



Single Window Services in Social Protection: rationale and design features in developing country contexts

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Introduction

Enhancing cooperation and integration of public services in order to improve citizen-government relationship is no new phenomenon. Approaches how to integrate fragmented social protection schemes, how to increase convergence between them as well as how to link them with other sectors, such as employment or health services, have been steadily gaining interest in the field of international development cooperation during the last years. One possible solution to address these challenges is the Single Window Service (SWS) approach— often also referred to as one-stop shop – which has been applied in several OECD countries during the last decades (Contiades 2007; Hagen & Kubicek 2000). In the last years these approaches have been also tested and implemented in a range of developing countries and emerging economies across Latin America, Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa (Mostafa & Silva 2007; Palma & Urzua 2005; Ammon et al. 2012; Taieb 2012; Aziz et al. 2012; SASSA 2013; Ramkissoon 2013). In developing countries, this tendency often goes along with efforts to integrate poverty targeting mechanisms and build up single registries. However, there doesn't exist one single model: SWS need to be tailored to the respective specific country requirements and context.

As empirical and cross-country evidence is lacking so far for developing countries, this discussion paper - based on a review of literature on SWS in both social protection and other sectors - will discuss the different design features particularly focusing on developing country and emerging economy contexts. In the first chapter, the evolution of SWS in general as well as in the field of social protection in particular during the last decades is outlined and an attempt to develop a clear definition is made. The second chapter describes the main rationale for SWS in social protection and presents the expected benefits and functions. The third part discusses the key design features illustrating advantages and disadvantages as well as challenges with regard to implementation in developing country contexts. Finally, main conclusions and recommendations are drawn.

The Single Window Service concept

Historical Evolution

Single Window Services is no new concept, also not in development country contexts. They have so far been implemented in different sectors. Prominent examples are one-stop shops for business registration, licensing and administration or Citizen Service Centres (CSC). Some experiences with SWS have already been made in the field of social protection and labour, particularly in OECD countries.

In Australia, so-called one-stop shops were already developed and implemented in the mid-1970s (Wettenhall and Kimber 1996). The aim was to provide 'as nearly as possible a complete service (including if possible the power to make decisions) in one place, at one visit, and with members of the public having to deal with not more than one or two different officers' (Minas 2012). In Europe, the application of one-stop shops or single window approaches can be observed from the early 1990s onwards and expanded in the second half of the 1990s through e-government initiatives and the crucial role of integration to achieve a citizen- or customer-oriented government (Kubicek & Hagen 2000). It was assumed that responsible officers need to think of outcomes in terms of customer and citizen requirements rather than just their agencies' functional scope in order to improve services for citizens. This would enable officers to define problems and design products and services more holistically (Christensen et al. 2006). Furthermore, the 'integration' of public services through SWS approaches can partly be seen as reaction to the negative consequences of the New Public Management agenda aiming at modernizing the public sector and making services more efficient. With its focus on 'vertical specialization or devolution and on horizontal differentiation, based on the principle of single-purpose organizations it partly led to a fragmentation of the public sector' (Christensen et al. 2006). The Single Window approach as well as the often simultaneously referred to one-stop services (see

section on definition) entered the international development discussion in the early 2000. It was taken up first to improve services for the private sector in developing countries (World Bank_b, World Bank Institute), e. g. by implementing one-stop shops for business registration, or to improve municipal civil services in the form of CSC (World Bank_a). The former was heavily supported by international donor agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF in order to facilitate trade and improve the investment climate.

In the following a general definition of SWS is attempted, partly because there exist some overlaps with comparable terminologies such as one-stop shops.

Definition

As mentioned earlier there does not exist one single model or definition of Single Window Services as they are implemented in different forms and are offering varying services depending on the sector and scope of programmes covered or referred to. Nevertheless, the core function of a Single Window can be described as being a single entrance point to several government bodies and services in a certain thematic field or for a specific purpose and target group (Kubicek & Hagen 2000; ILO; Askim et al. 2007, Pollitt 2003). It may include merely information provision to citizens and supporting them in filling in applications, but may go beyond that in handling the processing of applications, case management, payment functions on behalf of other programmes as well as administering services themselves.

However, there is still some unclarity as to what the concept includes and some use terms such as ‘one-stop-government’ or ‘one-stop services/shops’, or ‘integrated service delivery’ as synonyms to ‘single window’ (Kubicek & Hagen 2007). During the last years, several scholars of Public Administration and Comparatives Welfare Studies have developed various definitions and approaches to differentiate and categorize different forms of single window approaches in order to develop a common understanding of the concept: for example, Kubicek & Hagen distinguish between (1) First-Stop, (2) Convenience Store and (3) True One-Stop. A First-Stop is described as an information counter which guides the citizen to the relevant services based on his or her needs. ‘In a strict sense, this is not ‘one’-stop-government, because at least a second ‘stop’ is necessary.’ In a convenience store, many different transactional services are located in a single office or on one website. More comprehensive services, however, may not be served here. A true one-stop shop, ‘integrates many, most or all services which are necessary to satisfy concerns of specific client groups or in specific events,’ and offers the client ‘a single contact person to handle all of a customer’s concerns’ (Kubicek & Hagen 2000).

Another categorization is chosen by Contiades who identifies (1) First-Stop shops or information centres; (2) Single authorities or single windows, and (3) One-stop shops as different types. Similarly to Kubicek & Hagen first-stops merely have the purpose of disseminating information. Single authorities or single windows offer a single entry-point of transaction from the part of the citizen: ‘this means that the actual administrative service does not necessarily take place

at a single location, but instead that the citizen can apply for different services at one location’ (Contiades 2007). This type is similar to Kubicek and Hagen’s definition for a true one-stop shop. A one-stop shop according to Contiades is a location where ‘many different transactional services, which satisfy the needs of many different categories of citizens are located in a single office’ (Contiades 2007). This definition shows some similarity with Kubicek & Hagen’s convenience store. Lastly, the World Bank in its focus on CSC takes another approach by focusing on access channels to differentiate between different subtypes and refers to (1) single windows and (2) multiple windows, with the former offering one entry point with cases being handled in the back-office while in the latter ‘a central location houses multiple service providers with different desks’ (World Bank a). In order to simplify the usage of the term in this paper, ‘Single Window’ will be employed incorporating the above revealed terminologies and subtypes provided that it entails a single first contact point for clients.

