SINGLE WINDOW FOR CITIZEN SERVICES

SOPROEN

SOCIAL PROTECTION ENGINEERING

Technical note written by:
Francisco V. Ayala, Niza Aragundi and Susana Ponce
December, 2023

SINGLE WINDOW FOR CITIZEN SERVICES (SWCS)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CMIS	Case Management Information System
L&R	Linkages & Referrals
MIES	Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion
SP	Social Protection
SWCS	Single Window for Citizen Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the major challenges facing social protection (SP) systems today is assisting and addressing the needs of individuals and beneficiary households when they face personal needs, whether simple or complex. Engaging with beneficiaries is already a significant challenge for social programs, not to mention the mechanisms to facilitate the resolution of their individual needs. In general, households and their members, whether beneficiaries or not of social protection programs, are not assisted by an SP system in resolving their own needs. It is not enough for social protection systems to support poor and vulnerable households with supply-driven programs and services; it is time to find and develop mechanisms to stimulate demand, give them a nudge, and provide them with information and guidance so that they can choose programs and service providers that can help them.

Mechanisms such as Linkages & Referrals (L&R), associated with citizen service centers, aim to understand individual problems and help resolve them by implementing precise and appropriate actions for each individual. So, if we want social assistance to be precise, we must stimulate demand (citizens) so that they can find suitable and tailored solutions to the challenges and needs they face.

To address personal needs, the SP system must have many programs and service providers. Not only public ones but also private, nonprofit, religious, and other types (third party) of programs. Service providers should be added based on citizens' needs.

Likewise, an inclusive social protection system should allow households that are not necessarily poor and vulnerable to participate. Emergencies and disasters, whether massive or personal, can lead to a situation of poverty and despair for households that were not in such a situation before the event.

There are three main reasons why citizens need to interact and communicate with SP programs and service providers: (i) to follow the rules established by SP programs to maintain eligibility and continue receiving the benefits of those programs; (ii) to access programs and service providers to address various types of individual needs; and (iii) to obtain general information about SP programs and service providers and/or specific information about events or activities organized by those SP programs and services.

It is proposed to develop and implement the SWCS mechanism to facilitate communication between citizens and institutional actors involved in the inclusive SP system. Then, through L&R, access to programs and service providers. This single window mechanism would address different types of needs. For each type of need, the SWCS would have different rules and protocols to assist citizens through referrals and links with programs and service providers. The SWCS can be implemented in a relatively short period of up to 6 months in a region and then expanded to the rest of the country after reviewing and adjusting its instruments.

A. INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges facing social protection systems today is assisting and addressing the needs of individuals and beneficiary households when they face personal needs, whether simple or complex. Beneficiaries may need general information about social protection programs, carry out procedures such as appealing a decision, filing a complaint, or updating information, while following the rules established by SP programs. They may also face personal catastrophes such as a terminal illness of a family member, the destruction of a home, or the loss of income due to death of the household head.

The World Bank and other development agencies agree that mechanisms facilitating the relationship between beneficiaries and social programs, which would assist them with their problems and challenges, are often overlooked. The design of such activities is commonly omitted (Raimondo, 2020). Policymakers and social program administrators are more interested in massive processes, such as data collection, beneficiary selection, enrollment, and payment processes, and show less interest in issues like direct attention and relationship with the beneficiary. Government agencies prioritize program outcomes such as the number of households that applied, beneficiaries paid, and disbursed amounts, among others.

Engaging with beneficiaries is already a significant challenge for social programs, not to mention the mechanisms to facilitate the resolution of their individual needs. In general, households and their members, whether beneficiaries or not of SP programs, are not assisted by the SP system. When these mechanisms exist, they are often centralized, not very customer-oriented, cumbersome, and with very long response times. Undoubtedly, any assistance aimed at resolving individual needs tends to be a complex process, especially when dealing with personal emergencies. Households facing urgent individual needs become desperate, they lack the required information to address them, and lack the resources to find a service provider who could help them. If they manage to do so, transaction costs to access the service and costs for using the service are usually high.

