

# Improving the Quality of Legal Aid: Impact Evaluation of Tech-Enabled Mediation in Peru

## **Abstract:**

This study assesses the impact of the Conciliator App on the efficiency and effectiveness of legal conciliation services in Peru, focusing on vulnerable populations. Utilizing a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) across 80 legal stations, we investigate whether the app, designed to self-assess performance indicators for conciliators, can improve agreement rates in legal conciliations. Results indicate a significant increase in agreement rates by 0.5 standard deviations among users of the Conciliator App, suggesting a notable improvement in the resolution of legal disputes.

## **Introduction:**

Access to justice is a fundamental human right and a critical component of sustainable development. However, in many developing countries, overburdened judiciaries with large case backlogs routinely delay justice, imposing significant constraints on those seeking legal remedies (Djankov, Porta, Lopez-De-Silanes, Shleifer, 2003; Marciano, Malcarne and Ramello, 2019). This not only undermines public trust in the judiciary and broader institutions but also disproportionately impacts the poor and marginalized (Amriapu, 2021).

Peru, a country with 20.2 percent of its population living below the national poverty line, faces significant challenges in providing quality judicial services to its citizens (World Bank, 2021). The two most prevalent issues reported through the country's legal aid phone line are deficient nutritional assistance and domestic or gender-based violence. Delayed justice procedures and court rulings exacerbate these social injustices, leading to strains on physical and mental health, economic hardship, and a heightened risk of substance abuse.

To address these challenges, Peru has established Centros de Conciliación Gratuitos (CCGs), or Public Free Mediation Centers, which serve as the first line of defense for improving access to justice for vulnerable groups. The 90 centers and 102 conciliators serve over 60,000 low-income citizens annually who lack access to other forms of legal services. However, CCGs are plagued by inefficiencies, highlighting the need for innovative solutions to enhance their effectiveness and reach.

In this study, we evaluate an intervention that aims to reduce backlog and improve judicial efficiency in Peru by leveraging technology. In partnership with Sama, an organization providing an innovative platform for online dispute resolution services, we will conduct a series of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to assess the impact of a data-driven web app on the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of legal aid in Peru's CCGs.

The proposed innovation delivers performance feedback at the management, conciliator, and public defender levels. By harnessing underutilized administrative data, the app aims to help justice actors gather new information, develop an awareness of areas for improvement, build

motivation, and make more informed and efficient decisions, ultimately leading to more satisfactory agreements for parties involved in legal disputes.

This research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on the role of technology in enhancing access to justice and promoting sustainable development. By rigorously evaluating the impact of the proposed intervention on the efficiency, quality, and accessibility of justice for low-income citizens in Peru, we hope to generate evidence that can inform policy decisions and drive locally-led development toward a more just, stable, and economically prosperous society.

### **Data and Methodology:**

We employed a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the impact of a data-driven web app on the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of legal aid in Peru's Centros de Conciliación Gratuitos (CCGs). The app provides performance feedback at the management, conciliator, and public defender levels.

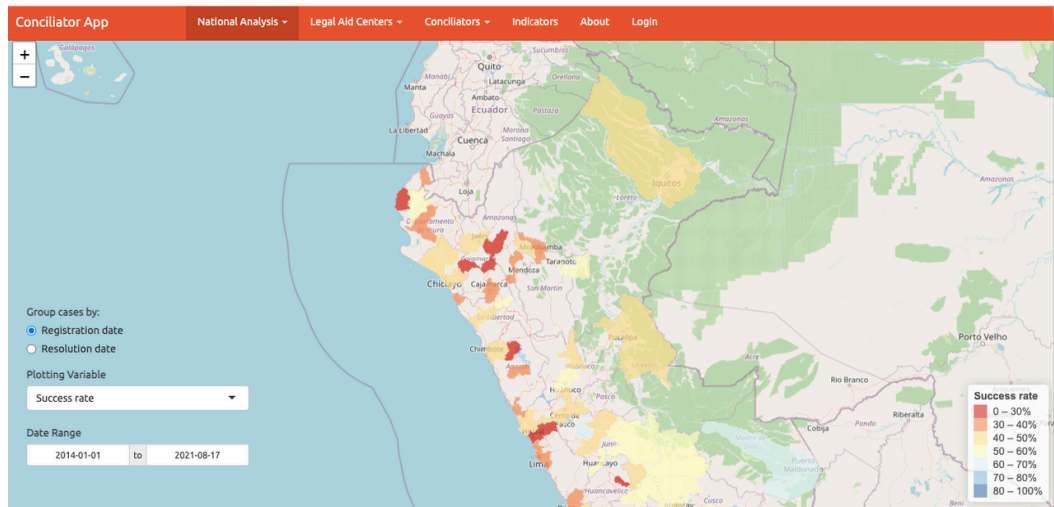
The research is conducted in partnership with the Peruvian Ministry of Justice, which administers the CCGs.