Single Window Services in Social Protection

Rationale

Pertaining to the discussion on SWS in social protection, certain rationales and driving factors were relevant to its implementation in both OECD and developing countries which are strongly linked to the expectations of what SWS can actually accomplish. There are some similarities to the discussion on business SWS and Civil Service Centres outlined above, but there are also rather sector-specific rationales. SWS have emerged as an important organizational form in OECD countries’ welfare states at the turn of the millennium (Askim et al. 2007). The main objective besides higher government efficiency via integration was to enhance the workfare focus on social assistance and unemployment benefits recipients by creating municipal job centres and merging employment and national insurance and social assistance administrations (Askim et al. 2007; Christensen et al. 2006; Minas 2012).

Starting with the consolidation of four cash transfer programmes into the Bolsa Familia programme in Brazil in 2003, integrated social protection and SWS have since also gained increasing attention in developing countries and emerging economies. Several international organizations have started to work in the field of SWS during the last year. E. g., implementing Single Window Service approaches is one of the key recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to make its recommendation 202 concerning National Social Protection Floors operational. Based on country assessments, the ILO proposed the establishment of SWS in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand and is currently designing pilots to test this approach in the three countries. German development cooperation through GIZ is currently supporting SWS approaches via a successful implemented pilot in Karnataka, India (see box 1), and an ongoing pilot in Tajikistan.

Box 1: Worker Facilitation Center in Karnataka, India

The Department of Labour, Government of Karnataka, and GIZ on behalf of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) have been jointly implementing a pilot to set up 250 Worker Facilitation Centres (WFC) in 6 of 30 districts in the state of Karnataka. This project, which started to effectively function from 2011, aims to improve the access to social security benefits among unorganised workers. Designed as a single window, WFCs are embedded in the local government structure. There is one facilitator in each WFC who visits all households in his/her area to identify unorganized workers and spread information on available social security schemes. He or she also gives assistance in the application process for schemes by filling in forms, gathering necessary documents and submitting the papers at the right department. Specific trainings have been developed to enable the facilitators to responsibly carrying out their job. A management information system monitors the progress of the programme, provides a database of the unorganized workers and stores required documents in order to facilitate applications in the future.

According to an impact evaluation that was jointly conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) and Oxford University, WFCs do improve awareness and take-up of government social security schemes. The study shows that in villages with WFCs, awareness of government social security schemes is 13 % higher than in villages without WFCs. Similarly, take-up of schemes is 15 % higher in villages with WFCs. Encouraged by the success of the pilot project, the Government of Karnataka has decided to extend the concept of single window service centres to cover the rest of the state from 2014 onwards. GIZ will support the Government of Karnataka with procedural and technical advice. Particularly, it will share its know-how in impact and quality control and support the development of new needs-based training modules for key ministry officers and the governmental stakeholders who will take over the tasks of the facilitators.

The most important expectations concerning SWS's application in these countries are to (1) increase customer-orientation and effectiveness by reducing barriers to accessing social protection services (2) improve government efficiency by overcoming programme fragmentation, and (3) apply the graduation agenda¹ by linking social protection with activation² and employment enhancing measures.

¹ The concept of graduation signifies the process of households moving out of poverty and being less dependent on in-kind and cash transfers, being able to sustain an independent and sustainable livelihood (Slater 2009).

² The concept of activation refers to social policies and programmes that promote the participation of people dependent on unemployment benefits or social assistance in work with the objective to increase labour market entry and participation and phase out temporary labour market exit options for working age claimants (Berkel and Borghi 2008, Clasen and Clegg 2006).

As to the first purpose, **barriers to access social protection services** and benefits by potential beneficiaries or claimants can be separated into two main causes: lack of a) systematic information and awareness of the citizens/claimants of benefits and services on their rights and the procedure to exercise them, and b) organization of the social security administration in a way that ensures the effective delivery of and access to services and benefits³ (Kubicek & Hagen 2000). However, they may only be reduced if they are both tackled simultaneously: 'even if a citizen is informed on a specific benefit or service that he wishes to claim or to receive, a highly complex, bureaucratic, burdensome and costly procedure (in terms of time and money) can, in practice, obstruct the exercise of his/her right' (Kubicek & Hagen 2000). Specific challenges which stem from these administrative bottlenecks are for example (a) the lack of referrals to other/complementary programmes; (b) separate applications filed for similar services and same documents duplicated across multiple applications; (c) duplication of direct and indirect costs for the applicant in seeking benefits; (d) unclear fees for required documents and accepting applications leaving individuals open to the risks of corruption; (e) heavy burden of required documentation for the applicant to provide; (f) unclear processing times meaning that applicants may experience long delays or unresolved applications; (g) no information about current status of application (Ramkissoon 2013). By offering a single contact point to receive information and apply for services in the field of social protection, both awareness of available social protection services, higher transparency of the procedures as well as support in the application process is anticipated. However, SWS cannot substitute for more rigorous reforms to increase coverage of social protection programmes, in case supply of services may not meet the demand by citizens.

Although exhibiting some linkages to the first aspect, higher expected **public service efficiency** due to fragmentation mainly refers to high administrative costs on the side of the government and service providers. On top of decentralized and deconcentrated governmental agencies, semi-private or private organizations have been charged with carrying out public services. The result is a highly fragmented public sector (Kubicek & Hagen 2000) leading to parallel processes involving a lot of manpower and resources. This aspect is now increasingly pertinent to developing countries and emerging economies as in the recent two decades and supported by international actors many new social protection schemes have been introduced, decentralization reforms have been pursued, having created many specialized as well as deconcentrated and decentralized governmental social protection and labour services not well connected to each other. This has created duplication of services on both national and local level as well as different targeting approaches (including the collection and verification of data) and consequently separate management information systems (Rao

³ In this context, also the weaknesses of some targeting systems should be mentioned, involving potentially high 'exclusion' and 'inclusion' errors. Since this is not the focus of this paper, it will not be further discussed here.