What has been worked on in detail and supported by development agencies such as the World Bank is the case management process. In this process, beneficiaries' needs and strengths are first assessed, and intervention plans are developed that would eventually graduate them from the SP system and then sustain themselves without state assistance. However, being a comprehensive approach, the execution mechanisms tend to be complex, lengthy, and costly to achieve their objectives. The relationship between

these beneficiaries and officials of the SP system must be intense during the execution of these plans. The challenge of this relationship is to maintain smooth and effective communication.

Given the above, the United Nations (Bowen 2020) and various researchers (Banerjee, 2011, Easterly, 2013) have been advocating for the inclusion of mechanisms that drive demand (citizens) to solve their problems. It is not enough for social protection systems to support poor and vulnerable households with supply-driven programs and services (State); it is time to find and develop mechanisms to stimulate demand, give them a nudge, provide them with information and guidance so that they can choose programs and service providers that can help them.

This technical note proposes developing and implementing a mechanism called "Single Window for Citizen Services" that would help citizens communicate better with officials of SP programs and service providers. Through quick and effective communication, possible aids would be identified, allowing citizens to find solutions to their needs.

B. OBJECTIVES

1. General Objective

- Propose a communication mechanism and a Linkages and Referrals (L&R) system designed to stimulate demand (citizens) so they can address their needs effectively.

2. Specific Objectives

- Explain the fundamental characteristics and operation of the Single Window for Citizen Services (SWCS) mechanism, which can be implemented within social protection systems.
- Outline a proposal for the implementation of SWCSs in Ecuador.

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For centuries, various scientific fields, such as medicine, have progressed through trial and error, assuming that what worked well for some patients could benefit others. The same evolutionary path can be observed in the social sector, where pilots have demonstrated the effectiveness of certain actions and their applicability to diverse populations. However, in recent decades, significant scientific advancements across disciplines have enabled personalized solutions, now commonly referred to as precise solutions. In medicine, for instance, it is understanding the the cellular and genetic

mechanisms that cause diseases, allowing for personalized treatments based on unique genetic characteristics. As expressed by Estupinya (2016), "Now each case is a different world, and it is no longer an excuse but a reason for investigation". Similarly, the social sector is transitioning towards this personalized approach, which the SOPROEN-Ayala Co team dares to baptize as "*precise social assistance*". Mechanisms such as Linkages & Referrals, associated with citizen service centers, aim to comprehend individual problems and help solve them by implementing precise actions.

Therefore, if we want social assistance to be precise, we need to stimulate demand (citizens) so that they can find suitable and tailored solutions to the challenges and needs they face. For this to happen it is necessary to expand the social protection system and make it more inclusive. In other words, to address personal needs, the SP system must have many programs and service providers. It should not only include public ones but also add programs and service providers from the private, non-profit, religious, and other sectors (third party) that citizens can turn to for their needs. Similarly, an inclusive social protection system should allow households that are not necessarily poor and vulnerable to participate. Emergencies and disasters, whether massive or personal, can lead to a situation of poverty and despair for households that were not in such a situation before the event.

If a social protection system has a large number of programs and service providers that individuals and households with needs can turn to, the chances of resolving their needs increase significantly. For this to be possible and occur effectively, social protection systems must have mechanisms that facilitate communication between the parties and allow them to make the necessary referrals to relevant programs and service providers. These mechanisms should be customer-oriented, very easy to use for citizens, even if their internal design and operation are complex. The greater the number and types of needs that are intended to be addressed in the SWCS, the greater the operational complexity of the SWCS.

To understand the basic characteristics of these communication mechanisms and L&R that make up the SWCS, it is first necessary to identify the actors involved in such a mechanism. There are four key actors who communicate with each other:

1. Individuals or households (citizens), including not only poor and vulnerable households,
2. Social workers from the social protection system,
3. Programs and service providers of the current SP system (i.e., central, and local public),
4. Programs and service providers that do not belong to the current SP system, which are integrated into the SWCS and become part of the inclusive social protection system.

