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Advancing Transparency and Responsiveness in Social Work through the SWAN Humanitarian Platform

Bijal Lalitkumar Dave

Full Stack Lead, Istream Solution, USA

ABSTRACT: Save the Children International, World Vision International, Action Against Hunger, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, four prominent international NGOs, launched the SWAN humanitarian platform with United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs funding in March 2019 in Ethiopia. The Social Worker Administration Network (SWAN) provides life-saving initial emergency supplies in areas of emergency shelter, water sanitation and hygiene, and health services. SWAN has provided life-saving support to women, children, and other vulnerable populations affected by cholera, COVID-19, natural disasters, conflicts, and other crises. SWAN's focus on coordination among partners includes needs assessments, supply pre-positioning, capacity building, and creating linkages to coordinate and work with other humanitarian system actors. SWAN has successfully improved access to clean water, emergency shelter, medical attention, and hygiene education for millions. SWAN's rapid response capacity, coupled with transparent governance, has enhanced accountability to and engagement of beneficiaries, and contributed immensely in humanitarian efforts for life-saving support to alleviate suffering, restore human dignity in crisis settings, improve coordination, and address delivery redundancy while improving effectiveness and efficiency.

KEYWORDS: World Vision International, Action Against Hunger, Norwegian Refugee Council, Social Worker Administration Network (SWAN)

I. INTRODUCTION

Two major issues arising in the delivery of social work services relate to its openness and flexibility. Lack of public trust due to bias and misunderstanding prevents people from being forthcoming, which in turn portrays social workers in poor light. Because of the limits of confidentiality, social workers cannot defend themselves publicly against bias and misunderstanding. This leads to public distrust and the impression that they are unaccountable. Well-entrenched but slow-changing and difficult-to-alter processes make the unresponsiveness of businesses real since this prevents them from immediately responding to their clients. Limited resources and the need for several agencies to interface further increase the response time. While technology improves efficiency, its use also requires consideration of moral implications for both professional judgment and human relationship. Public perception and institutional limitations are systemic barriers to providing transparency and flexibility in service delivery. To summarize, limited resources, rigid protocols, and ethical frameworks on the use of technology create unresponsiveness. You can, however, create the same processes open when you add confidentiality and accountability.

An attempt at showing the transparency of social work services faces problems and difficulties arising from the professional commitment to privacy and maintaining confidentiality of information. All of these issues make people less trusting and understanding of social work in the public domain, in all of its relationships and contacts with the people and communities that social workers serve. In agencies, administrative processes may prevent information from flowing, and organizational constraints may create a lack of transparency, along with the absence of standards in informing and reporting procedures, adding to lower accountability. Finally, social workers themselves are circumspect in the sharing of information for fear of dire consequences, coupled with limitation of technological support that could help them manage data. In order to overcome these issues, there seems to be a need to be flexible and balance accountability with confidentiality, communicate clearly with stakeholders, and embrace technology while working towards a more transparent and trustworthy environment. [2].

SWAN is poised to disrupt the status quo of social work service delivery through more transparency and agility built on a decentralized, user-led digital ecosystem. It maintains accountability by having a complete audit trail of any data collection and processing based on user choices and privacy while in the service. Features of the platform include verifiable documentation of social work activity which is confidential but still provides transparent visibility to

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stakeholders; faster datadriven decision making; faster than under solid bureaucratic timelines; user control of personal data – better ability for user to control what personal information to exchange at any time. http://www.swancanada.ca The software is designed to provide ease of implementation and scalability for service providers, while fitting into the current social work ecosystem so social workers feel the platform has relevant meaning to the scope of practice in which they are trained. SWAN not only supports adherence to both the privacy and confidentiality protocols enshrined in the ethical framework to data; but in terms of the service, it serves to enhance service delivery while facilitating accountability and transparency in the delivery of services, to both clients and our communities. The Social Work Services (SWS) System is designed to provide a comprehensive set of social welfare and social protection services to vulnerable individuals, families and communities with a focus on serving marginalized communities, social cohesion, and embedding the principle of social inclusion for those that are socially excluded. The SWS works alongside the local government, community partners, other not-for-profits and stakeholders to provide integrated, person-centred care which includes social welfare programs in the areas of housing, health care services, education and job assistance, with a social worker and interdisciplinary approach to social protection. Today's SWS systems use web-based communication platforms and scope accountability that link with electronic documentation, case management, and communications, with a heightened emphasis on community engagement strategies, completed by a national call in hotlines that operates 24/7. However, the the SWS system faces numerous challenges, including complex administrative systems, large caseloads, and the problems of burnout, which limit direct client engagement and ultimately impact the quality of service. Limited or ineffective training, or ineffective communication only add to the administrative challenges and ultimately, the long-term consequences are delays and misunderstandings [3].