2013). If a country chooses to integrate its several social protection programmes, the need to establish also integrated units at local level is essential: 'instead of each scheme maintaining separate staff at local level, countries should look to have single social protection teams who work across a range of schemes' (Chirchir & Kidd 2011) This function is one of the main advantages a SWS can offer.

In respect of the **linkage between social protection and employment**, enhancing programmes in ways that promote 'graduation' from poverty and from dependency on cash transfers is the main objective (Lindert et al. 2007). Beneficiaries of social assistance should be linked to other complementary services and actions that can help them to overcome obstacles and build their asset accumulation for increased employability and productivity. Two types of links could be promoted: (a) links to other social (assistance) services and social worker accompaniment to help particularly vulnerable beneficiary families overcome specific risks and obstacles; and (b) links to job-related services (counselling, training, placement) and other productivity enhancing activities, e. g. support to start and extend micro and small enterprises, to ensure graduation of beneficiaries of social assistance in the long run. Combined benefit packages that aim at increasing human capital development and employability of the working poor are increasingly used to foster such linkages.

Demand side and supply side benefits

Partly referring to the above objectives of a SWS in social protection, several demand side (for citizens) and supply side (for governments) benefits can be identified. For the citizens the advantages mainly include saving time and resources by not having to approach several departments several times and having a higher degree of transparency of the costs of services and the application process. From the government perspective three main (supply side) benefits exist: First, more efficient and effective cooperation between the public and administrations by streamlining processes and better cooperation between departments help to save costs. Second, being more customer-oriented improves the image of and the trust in public administration in general. Third, improving linkages between social assistance and activation and employment services increases the chance of unemployed and under-employed to find a job and graduating out of poverty, consequently reducing the fiscal strain on social programmes and contributing to economic growth (Kubicek & Hagen 2000; Contiades 2007). The following table provides an overview of the respective advantages of applying a SWS referring to the inherent process steps in a typical SWS cycle, differentiated for both clients and governments.

Table 1: Demand and Supply side benefits in the SWS cycle

Process	Advantages	
	For the client	For the government
Citizens seeks contact	Short ways, contact point nearby, low indirect costs (time, travel costs)	Assurance that citizens are informed about available services and benefits
Citizens receives advice and information	Information about programmes available and their eligibility. Certainty about costs and processes.	Assurance that citizens are informed about available services and benefits
Client data is entered into an integrat. database; Needs assessment	Providing personal data and needs assessment only once	Cost saving as only one integrated database needs to be maintained. Possibility of targeting services based on needs assessment
Application templates are provided and citizens supported	Clients only receive templates they need. Receiving support in filling them in and in attaining necessary documents	Documents and applications can be directly checked on completeness and correctness on behalf of other departments
SWS forwards and follows up on application	Can approach SWS for requesting the status of processing of several applications	Transparency on process limits opportunities for Corruption and long processing times
Receive and follow-up on complaints and appeals	Possibility to complain or file protest against service provider processing & decisions	Service providers be held accountable for

Source: own compilation, partly from Ramkissoon (2013)

Besides both citizens and the government - including service providers - benefiting from SWS, other stakeholders such as employers may profit from a SWS approach as well. For example, the part of the services of the Workers Facilitation Centres in India includes the identification of potential employees for local and regional companies from the database of registered unemployed and informal workers. They are then informed via SMS about a vacant position or other short-term work opportunities (Taieb 2012). Lastly, also bi- and multilateral donors may expect advantages as regards the effectiveness of their engagement in social protection programmes as an integrated service delivery model allows them to better target government social protection measures for beneficiaries applying a more transparent and effective citizen-government arrangement.

Organizational structure: Front and back office functions

How is a Single Window Service typically organized? If possible, the citizen who approaches the SWS doesn't take notice of the internal administrative division of labour. For the client, the processing is not visible and disappears behind its contact person. With regard to the organizational structure, SWS are usually divided into front and back office units (Traunmüller & Wimmer 2005).

The concrete division of labour is structured along the respective programmes, process steps and whether applications can be handled within the SWS or have to be forwarded to other departments (Völkers 2008). Thus, in the following, the client contact will serve as a differentiation between

front and back office. Activities, which afford the interaction with the client, belong to the front office. Tasks which employees can carry out without direct contact with the citizen count to the back office (Matzner & Räckers 2007). Table 2 lists some of the most common tasks of each unit.

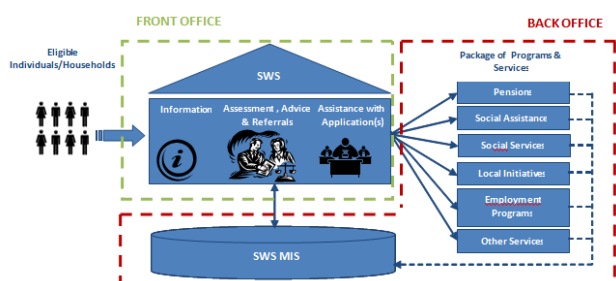
Table 2: Division of Labour between front and back office

Front office activities	Back office activities
information and advice	Asking for information from responsible entities of different programmes
Support of registration process (provision of registration forms, support to complete forms, submission of registration form, etc.)	Check documents for validity, correctness and completeness
Acquisition and verification of identity and data	Enter data to MIS and transfer data to entities responsible for different programmes
Notification and hand-out of identification documents (e. g. smart cards)	Follow up of registration process and communication with responsible entities, further processing
Receive complaints and appeals and communicate results	Follow up on complaints and appeals with responsible entities for the respective programme

Source: Martina Bergthaller (2014)

Front and back office functions do not necessarily have to be located in the same office (Traummüller & Wimmer 2005), offering some possibility to locate front offices closer to the client. However, for that to function effectively, interoperability within the SWS needs to be assured which makes a web-based management information system necessary. Figure 1 illustrates the division of labour within a SWS.