The following figure shows these four actors and the communication lines between them for the SWCS mechanism to function: (Figure 1)

Figure 1. Actors of an Inclusive Social Protection System and Communication Channels
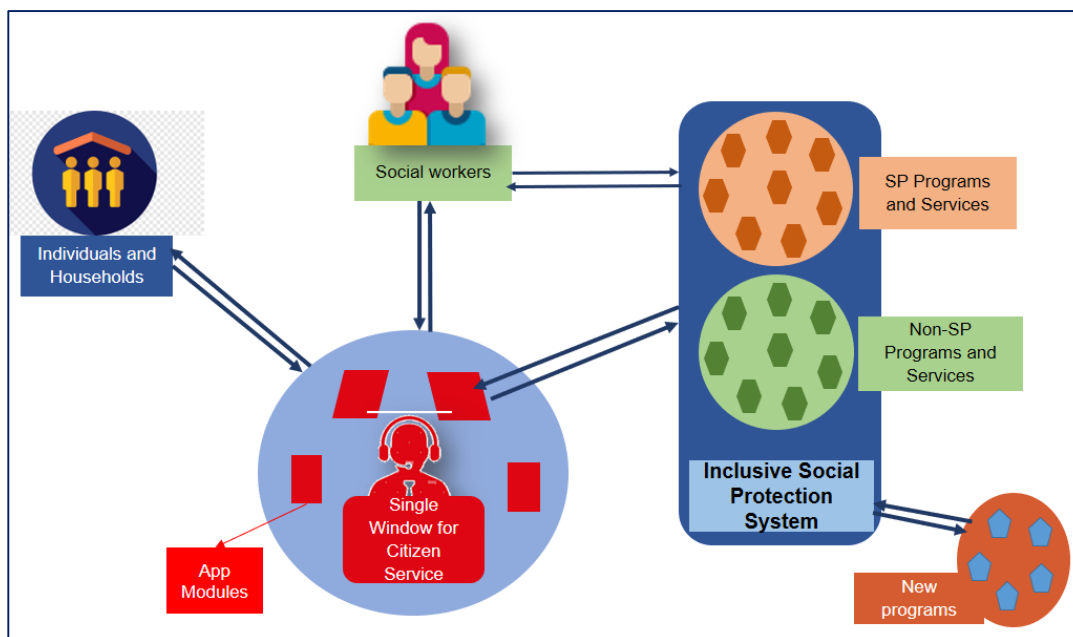
Source: Ayala Consulting

The SWCS is a mechanism that facilitates communication among the four actors. Citizens communicate with call center operators when they decide to and want to address their problems or needs. This mechanism has operators to facilitate initial communication but can also be complemented with digital applications such as chatbots, WhatsApp, emails, and others.

Now that we have a clear understanding of the four types of actors, this type of communication mechanism and L&R should have basic functional characteristics, which are outlined below:

Why is fast and effective communication required?

There are three main reasons why citizens need to connect and communicate with programs and service providers of the SP system:

- To follow the rules established by SP programs to maintain eligibility and continue receiving the benefits of those programs;
- To access programs and service providers to address various types of individual needs; and,
- To obtain general information about SP programs and service providers and/or specific information about events or activities organized by those SP programs and services.

Who initiates the communication?

The protocols of the programs determine who should initiate communication. Individuals are responsible for initiating communication when it comes to appeals, complaints, and data updates, among other things. On the other hand, data collection, records, guidance, and training are processes where program officials initiate communication.

When it comes to obtaining general information about programs and service providers, the citizen should initiate communication. Similarly, the citizen should initiate communication when they need help to address a personal need.

In essence, the role of the SP system is to encourage or prompt citizens to start the conversation when facing personal problems that could be resolved with external assistance or when they need to carry out activities related to the administrative processes of the programs.

Why is the SWCS relevant?

