

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR QUILOMBOLA COMMUNITIES, SUSTAINABILITY AND DIGITAL INCLUSION: A CASE STUDY IN THE QUILOMBOLA COMMUNITY OF REMANSO¹

ACESSO À JUSTIÇA POR COMUNIDADES QUILOMBOLAS, SUSTENTABILIDADE E INCLUSÃO DIGITAL: UM ESTUDO DE CASO NA COMUNIDADE QUILOMBOLA DO REMANSO

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Abstract

This article investigates how Digital Justice can enhance access to justice and the realization of rights for quilombola communities in Brazil, with a particular emphasis on social and cultural sustainability. The methodology employment includes a literature review centered on quilombola communities, digital inclusion, and access to justice. Subsequently, a case study approach was adopted, incorporating document analysis, participant observation, and focus groups with community members. Document analysis provided insights into the historical and cultural context of quilombola communities in Brazil. Field-based participant observation was conducted by the researchers in the Remanso quilombola community, located in the municipality of Lençóis, in the interior of Bahia, Brazil. Finally, two focus groups were held, each understanding five members of the local quilombola community. The findings identified six key dimensions associated with barriers to justice and the enabling factors of Digital Justice: (i) usability of technology for accessing justice and rights; (ii) community-based facilitators for integrating legal and technological systems; (iii)

Resumo

Este artigo investiga como a Justiça Digital pode aprimorar o acesso à Justiça e a efetivação de direitos para comunidades quilombolas no Brasil, com ênfase particular na sustentabilidade social e cultural. A metodologia empregada inclui uma revisão de literatura centrada em comunidades quilombolas, inclusão digital e acesso à Justiça. Posteriormente, adotou-se uma abordagem de estudo de caso, incorporando análise documental, observação participante e grupos focais com membros da comunidade. A análise documental permitiu compreender o contexto histórico e cultural das comunidades quilombolas no Brasil. A observação participante de campo foi conduzida pelos pesquisadores na Comunidade Quilombola do Remanso, localizada no município de Lençóis, no interior da Bahia, Brasil. Por fim, foram realizados dois grupos focais, cada um composto por cinco membros da comunidade quilombola local. Como resultados, foram identificados seis dimensões-chave associadas às barreiras à justiça e aos fatores facilitadores da Justiça Digital: (i) usabilidade da tecnologia para acesso à Justiça e aos direitos; (ii) facilitadores

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) available resources and infrastructure for technology use; (iv) geographic barriers ; (v) communication for rights awareness ; and (vi) education and literacy . The study concludes that these six dimensions are critical to advancing digital inclusion and equitable access to justice for quilombola communities .

Keywords: Access To Justice. Case Study . Digital Justice. Quilombola Communities . Sustainability.

comunitários para integração de sistemas jurídicos e tecnológicos; (iii) recursos e infraestrutura disponíveis para uso da tecnologia; (iv) barreiras geográficas; (v) comunicação para conscientização sobre direitos; e (vi) educação e letramento. O estudo conclui que essas seis dimensões são cruciais para promover a inclusão digital e o acesso equitativo à Justiça para as comunidades quilombolas.

Palavras-chave: Acesso À Justiça. Estudo De Caso. Justiça Digital. Comunidades Quilombolas. Sustentabilidade.

1 INTRODUCTION

Quilombola communities emerged in Brazil as a form of resistance to the enslavement of Black people, a practice rooted in the colonial model implemented by Portugal from the 15th century onward. Beyond Brazil, other Afro-descendant communities in Latin American countries, such as Colombia, Ecuador, Suriname, Honduras, Belize, and Nicaragua, identify as ethnic groups and actively demand their rights.

In Brazil, the colonial exploitation of the territory—aimed at exporting wealth to Europe—was marked by the trafficking of Africans from various regions of the continent, subjected to forced labor in a wide range of activities. In response to this system of oppression, enslaved individuals formed quilombos—settlements where Afro-descendant peoples reclaimed their freedom through cultural, religious, medicinal, and ecological practices, as well as artistic expressions, spiritual traditions, and ethical and technical knowledge.

Quilombola communities, therefore, emerged as part of the historical and cultural formation of Brazilian society. This trajectory resulted in populations living in conditions of geographic and structural vulnerability, especially regarding access to justice and the exercise of rights, due to a long history of exclusion and resistance.

At the same time, the Brazilian Judiciary has undergone considerable technological transformation in recent years, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. These advances, aimed at building a more digital justice system, occurred alongside the growing virtualization of social relations. Many scholars identify the

adoption of innovative technologies and the digitalization of procedures as promising strategies for addressing chronic challenges in the Judiciary, including mitigating geographical barriers. At the same time, studies highlight the need to ensure that the Judiciary's technological transformation does not result in digital exclusion or violate fundamental rights and guarantees.