Figure 1: SWS model displaying front and back office functions



Source: Ramkissoon (2013)

Some services or programmes such as training or employment services registered in and transferred to by the SWS naturally afford inter-action with the client. If resources allow it, and the institutional set-up enables it, these services programmes can be located under one

roof, defined by Kubicek & Hagen as a ‘true one-stop-shop’, offering various social protection and related services in one building. This is the case in the Brazilian municipalities, where citizens enter Social Assistance Reference Centers (CRAS), in which all social protection programmes are located and constitute the front door of the Brazilian Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS). This relocation of programme desks and programmes into one location was heavily supported by the federal government, with 3,910 out of 5,110 CRAS being implemented with financing from federal level (Vaitsman et al 2009). This federal engagement demonstrates the relevance of national responsibility in steering and financing integrated social protection reforms. The next section will look at what are concrete design parameters setting up SWS, and will pinpoint the respective advantages and disadvantages in different developing country contexts.

Single Window Service design features and its advantages and disadvantages

In order to better understand the different variations and design features of Single Window Services, different structural variables are used along which the analytical discussion is structured in this paper. The selected variables build on both previous work on SWS and one-stop shops (Kubicek & Hagen 2000; Askim et al. 2007) and on some additionally identified variables:

- (i) breadth of services and target group referring to the portfolio of social protection, employment and other programmes referred to or managed by the SWS itself;
- (ii) depth of services describing the tasks performed by the staff of the SWS;
- (iii) participant structure and inter-governmental cooperation discussing the range of governmental institutions at central and local level, as well as private actors, involved in the scheme and its positioning within a national government framework;
- (iv) access channels referring to ways (physical location, virtual, call centre, mobile units) a citizen seeks contact with SWS taking into account respective outreach strategies to rural and poor citizens and management information systems focusing on the question of how integrated the IT system of SWS is with partnering departments and service providers
- (v)

A useful tool to analyse the scope of variations of SWS is a model initially developed by Askim et al. which measures SWS in the field of social protection according to their level of comprehensiveness (Table 3). This model was adjusted according to the selected variables for this discussion paper and used as a basis for analysing advantages and disadvantages of different design features in developing countries.

Table 3: Level of comprehensiveness of SWS in Social Protection

Variable	Values and Examples	
	→	
Target group / Breadth	Narrow Special target group- Few policy areas: e.g. labour market services only	Broad Broad category; More policy areas: e.g. pensions, welfare benefits and social services
Depth	Shallow Information/ signposting (only partial product closure)	Deep Information + advice +assistance with applications: case closure on the spot
Participant structure	Simple Few agencies, One level of government Public sector only	Complex Multiple agencies; Several levels of government (e.g. central, province, district, subdistrict); Mix of public/private/NGOs
Access channels/ outreach	Distant Regionally based service	Close Locally based neighbourhood service, virtual service accessible in own home
Management Information System	Isolated Separate databases for different programmes	Integrated One integrated MIS; allowing Single Registry, Links between departments

Source: based on model developed by Askim et al. (2007), adjusted

Target group and breadth of services

The breadth of the programme portfolio of SWS basically depends on its specific purpose and target group. Citizen Service Centres, for example, theoretically target the whole population of a country, region or municipality. In contrast, SWS in the field of social protection mainly refer to either a life-cycle event (for example unemployment, poverty, birth) or a specific target group (poor, woman, children, unemployed, and people with disabilities or elderly).

Often, SWS in social protection in developing countries target that part of the population which seeks at least some element of social assistance or social services and is eligible for social benefits. This can include (conditional) cash transfers, social pensions, employment services, access to agricultural inputs and microfinance, as well as (psycho-) social or rehabilitation services. For example, in the Chilean Solidario Programme, social protection, housing as well as employment and activation programmes are part of the services included (Taieb 2012; Palma & Urzua 2005). However, as many countries currently extend poverty targeting as a mechanism to enable access for eligible citizens to a broader range of services, SWS are increasingly also managing applications to various sectors. A well-known example is the Brazilian Cadastro Único de Programas Sociais: 'Following the integration tendency of cash transfer programmes in Brazil, a single registry for all social programmes with targeted scope was created by presidential decree in 2001. The registry,

called Cadastro Único de Programas Sociais (CadÚnico), aims at identifying the socio-economic profile of the entire poor population of Brazil to inform central government on the effective demand for pro-poor policies' (Mostafa & da Silva 2007). Currently, over 16 million families (60 million individuals) are covered by the Single Registry. They include a wide range of programmes such as conditional cash transfers, electricity subsidies, other social and employment programmes as well as taking care of children in the afternoon or facilitating access to food and agricultural services (Ministerium 2007; Mostafa & da Silva 2007; Taieb 2012). This has been a process which started with a limited number of programmes and gradually increased to the current multi-sectoral approach coordinated by the Ministry of Social Development.

Yet another services growingly linked with social assistance is national health insurance that uses information on eligible poor provided by an integrated targeting mechanism to subsidize or bear the costs of contributions for the poor. Prominent examples are Philhealth's indigent programme in the Philippines, the Indian Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna (RSBY) insurance scheme for the poor, or the ID Poor programme in Cambodia which entitles the indigent to access health services through Health Equity Funds.

Keeping in mind the model by Askim et al., SWS in social protection, may not only serve as a referral point to an entire (poor) populace, but are also used to focus on more specified target groups such as unemployed, informal workers, disabled people, women or children. For example, the Samajik Suvidha Sangam Program in India offers access for women to 45 programmes from 9 departments including a mix of social, employment, health as well as education and food programmes. Access points are Gender Resource Centres which additionally offer empowerment for women through skill enhancement and networking (Taieb 2012). Another example are child care or family centres which offer also services such as support to attain birth certificates or access to maternal health. Other examples are the Worker Facilitation Centres (WFC) in Karnataka, India, which focus their attention towards informal workers (GIZ 2012; LabourNet 2012) or the Return to work and disability management programme in Malaysia (Aziz et al. 2012).