When there is a need, citizens embark on the task of searching for service providers who can help them and use the mechanisms they know through which they can communicate. In such a situation, the chances of finding the right provider become difficult and costly. The SWCS assists the citizens, guiding them to identify and select the appropriate service provider. This search process is carried out with the assistance of SWCS operators and officials in a very short time and with minimal transactional costs.

What communication and L&R mechanisms have been developed?

Digital applications and custom software have been developed to facilitate different types of communication and referrals between citizens and SP programs. In the past, SP programs have developed separate modules or applications to handle updates, complaints and claims, and case management.

Some more advanced social protection systems have developed mechanisms to optimize communication between beneficiaries and SP programs. Interesting examples are those implemented in Chile, Colombia, and other countries. SOPROEN has developed applications and software modules to implement referral and linkages mechanisms to address needs, handle updates, complaints, and case management.

Recently, the World Bank has developed a customizable software application called Case Compass to address case management processes. The software application called Case Management Information System (CMIS) is a prototype that can have the ability to focus on the customer and their needs and be goal oriented. The CMIS can go beyond case management and intervention plans; it can include referrals and linkages for other types of needs.

D. PROPOSAL "SINGLE WINDOW FOR CITIZEN SERVICES"

SP communication mechanisms face a series of problems and challenges that create barriers to interaction among actors. The main problems are summarized below:

- Often, citizens hesitate to initiate any communication. Some of them may suffer from different types of cognitive barriers that decrease the chances of communication, and they prefer to avoid it rather than act accordingly (Datta, 2023).
- Communication with PS programs can be slow and chaotic, which occurs when communication mechanisms are not well-designed or adjusted to customer characteristics. Program officials responsible for assisting and helping beneficiaries do not do so professionally and are not customer oriented.
- The greater the number of independent and separate mechanisms for connecting different actors, the greater the confusion among beneficiaries and the lower the levels of communication.

For these reasons, SP systems are heavily criticized despite having a variety of assistance programs and services for the poor and vulnerable. Criticisms focus on the lack of personalized attention to households and their inability to graduate a larger number of beneficiaries. The significant leap, then, is to add communication and referral mechanisms to stimulate demand and facilitate actions to address various types of needs.

It is proposed to develop and implement the SWCS mechanism to facilitate communication between citizens and the other three types of actors involved in the inclusive SP system. Subsequently, through Linkages & Referrals, citizens can access programs and service providers. This single-window mechanism would address different types of needs. The process works as follows:

1. Initiating communication when a need arises. Communication begins when a need arises. First, the citizen determines whether external assistance is required. If so, the citizen contacts the telephone service center of the SWCS (or through other complementary means) and explains to the operator the reasons for the call and their need.
2. The operator receives, understands, and classifies the request into one of the established categories and subcategories, each with a protocol to follow to assist the citizen by the corresponding institutional actor.

In general, the SWCS can classify requests (needs) into the following categories:

- **Urgent Needs (Emergencies):** Individuals and households facing individual emergencies or geographical disasters.
- **Non-urgent Needs:** Individuals seeking to address specific types of programs or services.
- **Special Needs of Vulnerable Populations:** Such as seniors (55+),

migrants, abused women, and others. Each population requires different types of assistance. For example, seniors might wish to continue working, transfer their knowledge, or access leisure social networks, among other things.

- **Needs of households benefiting from the SP system:** Those willing or eligible to prepare and execute intervention plans leading to eventual graduation from the SP system.
- **Information Update:** Required by SP programs to which individuals belong and receive benefits, to maintain eligibility and continue receiving benefits.
- **Complaints and Claims:** That individuals and households may have against the SP system or its programs, whether they are beneficiaries or not.
- **General Information:** About the SP system, specific events and activities organized by it, or other general inquiries.

3. Once the request is classified, and depending on the case, two actions can take place. The operator either assists the citizen by providing general information or refers them to a specialized officer at the SWCS to address the request.

4. The SWCS officer can guide the citizen on what to do, help her identify and choose service providers, and explain the next steps before making a formal referral to a specific program or service provider.