As a response to these challenges, SWS aims to support social welfare delivery by integrating various interventions, improving accuracy in SWS documentation, and promoting inter-professional collaboration in support of social workers from other relevant professional disciplines. Automation of communications in the case management process to reduce admin and accuracy issues will benefit SWS direction. Additionally, collaboration with local services ensures culturally sensitive supports are offered to clients. The modernization of the system in 2024 is focused on the digitization of referral processes so that services are more responsive and efficient, and social workers, therefore, will be able to spend more time with clients. Even with ongoing challenges related to the case management systems, like accessing information unreasonably longer than usual, usability, etc., the proposed product can help improve security and confidentiality of the data. However, it will assist in making vulnerable individuals easier to identify and refer. In addition, a primary dashboard for referral that is centralized gives the ability for analytics to be tracking in real-time since coding and tracking improvement is relevant to each case. Moreover, if done accurately, clients and providers should be historically and accurately established for each individual and be able to automatically create reminders to support timely referrals and decrease administrative work. All in all, gainful service and employees' approach will revolutionize service delivery [4].

In terms of a superior training structure for the better acceptance of the Social Work Services (SWS) system as social workers in the profession, any training plan should hit the essential elements. This training may begin with formal onboarding instruction or quality coaching. Training should include the system-level feature systems, and practice level training through hands-on active learning with situations akin to real cases. Role-based training can assist social workers in establishing relevant structures for each worker role based on instruction, but also offer time for practice issues, coaching, and prompts. In addition, training could include seminars later in the onboarding process for case managers, administrators, and field workers. Ongoing online education and refresher courses are important for educating staff on new features and best practices. Peer support and guidance can contribute to a culture of support through "super users" and mentorship opportunities. Regularly seeking user feedback will help identify training needs, from which to iteratively develop the system and training materials. Maintaining easily accessible training materials, such as quick reference guides, and access to a help desk are essential for immediate access to help. Training must address change management and soft skills so that social workers are prepared for changes in workflow and an increasingly digital world. Motivation can be created by implementing performance evaluation and incentives into the platform to ensure that competency is being monitored and users can be rewarded for their adoption of SWS. The combination of structured, continuous, and user-centered training will provide social workers with confidence, reduce resistance to change, and maximize the value of SWS - ultimately improving service delivery.

The intention of this paper is to analyze how the Social Work Services (SWS) system, operating on the SWAN platform, will alter the speed and transparency of the work in social work., The improved coordination and management of data and the delivery of service better responding to the needs of vulnerable populations and social workers will be discussed. The major intents are to identify problems presently occurring due to antiquated methods that hinder administrative efficiency and transparency, to understand barriers to prompt service delivery, and to

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demonstrate the SWAN platform as a new model of user agency and data transfer method with security. The article will demonstrate the SWAN digital platform, allowing for automated and improved case management, referrals, communications, and interdisciplinary collaboration using the SWS system. Strategies for change management and training will also be discussed, through which social work professionals receive integration and acceptance with the SWS. The conclusion will connect all presented comprehensive exploration of how to digitize social work systems that positively affect the delivery of faster, easier, and more accountable services, all while remaining consistent with social work professional practice value choices: community engagement, agency, social justice and care to the individual. [5].

II. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

There are several key reasons why transparency and flexibility are important in social work services. First, transparency creates trust between social workers and clients by sharing information in a clear manner about processes and choices, thereby engaging the clients in their care. Second, transparency creates accountability and credibility, adding to ethical service delivery, building trust in vulnerable communities, such as among clients of color. Third, being flexible lets social workers meet the needs of their clients as they change, which makes the service better and more coordinated. Fourth, open communication within and between interdisciplinary teams encourages teamwork and makes case management better. Fifth, clear systems may help social workers avoid burnout by making their roles and responsibilities clearer. This will enable them to concentrate on working with clients. The sixth point is that being open and flexible can help the cause of social justice by making sure that everyone can get the care they need that is right for their culture. And finally, being flexible helps you be responsive and efficient, but being open and honest is important for trust, responsibility, and giving clients power.

Social work faces two intractable challenges when it comes to service delivery and reporting: red tape and administrative barriers. These barriers make it harder to decide, longer to decide, and reduce your options. There is not enough service capacity: not enough staff or infrastructure. This results in too many cases for social workers or not enough time for social workers to see clients. Poorly connected systems-meaning agency non-cooperation and coordination-results in duplicative services and useless referrals. Writing things down by hand can be time-consuming, taking that time away from the clients, which also leads to errors. Social workers are not as productive as they can be because they lack appropriate training and cannot use new technologies. Clients have difficulty becoming involved and holding people accountable due to lack of openness and communication. It may also be more difficult to access care due to social and cultural barriers. These various limitations lead to inefficiency, fatigue, and poor client outcomes, hence a demand for technology-enabled and integrated social work systems [7].

There are many ways of cutting down on delays due to hierarchies and the need to get approvals. First, lower the number of levels of review needed for minor approvals and lower levels of review overall. This will make it easier to get approvals. This would lead to quicker and more efficient decision making. Second, develop thresholds for value of approval so that you can build clarity around what needs to be approved by senior management versus what can be approved by users and lower management. Third, allow approvals to be processed in parallel, so that more than one stakeholder can approve at the same time to maximize utilization of resources and reduce wait times. Fourth, automate approvals as a workflow in a digital environment to improve transparency and eliminate solicitously delays. Clarity in roles and authority can provide a buffer against confusion and unnecessary delays, while follow-up and notifications can ensure that actions are completed in a timely manner. Fifth, train approvers and users at all levels on any new policies and procedures. Training establishes an environment where a new process may be presented and/or learned. Sixth, retain the approval cycle schedule and the frequency of approval bottleneck, if it exists at some level; prompt self-reflection and the refinements of those process(es). Also, if they use mobile or remote approval options, decision-makers can make decisions quickly without having to be there. These will all work together to create a speedy, transparent, and well-structured approval process with accountability of the individuals involved and reduced delays in the process [8].

Technology is important in social work because it helps people decide what to do based on facts, makes it easier to talk to each other, and speeds things up. This includes case management systems that let teams from different fields share and manage their cases and data safely, and automation that helps ease the burden of following the rules and cuts down on paperwork. Telehealth and telecare support services help people from a distance, which promotes access to services and support for those living in rural areas. Mobile apps will help social workers in the field to be able to access information they need and update records from any location. Predictive analytics and AI can help us make proactive care by helping us guess what people will need and spotting signs of risk. Digital collaboration tools let coworkers share information in real time, which leads to better client-centered care. Automated referral processes make

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workflows better because clients used to have to wait for a service to start. Continuous online training helps social workers learn about best practices and technology. In short, technology helps change social work by making it less expensive to run, more open, better at intervening quickly, and more involved with clients and staff.

The platform has a full cycle (intake, service, closure, etc.) social work case management system that makes social work services more efficient, open, and collaborative. It has made client management easier by providing secure record keeping, documentation management with customizable templates to make your paperwork easier, calendar benefits to help you keep track of service appointments, automated workflow actions to cut down on repetitive tasks, and most importantly, communication tools to help you coordinate treatment. It has real-time reporting and analytics to promote data-driven decision making, and users can access mobile platforms to manage their information while in the field. The system also meets overall standards for acceptable legal compliance related to data management and security principles, and it creates tailored case plans proportionate to the specific needs of the client. There is continual training and support for all users. All of these features have the intention of promoting more responsive and client-centered social work services, alleviate some of the administrative burden, and enhance efficiency of case management and the delivery of services.