Although not yet empirically analysed, advantages and disadvantages of the comprehensive vs. specialized SWS can be identified. The advantages of a broad client group such as the poor are (1) that customers only have to forego a needs assessment and application process once, reducing transaction costs, and (2) registration into a database or single registry only takes place once reducing administrative costs on the side of the government. Although the poor can already be a relatively broad client group in some countries, there exist some disadvantages to focus services merely on the poor as a) this can lead to stigmatization of the poor, and b) reduce penetrability since poor only use services they are eligible for potentially creating dependency and exacerbating graduation. Furthermore, in many countries the cut-off point of poor and near poor is difficult to define, leaving non-eligible citizens without any protection creating risks of falling (back)

into poverty in case of unexpected events such as illness, unemployment etc. For that reason and as some programmes do not base their eligibility criteria on poverty targeting a broader client focus comprising information on various household parameters allows interventions to enhance risk protection and employability for those in need.

In contrast, gains of more focused SWS are that (a) target groups may be reached more effectively through specific access channels, (b) more specialized or complex services can be offered in-house which would perhaps overwhelm more general SWS front office staff. A problem, however, is the differentiation between categories of groups as it entails some overlap. For example, recipients visiting SWS focusing on family matters or children may - in case they are poor - likewise be interested in cash transfers as well. This also refers to under-employed or income-poor informal workers. Separate schemes would thus add different application points once again. If a municipality decides to locate various programmes under one roof, as the Brazilian CRAS, more complex services may be still be offered 'in-house'.

Depth of services

As mentioned earlier, there exist a wide range of different services from simply providing information, integrating the client data into an integrated or single database, needs assessment, supporting in filling in applications and forwarding the applications to other departments, supporting the customer in collecting all the necessary documents, and dealing with customers through a case management approach. On top, further services such a psycho-social advice or occupational counselling may be part of the task portfolio of a SWS. The range and comprehensiveness of processes is strongly interlinked with the breadth of services and target group. Generally, it can be differentiated between in-house services and programmes SWS either refer to or verifies eligibility for. Secondly, it can be distinguished between whether SWS only handle the easy requests themselves or also complex ones. Some of the SWS do reach 'product closure' (Rainey 1990) implying that the case is resolved on the spot without any need for further steps (Askim et al. 2007). Applications may need to be forwarded to other departments as the tasks are simply too complex to be dealt with by the SWS or the respective departments are responsible by law. If a country applies a single targeting mechanism, sectoral departments use the information of identified poor for their own programmes. In this case, the SWS can be in charge of the needs assessment, verification, and the application for different programmes on behalf of various agencies. However, in most of the cases approval will still lie with the respective 'mother-department' of a programme as they mostly retain the budget oversight.

A task increasingly applied by SWS, as by the Samajik Suvudha Sangam Programme in India or the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in Pakistan, is the issuance of a customer care or biometric Smart Card with an identification number allowing access to different services (Taieb 2012). Another function in exceptional cases managed or delegated

to SWS is the payment of benefits as in the BISP programme (Taieb 2012). However, a compelling argument against this function being carried out by SWS is the higher degree of accountability and reduced risk of corruption if registration and payment responsibilities are separated. This has for example been successfully realized in the Brazilian CadÚnico scheme where the Caixa Econômica Federal, a federal savings & credit union organization, is contracted by the Ministry of Social Development to disburse cash transfers to the beneficiaries.

An increasingly discussed service to be stronger linked to social benefits is employment enhancement through job identification and skills development. The most comprehensive approach in this regard currently applied in developing countries is through a case management approach as applied in the Solidario Programme in Chile. A social worker accompanies selected clients for two years and develops an exit strategy from poverty. This includes the signing of a 'family contract' to improve their living conditions with the government taking responsibility for supplying them with a range of support services and resources, and the family agreeing to work to overcome barriers to improve their lives. The case management in Chile specifically involves (1) psycho-social support including periodic personal visits by professional staff, (2) a cash benefit conditional on the family meeting the contract signed, (3) guaranteed cash subsidies, and (4) preferential access to programmes of skills development, work assistance and social security (Palma & Urzua 2005). Furthermore, eligible households are exempted to come up for the fees for documents which are necessary to apply for services (Taieb 2012).

Although the advantages of a case management approach are manifold, the costs pertaining to human resources can be high. Particularly for low-income countries where poverty rates are immense - reaching fifty percent of the population in some Sub-Saharan and South Asian countries - this may not be financially viable. Likewise, the administrative costs of establishing and maintaining a national registry and comprehensive targeting mechanism (e.g. proxy-means) are often underestimated as data must be regularly recollected (generally every 2 to 5 years) involving regular census and household checks. On the other hand, SWS can potentially act as a vehicle through which potential clients self-target themselves in order to access subsidized services. However, this affords a well-developed outreach strategy and physically easily accessible front offices as well as the regular updating of beneficiary databases.

Concluding, the benefits or shortcomings associated with different levels of comprehensiveness regarding the depth of services mainly depend on the range of programmes referred to and whether a SWS is serving a broad or narrow target group. Pursuing very 'deep' services to the customer may not easily go along with a broad offer of facilitating access including product closure to a variety of programmes and services in different sectors. Therefore, SWS in social protection in many countries typically involve certain general functions such as registration, needs assessment and verification

while leaving more complex tasks and services to specialized departments and service providers. However, some in-house services such as psycho-social support in the Chilean case or employment identification function provided by WFC can have some added value to improve graduation more effectively. This was the motivation of most European Job Center reforms which – although disposing of a single entry point – handle both applications processing for social benefits as well as job services by professional staff. In developing countries, in order to enhance graduation SWS should at least offer advice to clients as to which training, skill enhancement, public works or other activation programmes are available and suitable for them. Particular, if combined benefits packages of both social assistance and job-related client responsibilities are envisaged. However, the comprehensiveness of SWS functions as regards employment issues depends on already existing infrastructure of employment agencies in a country and needs to be carefully designed in order to avoid potential duplication and identify the most adequate set-up.