In this context, the Justice System must incorporate technological innovation while ensuring access to rights and preserving the values essential to the delivery of justice. Information and communication technologies offer a promising framework for advancing this agenda, enabling the construction of a more sustainable, democratic, transparent, and accessible Justice System.

It is in this scenario that this study seeks to identify the broader context of quilombola communities and examine how Digital Justice can expand access to justice and the realization of rights for individuals in these communities, with an emphasis on promoting their social and cultural sustainability.

To achieve this objective, a literature review was initially conducted, focusing on the topics of quilombola communities, digital inclusion, and access to justice. This review allowed us to understand the historical formation of these communities, ongoing technological transformations, and emerging opportunities for digital inclusion, as well as identify potential barriers and enabling factors related to access to justice. Subsequently, a case study was conducted based on documentary analysis, participant observation, and primary data collection through two focus groups composed of members of a quilombola community. The Quilombola Community of Remanso, located in the state of Bahia, Brazil, was selected for this case study due to its representativeness. Bahia has particular historical significance, having been the main gateway for Portuguese colonization and the initial arrival of enslaved Africans. Furthermore, it continues to have the largest number of self-identified Black people and the largest documented population of quilombola community members in the country. The case study allowed for an in-depth analysis of how Digital Justice can influence access to justice and the protection of rights in these communities, from the perspective of their members. Finally, the primary data collected were analyzed and interpreted in light of the selected theoretical framework, as part of the qualitative research conducted with participants from the Remanso Quilombola community.

2 QUILOMBOLA COMMUNITIES, ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND DIGITAL INCLUSION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Brazil was colonized by Portugal from the 15th century onwards. This process was initially based on the enslavement of indigenous peoples, later replaced by the trafficking and enslavement of black people brought from various regions of Africa (Souza; Almeida, 2005).

Quilombola communities emerged in this historical context. The term *quilombo* refers to settlements established by Black people who escaped slavery during the colonial and imperial periods of Brazilian history (Marques, 2009). Indeed, numerous quilombos emerged as a direct form of resistance to the oppressive slave regime (Souza; Almeida, 2005; Cunha Junior, 2012).

In this sense, quilombola settlements in Brazil originated from a revolutionary impulse to confront and reject the criminal system of slavery, affirming cultural identity and territorial belonging (Souza; Almeida, 2005; Vieira; Quintans ; Carlet , 2017). These quilombos became spaces where freedom was recreated in its fullness (Souza; Almeida, 2005).

Historically, the Portuguese Overseas Council already referred to quilombolas in correspondence to the king in 1740, describing them as any group of fugitive slaves with more than five people, generally located in uninhabited or difficult-to-access areas (Teixeira; Xavier, 2018). Since their inception, quilombos have been characterized as organized societies, with social relations based on solidarity and the use of land as a central resource for subsistence (Silva; Regis; Almeida, 2012).

Thus, quilombos were composed of descendants of Africans who preserved their own cosmologies, encompassing religious practices, artistic expressions, ethical and ethnic knowledge, as well as economic systems (Teixeira; Xavier, 2018). As a form of cultural resistance, quilombola groups sought to protect their traditions, spiritual beliefs, and historical narratives from violence and flight, establishing autonomous territorial claims (Souza; Almeida, 2005; Araújo Filho; Lunardi ; Lafuente , 2025).

Because they arose from collective resistance during slavery—formed by individuals or groups fleeing captivity or leading rebellions (Reis, 1996)—quilombos were often established in geographically remote regions. Consequently, their populations tend to face geographic vulnerability, especially regarding access to justice and the

guarantee of rights (Torlig; Gomes; Lunardi , 2023). Brazil's vast territorial extension, coupled with precarious infrastructure and limited public services in areas far from urban centers, exacerbates this vulnerability (Araújo Filho *et al* ., 2024).

Therefore, it is essential to identify, on the one hand, the barriers to access to justice and, on the other, the facilitating factors and opportunities involved—especially those arising from contemporary technologies. In the context of this research, access to justice is understood as the possibility of obtaining judicial services and the recognition of rights, particularly through mechanisms that allow individuals to reach the institutions responsible for guaranteeing these rights and ensuring their enforcement. These are, above all, institutions focused on the peaceful resolution of threats or obstacles to the realization of civil, social, economic, political, and cultural rights (Sadek, 2009). Similarly, access to justice can be defined as the institutional capacity of the judiciary to enable all people to seek and obtain effective redress through accessible, impartial, efficient, effective, and culturally appropriate justice institutions (Cappelletti; Garth, 1998; Kondori; Rouhani, 2020; Voert; Pivaty; Marique, 2022).