The SWAN platform is committed to increasing transparency in social work service delivery through a number of mechanisms. SWAN concentrates on accountability to the population that is affected by the service through involving vulnerable populations in the needs assessment and decision making processes, in order to ensure needs based services. SWAN also establishes inclusive feedback processes, whereby vulnerable and affected populations provide feedback and input. The SWAN program is based on the principles of protection to build trust and stop exploitation and abuse. It has been open about how it gives out help and how it evaluates performance, which includes ways to check the results and ways to appeal. Intention works with consortium members and community partners to foster trust through open communication and shared responsibility. SWAN intends to use data responsibly, guaranteeing data protection and building trust in data usage. These attributes allow social work interventions to be more transparent, accountable, and results-driven toward the interest of marginalized groups and also foster continued participation at the community level. The SWAN Platform is bound to follow all legal requirements concerning user consent and data access while protecting the users' information and preserving their privacy. SWAN also has mechanisms inbuilt for consent management that ensure no user can bypass user consent in sensitive actions, either knowingly or unknowingly. Consent management procedures make use of strong customer authentication methods, such as multi-factor authentication, which may include biometric feedback, to keep track of user consent results for actions that are private. The mechanics of the approval process are presented in an easy-to-manage form that will walk the user through the process of approval requests via secure URLs. For bulk actions, a server-to-server consent process is possible whereby only approved accounts can access SWAN for bulk actions, requiring cryptographic management. Role-based access controls restrict who has access to sensitive information. SWAN places a high priority on data privacy and security through strong encryption and audit logs to ensure state, national, and international compliance for sharing data. Records of consent campaigns will be retained in an immutable format for accountability and monitoring, leaving an audit trail. SWAN provides safeguards to ensure user consent is captured, audited and enforced, while also imposing strict controls on data access for user privacy in social work services.

In addition, SWAN has a number of other features that contribute to agile decision making and project delivery in social work: automation of repetitive functions reducing work demands and streamlining case processing; real time access to the most current information to make decisions more quickly and with more information, without waiting; artificial intelligence and data -driven real time data (e.g., for case prioritization, detecting with high probability, recommended actions based on the data of 1,000s of clients); supports collaboration by enhancing coordination across inter-professional teams; and facilitating realtime approved access to social workers to update and decide on case information remotely, when necessary. SWAN includes autonomous intelligent agents that assess situations and will take action automatically if relevant and appropriate, to further add to operational efficiency. Overall, SWAN increases the speed, data reliance decision making of social work, leading to improved coordination and client outcomes.

III. SYSTEM DESIGN

Various case studies support that the SWAN platform can be engaged in social work to some extent emphasizing team-based intervention planning and integrated conversations. In doing so it utilizes a cards for a peer review and discussion in order for social workers to even notice to coordinate social quality issues in a targeted way involving both the residents and some outside expert. The conversation toolbox of SWAN intervenes in discussions around client situations thus using the overall knowledge of situations to co-create interventions. The example of SWAN

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coordinating industrial waste prioritizing information from and together with participants from the Balkans demonstrates a similar capacity for collaboration and information utilization, which could be used in social work. All of these studies demonstrate the value of SWAN to support fellow inquiring, collaborative, and adaptable practices to meet the immediate needs of clients and community as well as understanding the behavior of commercial entities.

Overall, the SWAN platform improves social work interventions and client relationship in various ways. Firstly, it facilitates multi-level intervention planning through a type of vertical specificity where social workers can look at issues facing clients at multiple levels individual-collective-society. The distinction of micro views into their expansive multi-use based on who, when and the of various others is used to understand of social group thinking and find an innovative solution in regard to their future. In addition to using feedback from group discussions for consideration in collaborative decision making to create an intervention plan that is respectful of individual cultural understanding. The platform centers on vulnerable populations, supporting effective and equitable service delivery. It incorporates safety and protection into the intervention, thereby increasing trust and comfortability with the client. SWAN also facilitates quick emergency response by mobilizing and coordinating resources during a crisis, thereby mitigating harm. SWAN encourages client participation in community member engagement in assessment and program services to advance the impact of their recovery from trauma. Further, SWAN increases access to essential services resulting in better health outcomes and quality of life for clients. In short, the community social work sector is transformed to a proactive, client-centered, and data-driven area of practice that recognizes client agency.

