayor's Office was to provide the institutional space for implementing the entire process, and to provide logistical and administrative support as well as the underlying legal framework for all audit activities. This was critical during the project's early stages since the other participants perceived a degree of political will to undertake this activity that was without precedent in the municipality.

The Local Development Committee (CDL) played a prominent role in identifying the most affected population and prioritizing needs, which made it possible to plan for the transparency with which the work was carried out; it also was the entity that identified local leaders in the area.

Community leaders organized in the Social Audit Committee were the eyes and ears of the entire process. They monitored the physical construction process and paid attention to everything from the receipt and quality of materials to their proper use. They approached this task with unswerving dedication, given that they were the direct beneficiaries of the project.

The municipal Procurement and Contracts Unit [Unidad de Adquisiciones y Contrataciones] prepared the final contract; this information was necessary to monitor the process from the administrative standpoint. It also served as a source of budgetary information and provided specific information to the Local Development Committee and community leaders.

CREA International, using one foreign and one national consultant, encouraged the organization of the Audit Committee. It conducted advocacy in the municipality and among local authorities on the need for a legal instrument, such as the Municipal Ordinance, to support audit activities. These consultants also trained the entire committee in the application of the Procurement and Contracts Law [Ley de Adquisiciones y Contrataciones], all of which contributed to the success of the audit process.

How

The process of auditing a local six-kilometer roadway was extremely complicated. It began with the selection of the beneficiary community out of a universe of communities, based on surveys conducted by the Local Development Committee (CDL) to identify the most needy community and population.

The second stage of the process involved the selection of community leaders to form the Social Audit Committee. The CDL selected these individuals based on the following criteria: honesty and integrity, no conflicts of interest, no pending criminal or civil procedures.

As a third step, which occurred throughout the process, the Audit Committee interviewed individuals and entities such as the Municipal Mayor, the head of the Institutional Procurement and Contracts Unit, project technical staff, and the population in general. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain the project's budgetary characteristics, the quality and quantity of resources, time frames, and needs.

Guided by the Committee, the community at large conducted ongoing evaluation of the physical progress of the public works project, a task that required precise technical expertise. Throughout the process, and once it was finalized, the Audit Committee reported to the CDL, the Municipality, and the facilitating institutions on operational compliance.

How Much

The estimated cost of the local road project was approximately \$21,714.28 dollars, broken down into labor (\$ 6,348.59), materials (\$14,314.96), and transportation (\$22.86), for a subtotal of \$20,586.41.

A miscellaneous expenditure in the amount of \$685.02 and supervision in the amount of \$342.85 brought the grand total to \$21,714.28 (see Table 1). The Central Government allocate these funds from the General Budget of the Nation to the municipalities, which then invest them according to their needs.

TABLE 1 ESTIMATED COST OF THE LOCAL ROAD PROJECT

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Labor	6,348.59
Materials	14,314.96
Transportation	22.86
Miscellaneous	685.02
Supervision	342.85
Total	21,714.28

The budget of the technical assistance program for social audit came to a total of \$2,962.69. This includes the payment of stipends to a national consultant with expertise in municipal issues and citizen participation. Additional minor expenditures included lunch and breakfast during training sessions. In terms of a budget for follow-up, the community has planned for the self-sustainability of the process through self-training involving the various audit committees.

Outcomes

- Municipal authorities are more receptive to citizen oversight of other public works projects. One example is an \$80,000 potable water project that is soon to be implemented.
- Because of the positive experience of this local road project, the company that built the road was able to save money—due to transparency in the purchase of supplies and citizen participation—and therefore can extend the project even further.
- The project improved the social profile of the municipality to the degree that in the 2003 elections, the same party was reelected to the mayor's office and the outgoing mayor was elected deputy in the National Assembly.
- The number of active members of the Local Development Committee has increased by 100%, including an increase in women's participation.
- The increased number of days per year in which the road is passable and the decrease in travel time have fueled the population's interest in participating in future municipal public works projects.

Limitations and Opportunities

When the project began, there was a problem accessing information because the Procurement and Contracts Unit was opposed to releasing documentation such as the budget. This problem was resolved by raising awareness among these officials as to the benefits of the method, including them in training processes, and exposing them to other experiences in Latin America.

Another limitation was the need to train various members of the Social Audit Committee. Turnover among Committee members meant that training had to be ongoing. CREA has produced teaching materials for these training programs and it is hoped that the members themselves will transmit the knowledge they have acquired to new members.

Lack of financial incentives for those actually conducting the audit limited some Committee members' ability to participate, particularly since those individuals had to travel long distances to carry out their tasks.

In terms of opportunities, it is worth mentioning that the social audit method will be used in the future in the municipality in granting licenses, use of public property, contracts for ecosystem maintenance, environmental protection projects on public lands, and

in carrying out certain procedures, or implementing a participatory plan.

To strengthen the process, it is necessary to further develop the reporting and records-keeping phase, and the dissemination process (this was not done adequately). This will make it possible to disseminate findings, conclusions, and recommendations to increase public awareness. Another aspect that was overlooked, and that should be developed, is the capacity to take steps so that negative findings are investigated by oversight bodies and those responsible are punished appropriately.

Additional Resources

For more information, CREA International of El Salvador has a Web page (www.caii.net/participation) with information on its Transparency program and links to counterpart organizations. Information regarding the municipal ordinance for the creation of the Social Audit Committee, a final report on the Technical Assistance Consultancy for the Audit Committee, copies of ordinances in different municipalities in El Salvador, are also available by e-mail: (ottov@cai-dc.com). A guide is currently being developed entitled "How to Conduct Social Auditing at the Municipal Level" ["Como hacer Contraloría Social a nivel Municipal"], which will be posted on the Web page in mid-2003.