5. In the case of urgent needs, the SWCS officer refers the citizen to a service provider through a contact officer working for that service provider. This service provider contact officer receives the citizen and helps them navigate the bureaucracy of that provider on a priority basis so that they can eventually be linked and assisted.

6. The contact officer, in turn, informs the SWCS about whether the citizen has been assisted for follow-up purposes.

The following figure summarizes the process described above.

Figure 2. Single Window for Citizen Services
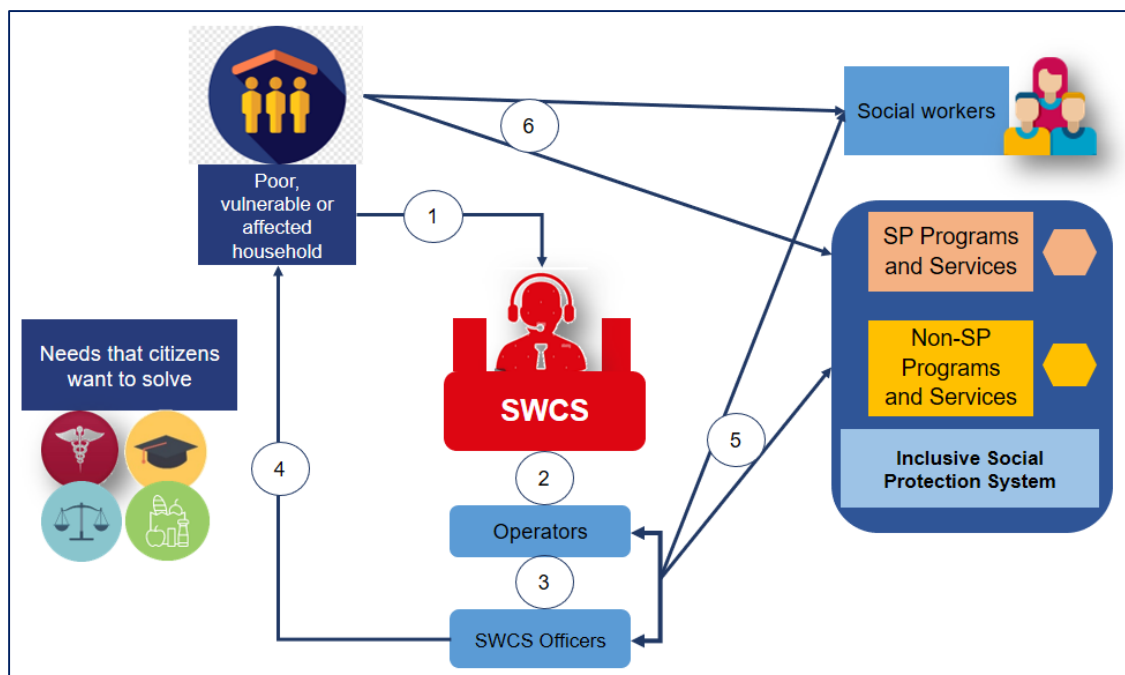
Source: Ayala Consulting

For the single-window mechanism to work, a robust application is needed, linked to the telephone service center and the various social protection programs and services. This version of SWCS proposes having a single and comprehensive application to manage different types of needs as mentioned above.

E. PROPOSAL FOR ECUADOR

The Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES) of Ecuador, with support from the World Bank, has launched a plan to implement a citizen service mechanism. To do this, it has integrated the databases of households in the Social Registry with information from various public records sources to have comprehensive and up-to-date information for each participating household. This information is crucial for the operation of the service window. In fact, this information will be used for participating households to interact with social protection system officials at the local or cantonal level and thus address various types of needs.