The SWAN platform architecture is a modular multi-layered platform designed to deliver social work services in a safe, open and flexible way. In general, the architecture elements focus on usability, automated processes, data security, deliberate decision-making, and increasing responsiveness, which is vital for increasing transparency and agility in social work. Though specific block diagrams of SWAN implementations are mostly absent, a conceptual model identified in the literature reflects the characteristics and architecture also found in similar social work platforms. See below Figure 1:

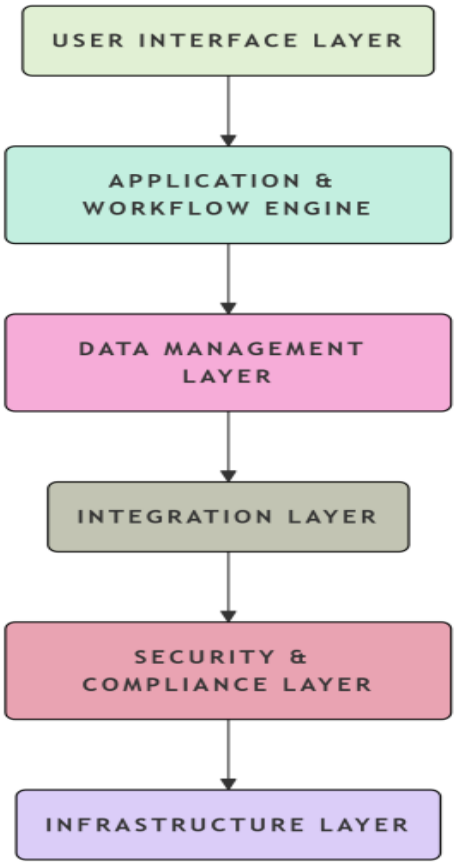

Figure 1: SWAN Social Work Platform Architecture

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1. User Interface Layer:

- Available through the internet and mobile apps for social workers, clients, and other stakeholders.
- Includes real-time reporting and a case management system, consent tracking and interactive outcomes, and communication between clients and social workers.

2. Workflow/Application Engine:

- Used to automate notifications, referrals, approvals and other social work procedures.
- Includes Artificial Intelligence for task prioritization, risk assessment and recommendation of possible interventions.
- Supports the coordination of work and/or collaboration across several users.

3. Data Management Layer:

- Centralized and secure database for client information, consents, case notes and intervention history.
- Ensures transparency and compliance with audit trail and immutable consent.
- User role based access control to manage data permission.

4. Integration Layer:

- APIs for sharing data with partner agencies and government databases.
- Communication services (email, SMS, push notifications).

5. Security and Compliance Layer:

- Strong encryption and multi-factor authentication.
- In compliance with regulations, privacy guidelines and data governance.

6. Infrastructure layer:

- Cloud-based and scalable infrastructure for disaster recovery and availability.
- Backup and recovery systems are also in place.

Social professionals and their clients have found the SWAN platform helpful in increasing collaboration among social professionals by providing structured tools and team-based action planning. SWAN enables users to explore complexity by analyzing socio-structural and individual elements associated with social situations, while reducing some administrative burden associated with paperwork and communication processes. Additionally, SWAN enhances professional development by assisting with peer review and access to expert consultation for culturally relevant supports through prioritization of vulnerable populations. SWAN allows for real time decision-making processes, through quick access to evidence based elements. Communicational steps are clearly articulated in each process of support, so as to ensure effective transfer of information and prevent worker fatigue by distribution of work through coordinated processes. For clients, SWAN offers a person-centered approach that is comprehensive to a social situational needs delivered in one platform. Clients experience greater inclusion and support within an intervention planning process, with improved access to supports that increase well-being and dignity through transparency of communication and expectation of shared access to services, as opposed to common instances of miscommunication with service providers. Timely assistance is supported by prioritization of vulnerability and improvement time to support through coordinated processes. Overall, the introduction of SWAN emphasizes a transition of social work from reactive responses toward proactive, and coordinated actions for clients.