However, several obstacles limit access to justice. Notably, one such barrier is geographic, which refers to the physical distance individuals must travel to claim their rights—a condition known as geographic vulnerability. It is equally important to identify the factors that enable access to justice, especially given the new possibilities opened up by technological advances (Mulcahy; Tsalapatanis, 2022).

From a governance perspective, accessibility is linked both to the strategic resources of the Judiciary and to the structure of the judicial system itself (Akutsu; Guimarães, 2012; Dickinson, 2012; Velicogna; Ontanu, 2019; Borba; Lunardi; Guimarães, 2025). This dimension encompasses the public's ability to use judicial services and to be treated equally in exercising knowledge of their rights (Sadek, 2009). The feasibility of realizing these rights must also be considered, with the aim of reducing social inequalities and promoting the democratization of access (Araújo Filho *et al*., 2024).

In this context, the Digital Justice model becomes relevant not only to keep pace with advances in information and communication technologies (Freitas; Lunardi; Correia, 2024), but also to reinforce core values of the Justice System, such as independence, integrity, equity, and effectiveness (Reiling; Contini, 2022; Creutzfeldt, 2001). The Digital Judicial Governance approach understands the adoption of technology not only as

a means of digitizing judicial operations, but, above all, as a strategy to strengthen the fundamental purposes and values of the Justice System (Contini, 2020; Oliveira *et al.*, 2023). The focus, therefore, is not only on the convenience of technological integration, but also on the incorporation and expansion of the values that legitimize judicial action, including independence, integrity, and inclusion (Contini, 2020).

On the one hand, there are statutes that establish national policies aimed at the Black population in Brazil. The Racial Equality Statute (Law No. 12,288/2010) determines, in its article 8, that residents of quilombola communities will benefit from specific incentives to guarantee the right to health, including improvements in environmental conditions, basic sanitation, food and nutritional security, and comprehensive health care. Article 18 of the same Statute guarantees quilombola communities the right to preserve their uses, customs, traditions, and religious manifestations, under the protection of the State. Articles 31 to 34 establish the right of quilombola communities to the lands they occupy, as well as access to public resources for their productive activities and infrastructure (Brazil, 2010). Decree 4,887/2003 regulates the process of demarcating quilombola lands (Brazil, 2003). International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169, ratified by Brazil, establishes the State's obligation to consult quilombola communities in decision-making processes, ensuring respect for their rights (Brazil, 2019). However, quilombola communities face significant difficulties in accessing justice and rights, particularly due to social and geographical barriers.

Therefore, it is important to empirically investigate whether the technological transformation of the Judiciary can help overcome barriers to access to justice, particularly for individuals and groups in situations of geographic and social vulnerability, such as quilombola communities. Analyzing the feasibility of implementing an effective digital justice system must consider not only the technical efficiency of the proposed changes but also their consistency with the fundamental values that legitimize the Judiciary, as well as the challenges of digital inclusion—especially for populations in geographically isolated areas.

3 METHODOLOGY

The empirical research used the case study method. Specifically, techniques of

documentary analysis, participant observation, and focus groups were employed (Gustin; Dias; Nicácio, 2020).

As an empirical research approach, a case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2015). Case studies can take different forms and are widely recognized as a valuable method for evaluating complex situations (Yin, 2015).

For this case study, the Quilombola community of Remanso, located in the municipality of Lençóis, in the Chapada Diamantina region of central Bahia, was selected. This community was chosen due to its particular relevance for the analysis of quilombola communities, based primarily on three factors: (i) historically, the colonization of Brazil by Portugal began on the coast of Bahia, which fostered the development of a rich Afro-Brazilian cultural heritage, rooted in the enslaved African population brought to sustain the colonial slave economy; (ii) the state of Bahia has the largest number of self-declared quilombolas in Brazil, totaling 397,000 people, or 29.90% of the national quilombola population (IBGE, 2023); and (iii) the chosen region has social, cultural, and historical significance, having been officially recognized by the Palmares Cultural Foundation since April 22, 2005, and is located in the area with the largest concentration of quilombola communities in the country.

To understand the context of the quilombola community, we began with a documentary analysis to examine existing data on its ethnographic profile. Official data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) were used for this purpose.

Next, participant observation was carried out within the community, with the researchers directly inserted into the field of investigation (Gustin; Dias; Nicácio, 2020). In this scenario, the relationship between observer and observed becomes interactive, occurring in the participants' natural environment. The observed individuals are no longer seen merely as objects of study and become considered active subjects who contribute to the development of the research (Abib; Hoppen; Hayashi Junior, 2013).

Subsequently, to capture the perceptions of the Quilombola community regarding the research topic—access to justice and digital inclusion—the focus group technique was employed. A focus group is a qualitative data collection method that gathers primary information through collective interactions structured around a specific theme introduced

by the researcher (Gustin; Dias; Nicácio, 2020).