MIES would enter into agreements with each municipal government to create a county unit that manages the service

window and the referral and linkages system. MIES provides the databases, the digital application, the initial investment in equipment, training, and remote support. On the other hand, the municipal government provides the necessary space for the management unit, which is responsible for operating the service window. The needs addressed in this service window would include:

- Current needs of poor and vulnerable households wishing to enroll in one or more national social protection system programs and one or more local (canton) social protection system programs.
- Needs of beneficiary households willing or eligible to prepare and implement intervention plans leading to eventual graduation from the social protection system.
- Updating of information required by the social protection programs to which they belong and receive benefits to maintain eligibility and continue receiving benefits.
- Complaints and claims that individuals and households may have against the social protection system or its programs, whether they are beneficiaries or not.
- Access to general information about the social protection system, events, and specific activities organized by them or other general inquiries.

Not all of these needs necessarily have to be included; they can be progressively added to the service window if necessary, depending on the implementation strategy.

It is worth noting that MIES has a centralized system called Questions, Complaints, Suggestions, Requests for information, and Congratulations (PQSSF). To address a request, this system can include up to 10 activities/actions. In the proposal, this citizen service system is decentralized and would be the responsibility of each municipal government.

SOPROEN proposes strengthening this citizen service proposal in the terms outlined for the SWCS. The types of needs are expanded to include urgent needs, special needs, and others aimed at addressing needs due to emergencies and disasters, whether personal or massive, and special needs for older adults, among others. It is also proposed to expand the social protection system, not only by adding municipal programs and services but also non-public service providers operating in that county and committing to doing so on preferential and special terms for poor and vulnerable populations.

The county SWCSs would be connected with one at the national level, especially when it is necessary to refer citizens who cannot be assisted at the cantonal level. The following diagram shows how the SWCSs would be connected.

Figure 3. Connection of the SWCS at the Cantonal level
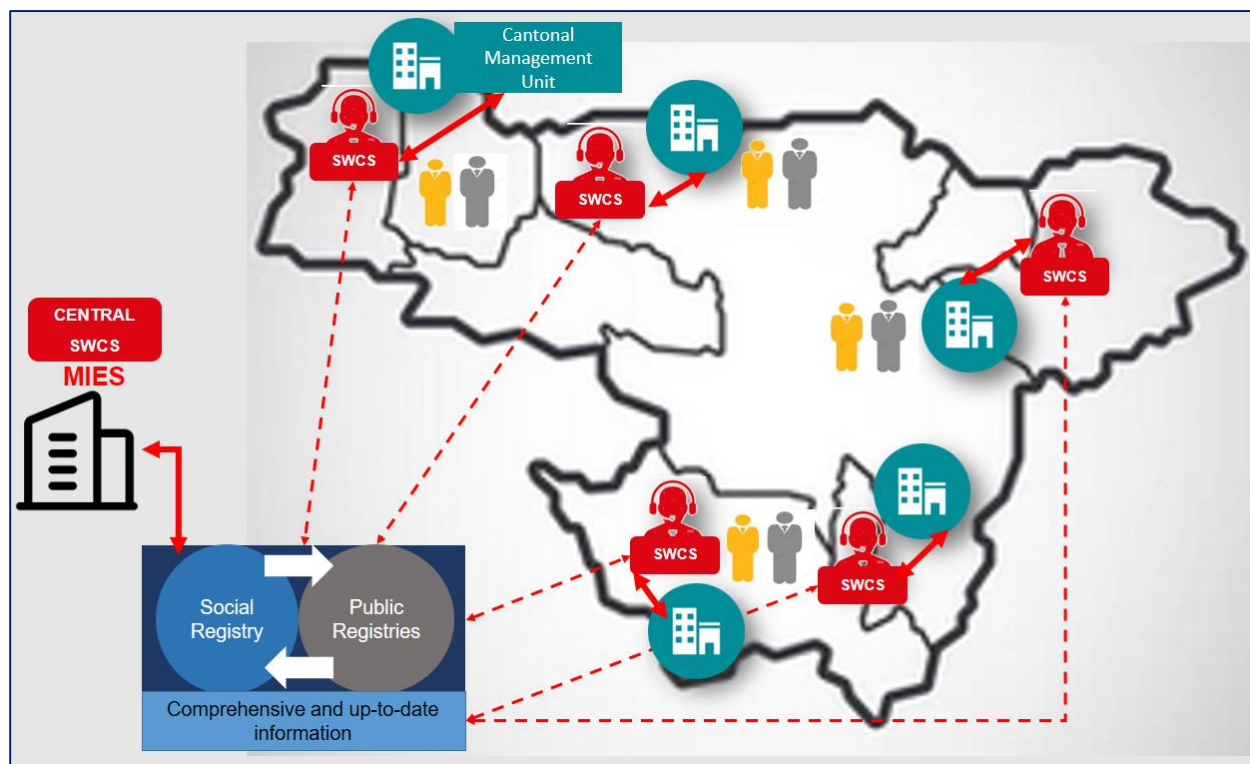
Source: Ayala Consulting