Participant structure and inter-government cooperation

The participant structure of SWS varies from simple to complex, involving few or many partners. The total of partners may match the range of tasks involved. The larger the geographical area covered the more municipalities are usually involved, in settings that involve the local government sector. Single Windows may include partners from one or more levels of government: national, regional and local, from different sector ministries as well as from public or private service providers. How SWS are embedded into the national inter-governmental setting depends on the degree of decentralization in general and in the welfare sector specifically (Askim et al. 2007; Kubicek & Hagen 2000). SWS are usually coordinated and/or steered to some degree at the national level in order to ensure data collection, monitoring and design of policy responses. This is particularly the case if a national targeting mechanism or single registry has been established. Thus, several types of governance settings and organisational solutions of single windows can be identified across different countries showing specific characteristics of hybrid governance, embedded in vertical and horizontal decision-making settings (Askim et al. 2007). If programmes which are still administered at the national level are part of the portfolio, as it is sometimes still the case with employment services, social pensions etc., the challenge of cooperation is more complex as it involves not only vertical cooperation at the municipality level but referral and decision-making may require communication up to the regional or national level within each sector. Since in many low-income countries services are often still not yet fully decentralized or are managed by deconcentrated agencies, different chains of command have to be taken into account. Here, more rigorous structural reforms should be considered, particularly if different programmes are envisioned to be offered in one location.

Against this backdrop but referring to the organizational set-up of the SWS itself, it can be differentiated between decon-

centrated SWS run by a national agency (e.g. the South African Social Security Agency) or those decentralized to municipalities (e.g. Brazil, Chile). There are advantages of both, more autonomous and more centrally controlled SWS, with the former offering local municipalities a higher degree of flexibility, thereby contributing to strengthened decentralization, while a more standardized setting offers policy makers more managerial discretion to design policies and monitor their effectiveness.

Principally, three instruments of control used by governments to encourage vertical cooperation can be identified being (1) authority, (2) incentives and (3) information (Askim et al. 2007). First, inter-departmental cooperation of SWS with other sectoral agencies and divisions may either be regulated through respective national laws or by a memorandum of understanding. Besides legal means, incentives can be an effective tool for steering the local level in a decentralized context. For example, although a national registry and a respective legislation exists in Brazil providing the Ministry of Social Development with the authority to decide who is eligible, municipalities have the freedom to design complementary local social programmes or top-up the cash transfer by the Bolsa Familia Programme. The 5,564 municipalities are encouraged through financial incentives⁴ and through a so-called performance-based Index of Decentralized Management (IGD) - which measures the quality of implementation in each municipality - to sign joint management agreements (Lindert et al. 2007). Finally, information-based instruments such as exhortations, advice to or training of local bodies can encourage and enhance services by municipalities.

Another important aspect of inter-governmental relations is the reform process of establishing SWS which can face some barriers or challenges. ‘While horizontal and vertical fragmentation of public administration is the cause for one-stop-government, it is at the same time one of the key barriers for its implementation’ (Kubicek & Hagen 2000). Besides a lacking culture of cooperation in many developing countries and emerging economies, fear of losing power over human, legal and financial resources hinders cooperation between different governmental institutions. To implement a SWS, staff may need to be transferred (World Bank; Ramkisson 2013) and roles and responsibilities within and across different institutions may be reorganized. Particularly, in low-income countries where resources are scarce it may be no viable solution to hire additional staff. Thus, a transfer of staff from service providers to the back-office of SWS is the preferred option which, however, may be met by some resistance or difficulties, for example if staff needs to be transferred from national agencies disposing of differing employment contracts.

Nonetheless, with regard to initiating pilots, the municipal level is the most yielding area for experiments and is often referred to as ‘laboratory of one-stop-government’ (Kubicek & Hagen 2000). Currently, various SWS approaches are piloted in different countries on a small scale level in a few municipalities or districts. For these pilots, governments or

⁴ administrative cost support to municipalities to reimburse them for a share of the costs of implementing the BFP

international donors often choose regions with well-performing local governments, well-functioning administrations and a high willingness to support interagency cooperation. This allows testing design issues, to measure the impacts of SWS approaches and, based on this, to make objective decisions to roll out a SWS model. However, when it comes to a scale up at national level the approaches piloted in these comparably favourable contexts might not be viable at country level due to a huge difference in performance of local governments and different interests of local political leaders as well as administrative staff even within countries. Sometimes, governments and international donors choose to pilot SWS by contracting private entities such as NGOs, partly to address the resistance of different actors to reorganize roles and responsibilities within existing governance structures. However, when scaling-up the scheme to national level the whole setting may need to be changed if the government (re)claims responsibility to run the SWS.

Finally, successfully applying a SWS approach irrespective of the participant structure, strong national leadership is indispensable. As the cases in Brazil, Chile and Pakistan (Mostafa & da Silva 2007, Palma & Urzua 2005, Taieb 2012,) but also in many European countries have shown (Kubicek & Hagen 2000), national steering units or commissions for social protection at least at the cabinet or prime minister or vice-presidential level are necessary to ensure that reforms are sustainable in the long run. Furthermore, political will at local level has to be ensured and enhanced. Against this backdrop, the potential of information technology can provide a solution to some of the revealed challenges. 'Providing electronic services may also help in restructuring public service. It would still require organizational changes within each agency in order to be used effectively and efficiently, but it would allow integration on a front office level' (Kubicek & Hagen). Yet, this poses some additional challenges as will be discussed at a later stage in the section on management information systems.

Access channels and outreach strategy

Increasing access to social protection programmes for citizens via SWS can be achieved through different channels. Besides physical counters, internet homepages, call-centres, mobile units, kiosks or communication through mail are ways SWS reach out to their clients (World Bank a, Kubicek & Hagen 2000, Askim et al. 2007). Most SWS choose a variety of access channels depending on what programme or process is concerned. While it may make sense to offer a service online such as information provision or the download of applications in advance, others such as identification, needs assessment or job counselling afford the presence of the applicant. While a physical counter usually is located at municipal level, there exist variations as to how close it is to the client with some SWS being located at district, village or even neighbourhood level. Usually, due to high start-up costs and limited staff they are located in urban areas (World Bank a). As mentioned earlier, the back-office may be geographically separated from the customer inter-action with front offices closer to the client. However, there needs to somehow exist an effective linkage between them in order to assure inter-operability. An obvious advantage of a physical location is that there is front office staff who can offer the

highest range of services on the spot. As in the case of the Brazilian CRAS, various social protection, health and employment programmes can be offered via a one-stop shop, reducing the transportation costs of the clients immensely. However, even in that case it is important that there is one single contact point in order to refer to the other desks in the building and arrange appointments. What's more, in many cases other municipal services are available in the same city or even in the same building as the SWS. E. g., the Worker Facilitation Centres in Karnataka/India are directly housed in the office of the village council (municipal office in urban areas) and thereby embedded into the local government. This can notably increase the outreach of the services offered.

