

SQ1B: Establish policies and procedures for the provision of good quality services

REGULATORY AREA: SERVICE QUALITY REGULATION		SQ1B
OBJECTIVE SQ1 Define service requirements to be met by operators	ACTION CARD SQ1B <h2 style="margin: 0;">ESTABLISH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE PROVISION OF GOOD QUALITY SERVICES</h2>	
COST: Low FREQUENCY: One time TARGET GROUPS: Regulators, service operators, consumer associations		
DESCRIPTION <p>The definition of service quality requires appropriate communication through transparent mechanisms. It is important that service quality procedures are comprehensible and accessible to service operators and consumers at all times. Regulators should therefore develop sets of policy and procedure guidelines aimed at setting common rules for service quality provision. In accordance, in most cases, these procedures are outlined through or built upon consumer charts. Outlined often with some incentives, these guidelines motivate operators to share accurate information. In turn, this helps regulators in the long term to reduce overall auditing costs.</p>		
EXPECTED OUTCOMES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent service quality guidelines and policies are accessible to all interested parties. • There is an independent and impartial supervision of service operators. • Consumer associations are actively engaged. 		
EXAMPLE 1: AUSTRALIA <p>In Australia, the regulator in Victoria state establishes that operators must issue and comply with a customer charter that meets the procedural and substantive requirements of the relevant code, and sets out the water business's approved service standards. In addition to complying with applicable requirements of public health and environmental regulations, a water business must provide a service in accordance with any commitments in the water business's approved service standards. Each water business is therefore required to adhere to the following.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Meet the customer-related standards, procedures and practices set out in this code. b) Develop, issue and comply with a customer charter which meets the procedural and substantive requirements of the water code, and sets out the water business's approved service standards. 		
EXAMPLE 2: ZAMBIA <p>Zambia introduced through its national regulator NWASCO the following Consumer Charter.</p> <p><i>You have the right to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The minimum level of service as guaranteed by your provider • Regular supply • Good quality water • A satisfactory response to your complaints • Be invoiced every month • Demand better services <p><i>You have the responsibility to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give feedback on the quality and quantity of services received • Keep water infrastructure/fittings in good condition • Pay bills on time 		

- Report any illegal activities around water infrastructure
- Allow water providers access to infrastructure and water points
- Pay for repairs and maintenance of distribution pipes
- Conserve water

EXAMPLE 3: COSTA RICA

The Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (ARESEP), through the Costa Rican Institute of Aqueducts and Sewerage (AyA), has a national REGULATION ON AQUEDUCT AND SEWERAGE PROVISION SERVICES (Agreement No. 2020-442), which regulates the relationship, rights and obligations between service providers (including the AyA itself) and their users with regard to the availability and effective provision of the utilities in question. The regulation establishes the following guiding principles:

- “Water service provision in the existing coverage area shall follow the principle that human consumption is priority.”
- “Sanitation service provision in the coverage area shall follow the principle of protecting public health and the environment.”

Furthermore, the regulation lays out policies and procedures for public utilities provision, stating that “(...) The drinking water and sanitation service provider is obliged to provide such services in accordance with optimum provision parameters in terms of quality, quantity, continuity, reliability, equality, universal access, efficiency, opportunity, sustainability and a human rights focus, except in cases of force majeure, acts of God or duly announced maintenance periods affecting the coverage area on which the property is located (...).” On this basis, the agency establishes general guidelines and procedures on aspects such as:

- Service provision conditions.
- Service connection and metering.
- Services provided over easements and drinking water pipes and/or sanitary sewerage.
- Construction and reception of primary aqueduct and/or sewerage sites needed to enable service provision.
- Billing and collections guidelines.
- User rights and obligations.
- Suspension and reconnection of water services.

EXAMPLE 4: BOLIVIA

The Authority for the Auditing and Social Supervision of Drinking Water and Basic Sanitation (AAPS) sets forth a NATIONAL REGULATION ON DRINKING WATER AND SEWERAGE SERVICES FOR URBAN CENTERS (Ministerial Resolution 510-92) containing the provisions regulating relationships between providers and users. The regulation establishes the following general principles, among others:

- “The Company is to guarantee the drinkability of the water it provides, which shall be fit for human consumption. In the event that this is not the case, the principle of Water Quality shall become the Company’s priority in pursuit of this aim.”
- “The Company shall be responsible for providing its services in a continuous and efficient manner, except in cases of force majeure or emergencies.”
- “The Company shall guarantee the adequate quality of materials used in domestic connections and the proper execution of works under normal conditions of use.”

Furthermore, the regulation lays out guidelines for the provision of public utilities, establishing general criteria and procedures in aspects such as:

- Service requests.
- Domestic drinking water and sewerage connections.
- Discharge of industrial wastewater in water sources, drinking water courses and/or sanitary sewerage.
- Tariffs and billing.
- Suspension of water supply.
- Rules for urban developers.
- Prohibitions.
- User rights and obligations.

Claims and sanctions.

LINKS

Australia: Australia Customer Service Code: <https://www.esc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/customer-service-codes-customer-service-code-urban-water-businesses-august-2018-20180801.pdf>

Zambia: Zambia Consumer Charter: <http://www.nwasco.org.zm/index.php/consumer-service/consumer-rights-obligations>

Costa Rica: AyA Service Provision Regulation. Board of Directors’ Agreement No. 2020-442: https://www.aya.go.cr/transparencialnst/acceso_informacion/SitePages/Marco-Normativo.aspx

Bolivia: National Regulation on Drinking Water and Sewerage Services for Urban Centers: <http://www.aaps.gob.bo/images/MarcoLegal/ResolucionesMinisteriales/RM-510-92.pdf>

INTERNAL CAPACITIES NEEDED AND THE ROLE OF PARTNERS

Strong administrative, procedural and communication capacities must be embodied within a regulator to conduct this action. It is common however, that regulators' staff will require additional support from development partners when drafting the guidelines and conducting multi-stakeholder consultations. Substantive inputs by relevant ministries will help to match these guidelines with other sector policies. Feedback from consumers, operators and civil society is necessary to ensure a common understanding through the use of understandable terminology.