We randomly selected 45 out of the 90 CCGs and provided conciliators with access to the app and weekly reminders to log in. The app allowed conciliators to monitor three performance metrics: (1) case volume, (2) the rate of successful agreements, and (3) efficiency, as measured by the average number of days to close a case. For the first time, conciliators received individualized performance monitoring reports and could compare their performance to the average performance of their colleagues. The remaining 45 CCGs served as the control group.

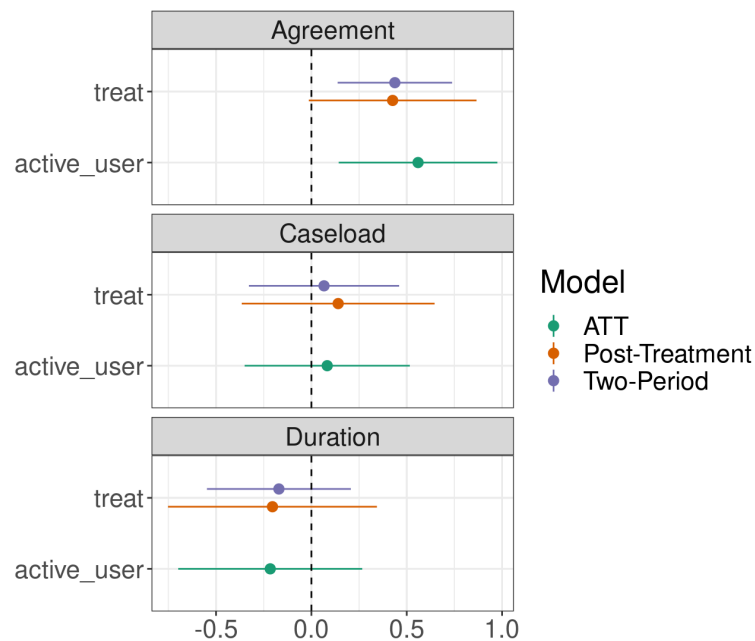
The primary outcomes of interest include conciliator performance metrics (agreement rate, case volume, and average time to close a case). The data is analyzed using standard econometric techniques for RCTs, including intention-to-treat analysis and treatment-on-the-treated analysis, to estimate the causal impact of the intervention on the outcomes of interest.

By employing a rigorous RCT methodology and leveraging both administrative and survey data, this study aims to generate robust evidence on the effectiveness of a data-driven web app in enhancing the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of legal aid services in Peru, with the potential for scalability and replicability in other contexts.

### **Figure 1: Screenshot of E-Justice App**



**Figure 2: Effect of E-Justice App**



The analysis reveals a significant improvement in agreement rates among conciliators using the Conciliator App, with an increase of 0.5 standard deviations for active users compared to the control group. This enhancement suggests that the app effectively supports conciliators in achieving more favorable outcomes in legal disputes. Secondary outcomes, such as case duration and user satisfaction, also indicate positive trends, although further analysis is required to fully understand these effects.

The results from the RCT demonstrate the significant impact of the data-driven web app on conciliator performance. Conciliators in the treatment group, who received access to the app and weekly reminders to log in, significantly increased their agreement rates by 0.4 standard deviations (in the intention to treat analysis) compared to the control group. This finding suggests that providing conciliators with individualized performance monitoring reports and the ability to compare their performance to that of their colleagues can lead to improved outcomes for legal aid users.

Furthermore, the results from the RCT showed a reduction in the average duration of cases, although this effect was not statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This trend, if confirmed in future analyses, could indicate that the app not only improves the quality of legal aid services but also increases efficiency by reducing the time required to resolve disputes.

### **Discussion of the Results:**

The findings demonstrate the potential of the Conciliator App to improve legal conciliation in Peru, particularly for low-income citizens facing barriers to justice. The app's ability to increase agreement rates suggests that technology can play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of legal services. However, the scalability and applicability of the app to other contexts warrant further investigation. The study's limitations, including its focus on specific legal stations and the short duration of the intervention, highlight the need for continued research in this area.

Overall, the results of this study are expected to make a significant contribution to the growing body of literature on the role of technology in enhancing access to justice and promoting sustainable development. By rigorously evaluating the impact of a data-driven web app on the performance of legal aid providers and the outcomes for legal aid users, the study will generate valuable evidence to inform policy decisions and guide future interventions in this area.

The findings from this research have the potential to drive locally-led development efforts aimed at creating a more just, stable, and economically prosperous society in Peru and beyond. By demonstrating the effectiveness of leveraging data and technology to improve the delivery of legal aid services, the study could inspire similar initiatives in other contexts, contributing to the global effort to close the justice gap and ensure equal access to justice for all.

### **Conclusion:**

The Conciliator App represents a promising approach to addressing the justice gap in Peru, offering a scalable and cost-effective solution for improving legal conciliation outcomes. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence on the potential of technology to enhance access to justice, encouraging policymakers, legal practitioners, and technology developers to consider innovative solutions to longstanding challenges.

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