One possibility to reach clients in smaller villages and more rural settings, is through mobile units either through agents or by using specially outfitted trucks and busses (World Bank_a). This proves particularly useful for serving populations in isolated or peripheral areas and allows poor and vulnerable groups – often the main target group of SWS in social protection - easier access to services. One example is the Integrated Community Registration Outreach Programme (ICROP) of SASSA in South Africa. The institution facilitates access of clients through the use of mobile units which are fully staffed and even equipped with all necessary administration and IT resources enabling online connectivity and processing of social grants (SASSA 2013). Also reaching out to clients but more agent-based, the Worker Facilitation Centres in the state of Karnataka, India, hired community facilitators who collect data from clients through house visits and provide information on the scheme and on available programmes (Ammon et al. 2012).

An alternative way to reach people is through a web-based Internet portal. A virtual location constitutes an easy and cost-effective way to offer citizens the possibility to get access to information from at home or internet shops. Although it only covers some of the functions, it can prove helpful to avoid unnecessary visits to the SWS. The customer can download application forms beforehand; make appointments, registration or payments online. Furthermore, he or she may check on the status of application online without having to go to the SWS in person.

Likewise, call-centres are a convenient and easily accessible way for citizens who dispose of landline or mobile phones. They are predominantly good for providing citizens with up-front information about processes and necessary application documents or to check on the status of applications from at home. As mentioned above, SMS⁵ may also be used to inform customers about the application process or job offers. Lastly, also self-service kiosks can be used as a channel to deliver services directly to customers. Interaction with the service provider is fully automated, including payment functions. Kiosks can be spread out to a greater variety of locations than office buildings usually are (Kubicek & Hagen 2000)

Apart from the above listed advantages, some disadvantages exist. Physical offices in urban areas, for example, have its limits as potential clients living in rural areas either are not aware of the service or may hesitate to travel to the city due to high transportation costs and loss of time.

⁵ Short Message Services

Mobile units, on the other hand, involve higher operating cost per beneficiary as stationary models which may discourage low-income countries from applying them. Using homepages as an access channel has its limitations in rural areas not merely in low-income countries as internet coverage is not yet provided sufficiently. Furthermore, internet literacy of beneficiaries may need to be enhanced. This similarly applies to self-service kiosks which additionally imply high up-front costs. Finally, call centres can only cover a limited range of services and need steady connectivity which may not be available in rural areas.

Finally, even though it is preferable for SWS to support a complete range of transactions, a country has to choose a tailor-made mix of access channels most appropriate to reach out to the respective client group, depending on country circumstances as well as financial means at its disposal: 'providing information or limited transactions is better for users than nothing at all. Limited services can be scaled up to complete services in the future in response to demand or process improvements' (World Bank_a).

Notwithstanding the chosen access channels, ensuring that SWS achieve the expected results, reaching out to potential clients and informing them about a new SWS schemes should be well prepared, e.g. through a public awareness and information campaign via different media formats. This may be through newspapers, TV, internet, posters or public events.

Management Information Systems (MIS)

Traditionally, social protection programmes dispose of separate MIS for each scheme. The complexity of a social protection scheme determines the total of information to be requested. 'More complex schemes – such as those undertaking poverty targeting or monitoring compliance with conditions – will require more information and more frequent transfers of that information' (Chirchir & Kidd 2011). Generally, a MIS offers a basis for higher transparency regarding the application process handled by the SWS as national auditors of SWS can verify if decisions have been taken correctly and whether processing times of applications have been appropriate, thus reducing scope for corruption (Ramkisson 2013).

In order to ensure effective and seamless interaction and processing of customer data and the forwarding of applications, inter-operability within the front and back office units of a SWS, local and central units, but also between the SWS and other service providers is required (Traunmüller & Wimmer 2005). Besides, the central level needs access to up-to-date information on registered beneficiaries and their background information in order to timely take decisions on how many people are eligible for programmes and to effectively evaluate and monitor the scheme and design policy responses. At the local level, the SWS need timely access to a

national registry in order to cross-check applications to avoid double entries⁶.

Referring to the comprehensiveness model, there exist different stages of MIS integration between government units, from (i) separate social protection programme MIS which operate to manage individual programme functions such as registration, targeting, enrolment, payment, (ii) a nationally managed 'registry' with separate MIS for each programme, to (iii) a nationally administered MIS with inter-connected Social Protection MIS offering the possibility of exchanging and accessing data between each other. One example for the latter is the SOCPEN system used by SASSA which put mechanisms in place to enable these MISs to communicate with each other (Chirchir & Kidd 2011). The third option is the most appropriate way to administer a national registry of eligible beneficiaries. However, in some cases this might be difficult to establish as most programmes already work with existing MIS which may be not be easily compatible with each other. As identified by Chirchir & Kidd, the third option offers considerable advantages: (1) improved oversight of schemes by a steering government unit at national level and facilitation of progress and performance monitoring of each scheme, (2) easier reporting to policy-makers, (3) a common payment system, (4) avoidance of double dipping of applicants in different programmes or districts, (5) enabling the movement of beneficiaries between schemes, and (6) more effective emergency responses (e.g. direct additional payments to all social protection recipients in areas affected by an emergency) (Chirchir & Kidd 2011).