It is proposed to implement the SWCS in stages, starting with a few counties. The development of the SWCS with all its elements, including a robust digital application, a call center, operators, and specialized SWCS service officers, can be launched within a period of 6 months. Subsequently, the implementation would progress by groups of counties. It could begin in critical locations with high levels of violence, poverty, and vulnerability to disasters, in agreement with the Association of Municipalities of Ecuador (AME).

The implementation of the SWCS in the first group of counties will allow for adjustments and improvements in both the operation and digital applications before continuing in subsequent regions. The activities that need to be initiated to implement the SWCS in the initial counties are as follows:

1. Review and determine the most frequent needs of social protection system beneficiaries. With this information, priorities are established around which the SWCS is designed. That is, needs are classified.

2. Prepare the detailed operational design, including the development of protocols to cover each of the different prioritized and properly classified needs.
3. Establish coordination and communication mechanisms with various programs of the social protection system and with service providers outside the system.
4. Establish the administrative structure of the central SWCS unit and decentralized SWCSs, including funding for implementation and operation.
5. Develop and adjust the digital application (software) and the call center that will support the execution of the SWCS in each of the cantons.
6. Hire and train staff to work in the central SWCS as well as in cantonal SWCSs, including operators, specialized officers, and administrative officers.
7. Identify, evaluate, and register the programs and service providers that will participate in the SWCS with the support of information-gathering agencies, including universities.
8. Launch communication strategies to initiate the operation of the first stage of the SWCS.

Table 1. Work Plan to Implement the SWCS

#	ACTIVITIES	MONTH					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Identification and prioritization of needs	▓					
2	Preparation of the Operational Design in detail	▓	▓				
3	Coordination and communication with SP programs and service providers		▓	▓			
4	Definition of the administrative structure of the Management Unit (includes financing)			▓			
5	Development and adjustment of the digital tool and call center			▓	▓		
6	Hiring and training of personnel					▓	
7	Identification, evaluation and registration of programs and service providers					▓	▓
8	Implementation of communication strategies						▓

F. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Banerjee, A., and Duflo, E., (2011). A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty. (pp. 17-38). Pinguin Random House.

Bowen, T., et al. (2020). *Adaptive Social Protection: Building Resilience to Shocks.* (pp. 33-58) International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / World Bank.

Datta, S, et. al., (2023). Innovative, Adapt, and Scale: The Future of Behavioral Science in Cash Transfer Programs in Zhao, J., et. al. (ed), *Cash Transfers for Inclusive Societies: a Behavioral Lens*. (pp. 33-54). University of Toronto Press.

Easterly, W. (2013). The Tyranny of Experts: economists, dictators, and the forgotten rights of the poor. Basic Books, New York.

Estupinya, P. (2016). El ladrón de Cerebros: comer cerezas con los ojos cerrados. (pp. 166). Pinguin Random House Grupo Editorial.

Raimondo, E., et. al. (2020). Beneficiary Operations Management in Linder, K., (ed), *Sourcebook on the Foundations of Social Protection Delivery Systems* (pp. 281-372) International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / World Bank.