In order to evaluate the effect of SWAN, the evaluator adopted a robust, theory-based, evaluation approach that is based on important social work and humanitarian objectives. Qualitative data collection utilized semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholders, including federal partners and local actors, in order to gain their perspectives and experiences with collaborative processes and service delivery. Focus group discussions with beneficiaries of the service, including internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups, were conducted to reflect on service user experience and service satisfaction, ensuring gender balance. Where appropriate, the evaluation also included a review of existing documentation and secondary data in order to triangulate findings relating to operational processes. The evaluation also considered SWAN relevance and effectiveness through a Theory of Change structure. Data collection was planned for and undertaken with a focus on specific areas of Ethiopia that were impacted by emergency response, as well as to collect representative data from those geographical areas. A mixed methods analysis integrated quantitative data collected from SWAN's program monitoring with qualitative data gathered from interviews and focus groups.

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The limitations related to the difficulties that were compounded by the absence of baseline data and the inconsistencies with the quality of monitoring the evaluation examined. Overall, this comprehensive evaluation developed informative findings about the humanitarian and social work value of SWAN, related to relevance of services, operational efficiencies, protection mechanisms, and the empowerment of beneficiaries. The evaluation of SWAN's effects within the social work contexts was guided by their overall number of standards, as well as instruments. The standards included relevance/appropriateness: templated for respect of gender and humanitarian need; efficiency: providing value for money and sound governance; effectiveness of delivery: delivering service in a timely and relevant way and protection vulnerable populations; sustainability: pertaining to the sustainability of benefits created from SWAN; and inclusion of beneficiaries focused on including marginal community, women, and children in decision making.

The instruments included key informant interviews from a variety of stakeholders, focus group discussions (FGDs) by gender and including vulnerable groups, document review focused on governance and delivery metrics for social work and humanitarian assistance, a theory of change developed for impact overall assessment, and triangulating qualitatively and quantitatively presented data to provide depth of understanding. Taken as a whole, the combinations of the different elements established a rigorous framework to assess the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of SWAN in humanitarian assistance and social work delivery, as the operational data and perspectives of various stakeholders for presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Criteria and Tools used in the Assessment of SWAN's Impact

Assessment Criteria	Description	Tools and Methods Used
Relevance	Alignment of SWAN interventions with prioritized emergency and humanitarian needs	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Document Review
Efficiency	Governance, collaborative mechanisms, and value for money	KIIs with federal partners and consortium members
Delivery Effectiveness	Timeliness, relevance, and safety of delivered aid services	Program monitoring data, KIIs, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
Sustainability	Durability of impact and effectiveness of exit strategies	Document Review, KIIs
Beneficiary Inclusion	Involvement of vulnerable groups in decision-making and needs assessment	FGDs, KIIs, Field visits
Protection and Safeguarding	Measures ensuring safety and security during assistance delivery	KIIs, FGDs
Outcome Metrics	Access to safe water, shelter, health services, empowerment, and wellbeing	Quantitative monitoring data, Beneficiary feedback
Mixed-Methods Validation	Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data for comprehensive impact assessment	Combination of all above tools

The SWAN platform attained important achievements on the aspects of agility and transparency - especially seen in the way beneficiaries and consortium members communicated and collaborated. There were challenges regarding the ability to communicate information between multiple agencies and agencies defining their roles with NGOs. The platform made a focus on the need to include impacted groups as part of the decision-making process while trying to provide transparency amid privacy concerns. The SWAN identified agility through response time during emergencies but continues to struggle with increasing its scale in both areas and across regions. It also addressed the need for flexible service delivery to accommodate changing demands while identifying the value of automating workflows to improve efficiency. Overall, lessons learned indicated that a consortium approach quickly standardizes rapid response procedures and that wherever possible the capacity of local and government bodies is greatly needed in order to sustain the work. Continuously providing clear communications and shared platforms are key to better coordinated effort. Finally, ensuring impacted people have an opportunity to provide feedback into their experiences provides relevance and intended impact to the aid efforts. Ultimately, good and sustainable aid delivery balances speed with completeness in order to minimize duplication and competition across agencies. The dataset contains indicators of transparency, agility, challenges faced, and lessons learned for SWAN. The dataset has been designed to produce graphic representations across all themes which is depicted in below Figure 2:

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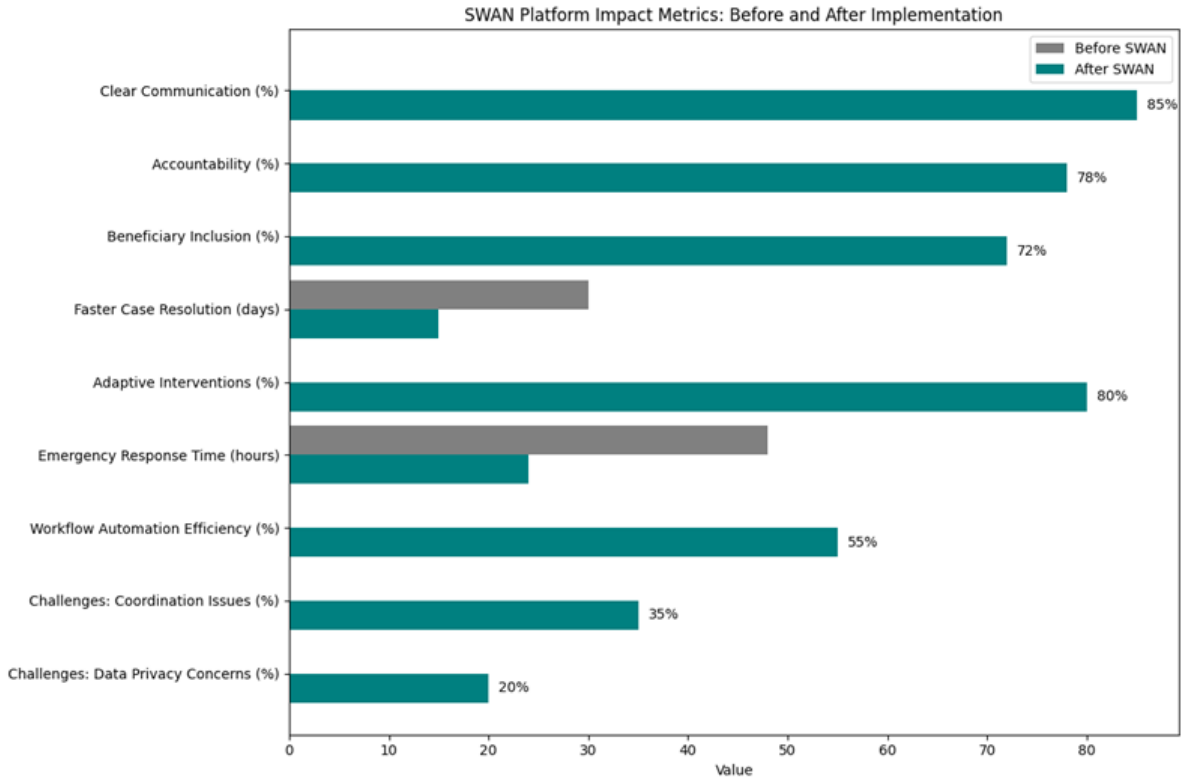

Figure 2: SWAN Platform Impact Metrics: Before and After Implementation

IV. CONCLUSION

The SWAN program has made notable progress in assisting vulnerable, and displaced, communities in Ethiopia by supporting human dignity and improving health through greater access to clean water and health services. By using an approach that enhances accountability, transparency through beneficiary engagement, and with sharing data in real-time, SWAN has developed an improved response through flexible response mechanisms and NGO coordination. SWAN faced a variety of challenges such as food shortages and permeability in delivery, yet it focused on institutional strengthening through trainings and workshops; however, capacity and turnover remain a challenge and are sustainability challenges. SWAN continues to serve as a model of needs-based, data-informed, and collaborative humanitarian social work even as it emphasizes accountability and beneficiary engagement. The transition from emergency to sustainable development will require strengthening with local government systems capacity, and a supportive policy environment as well. Looking towards the future, SWAN will develop its sustainability planning by creating linkages to larger health and social protection systems, expanding its context of engagement with capacity strengthening, and using digital technologies to enhance responsiveness. SWAN specifically aims to fill the gap in competency-focused post-crisis recovery and from a nutrition perspective as part of its evolution while providing continuous learning and knowledge exchange, data analytics, of the response during and after a catastrophe, while developing strategies to adapt the response useful to new contextual situations to promote maximized and significant impact in Stuart and resources with supporters.

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