Furthermore, the national steering unit in charge should be able to check with other government units as social insurances, tax departments or basic citizen data to determine eligibility of beneficiaries. Since there are current changes in client employment situation or he/she may die, an ongoing and possibly automated cross-check is advised. In Brazil, for example, there exists a national database of citizen information called National Register of Social Information (CNIS) documenting the development of employment contracts, payroll, and contribution amounts for each registered individual. In this regard, it is of crucial importance that citizens dispose of a national ID number in order avoid duplication at the point of registration. –

Nevertheless, there exist some challenges as to the deployment of more integrated and sophisticated systems which are for example high front-up costs for necessary hard- and software, high recurrent cost as to regular updates and new applications, limits with regard to internet connection of local SWS, limited capacity of the local staff who require extensive capacity building and IT training. On the other hand, there exist some low-cost open source software solutions (Chirchir & Kidd 2012) which, however, may not offer as much tailoring possibilities and have limits with regard to administering complex programmes.

Concluding, when testing a SWS approach, MIS integration may only be a second step as the up-front costs are estimated

⁶ A unique identification number for each application is necessary in order to effectively avoid double entries of applicants.

to be too high or internet connectivity is not yet developed enough for municipal units. In that case, when designing the MIS it should be ensured that a possible enhancement to a more integrated and web-based system is possible at a later state.

Conclusion

Single Window Services have gained much importance in different sectors, and lately in the field of social protection in developing countries. Yet, traditionally and still up to now predominating in most developing countries, differing social protection and employment programmes and services are implemented disjointedly with core functions such as registration into databases, needs assessment, application processes and payments being conducted separately creating double work efforts both on the supply (government) and demand (citizen) side. Single window services have proven to be efficient in organizing social protection administration and reducing barriers to access to various programmes by offering citizens a single entry point (through a front office), either referring applications to other programmes, offering them in-house, or by automatically verifying eligibility to various programmes through an integrated targeting mechanism. Optimally, they are offered in one location as in the case of the Brazilian CRAS, affording, however, some financial mechanism from state or federal level necessary to cover high up-front costs.

This paper typified different variations of SWS applications depending on its prime target group, programme portfolio and national inter-governmental context. Principally, different types of SWS were identified according to the level of comprehensiveness of its design features. More comprehensive SWS serve a broader target group, carrying out a wider range of services, consisting of a more complex participant structure, applying various access channels, and administering the scheme with management information systems integrated with other departments and service providers. Both, more comprehensive and more specialized SWS have its strengths and weaknesses. A narrower approach has advantages in reaching out to a particular client group and offer additional in-house services or services outside the social protection spectrum relevant to this group. Contrastingly, while a more general SWS may not have the specialized staff to handle such services itself, it clearly benefits from economies of scale as certain 'classic' functions of a SWS such as registration, needs assessment, application support and targeting by using a single database are helpful to efficiently manage access to several sector programmes for a broader target group, thereby reducing government administrative costs as well as offering citizens (or families) one contact point for social protection concerns.

Likewise, the level of autonomy of SWS has strengths and weaknesses. More autonomous SWS may further strengthen the role of municipalities and offer more flexibility in meeting specific local demands, while a higher level of control and standardization may be more conducive for national monitoring, quality assurance and policy making.

Therefore, each government has to thoroughly analyse the different target groups seeking social protection services and weigh the highlighted advantages and disadvantages in relation to its unique country context. Crucial criteria to determine a tailor-made SWS approach are for example the dimension and structure of its informal sector, different types of poverty (near poor, extreme poor), the level of decentralization, existing channels to particular client groups as well as expected financial costs. Furthermore, governments need to look into the question of what mix of targeted or universal social protection approaches shall be applied in order to increase access to social protection, health, education; skill enhancement or infrastructure services, as it are not solely the poor who are in need of these services. For that reason, a 'single registry' should be encompassing and informative enough to cover also those who are not covered by the formal social security system. Finally, the given institutional setting needs to be taken into account as some service providers (such as employment agencies or health insurances) usually already have established a comprehensive local infrastructure of single access points. Likewise, there may already exist well-functioning Citizen Service Centres at municipal level which hypothetically offer some synergy potential to incorporate social protection concerns. Last but not least, and as there doesn't exist a blueprint for SWS, reforms need to be part of a comprehensive national social protection and outreach strategy comprising all potential client groups.

A further key finding of the discussion paper is the fact that there are several barriers to implement SWS which have to be taken into consideration when a government decides to reform its social protection system by applying a SWS approach. Besides the human resources necessary to run the scheme – which may require additional staff or a restructuring of employees currently located at the front office of other service providers – financial affordability, resistance to organizational reorganization as well as technical limitations to utilize certain access channels or ensure effective interoperability through a MIS are the most well-known ones. This may be particularly challenging in hybrid institutional contexts with some service providers already being decentralized and others continuing to work through deconcentrated agencies. But, as the example of Bolsa Familia in Brazil demonstrates, integration can start with a limited range of programmes and departments and be expanded incrementally over time. Piloting SWS in only a few districts first may serve as a 'showcase' for other sectors or regions. Also, contracting private entities, such as NGO, may have some advantages in setting up schemes flexibly and reaching out to remote target groups. On the other hand, it involves some risks in the scaling-up process, particular with regard to aspects of financial sustainability and how to organize the transfer of responsibilities when governments choose to be in charge of implementation at a later stage.

In summary, Single Window Services in social protection demonstrate to be a promising tool to increase access to various social protection programmes, particularly effective in enhancing linkages between social assistance and activation and employment services. The outlined challenges can

be met by applying an incremental approach and using low-cost options. MIS can play a supportive role in enhancing inter-operability of departments and service providers avoiding physical integration of departments in some cases. As regards the reform process - irrespective of the mechanism chosen - successful examples in both OECD and developing countries have shown that steering and implementation responsibility for multi-sector integration reforms such as SWS at highest political level (at least cabinet level, prime minister's or vice-presidential office) is indispensable if SWS are to be sustainable in the long run and to manage vertical and horizontal cooperation effectively. Development cooperation partners can support this process by facilitating multi-sector stakeholder dialogue, south-south learning exchange and capacity building support of pilot projects.

Finally, empirical studies looking at a wider range of experiences and a broader set of countries can be helpful to get a clearer picture of what works in different country contexts with differing inter-governmental settings and degree of economic development, in order to identify key success factors and develop evidence-based SWS designs.

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The paper is intended to contribute to the debate and offers an overview of the current international discourse and more profound insights into current practice.

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