The research followed the ethical parameters established by Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council (CNS), which establishes the standards applicable to research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In accordance with Article 1, Section I, and Article 2, Section XIV, of this resolution, authorization from the Ethics Committee was not required to conduct the research because: (i) the interviewees were fully integrated into the community in which they lived; (ii) they spoke Portuguese and understood the internal and external realities of the community; and (iii) the questions asked were not personal in nature, but related to the improvement of a public service (Brasil, 2016). Furthermore, at the beginning of the focus groups, the researchers responsible for conducting the conversation asked whether everyone freely and informedly consented to the dynamic, and the participants responded affirmatively. Informed consent forms (ICF) were also collected, which are in the possession of the authors and are available for consultation and verification. Thus, all ethical parameters of the research were duly observed.

On May 24, 2024, the research team visited the region to conduct focus groups, accompanied by a local guide. Two focus groups were held, each with five members of the Remanso Quilombola community.

Participants were randomly selected from community members available at the time of the researchers' visit. Care was taken to ensure diversity in gender, age, and occupation, as well as to include individuals who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

To guide the research, a semi-structured questionnaire was prepared in advance, focusing on Digital Justice and access to justice for groups in situations of geographic vulnerability—the theoretical frameworks chosen for the study. The questionnaire did not delimit specific thematic areas, as there was no prior information on the types of conflicts experienced by community members in the research region. During the focus groups, the researchers presented each question and explained the research objectives, obtaining prior consent from all participants, who signed the informed consent form.

The focus groups explored participants' responses to the following questions: "Have you had previous experiences accessing justice or exercising your rights?"; "To what extent does the geographic distance from your residence hinder access to justice and rights?"; "How do you obtain the information you need to assert your rights?"; "What

technological resources and infrastructure are available to you, even if only within the community?"; and "To what extent can technology help you access justice and rights, including relevant information?"

In compliance with ethical commitments to guaranteeing anonymity, focus group participants are identified in the text by acronyms such as P1, P2, and so on. These identifiers correspond to the sequential order of the responses provided, without disclosing names or personal characteristics during the group discussions.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 The context of the quilombola population in the interior of Bahia : documentary analysis and participant observation

Bahia is home to the largest quilombola population in Brazil, with 397,000 individuals (IBGE, 2023) and 1,814 quilombola communities – approximately 30% of the national total (IBGE, 2023).

The Quilombola community of Remanso is located in the municipality of Lençóis, in the Chapada Diamantina region, central Bahia. This area contains the state's geodetic center—the most central point in Bahia—and ranks fifth among Brazil's largest states in terms of territorial extension. The region also holds considerable social, cultural, and historical significance, having been officially recognized by the Palmares Cultural Foundation on April 22, 2005. Remanso is located in the region that concentrates the majority of the country's Quilombola population.

The origins of this community are linked to fundamental historical milestones in the formation of Brazilian society. The Portuguese colonization of Brazil began in the state of Bahia, with Salvador designated as the country's first capital. The trafficking and enslavement of Africans were central mechanisms of this colonial project. These historical dynamics contributed to Bahia having the highest percentage of Afro-descendant population in Brazil (IBGE, 2023).

The Remanso Quilombola community was officially certified on May 25, 2005, by the Palmares Cultural Foundation, in accordance with current Brazilian legislation. Quilombola communities can be certified when they are recognized as ethno-racial groups that meet the criteria for self-identification, have their own historical trajectory,

maintain specific territorial ties, and are presumed to be of Black ancestry associated with resistance to historical oppression (IBGE, 2023).

The members of the Remanso community are descendants of Afro-Brazilians originally from the Nagô region. Their families historically lived under the so-called "morada system," in which landowners granted families a plot of land to live on and cultivate for subsistence. In return, residents were required to provide free labor. This arrangement served as a substitute for the old slave system.

Chapada Diamantina attracted many people due to the discovery of gold and precious stones, which spurred the development of mining. From the late 17th century to the late 19th century, mining sustained the region's slave-owning culture, making it one of the areas with the highest concentration of quilombos in the state of Bahia. After the decline of mining, the region became one of Brazil's most important tourist destinations.

Quilombo residents live in modest masonry houses built with cement and bricks, as shown in Figure 1. The community has electricity transmission poles (Figure 1), and over time, improvements have been made, especially in communal spaces, which have been paved (Figure 2). However, many houses are still connected by dirt roads.

Figure 1. Photograph of the quilombola community where the research was carried out, in the municipality of Lençóis (BA), Brazil.



Source: authors' personal archive (2024).

Figure 2. Paved community area at the entrance to the Remanso quilombola community, in Lençóis (BA), Brazil.



Source: authors' personal archive (2024).

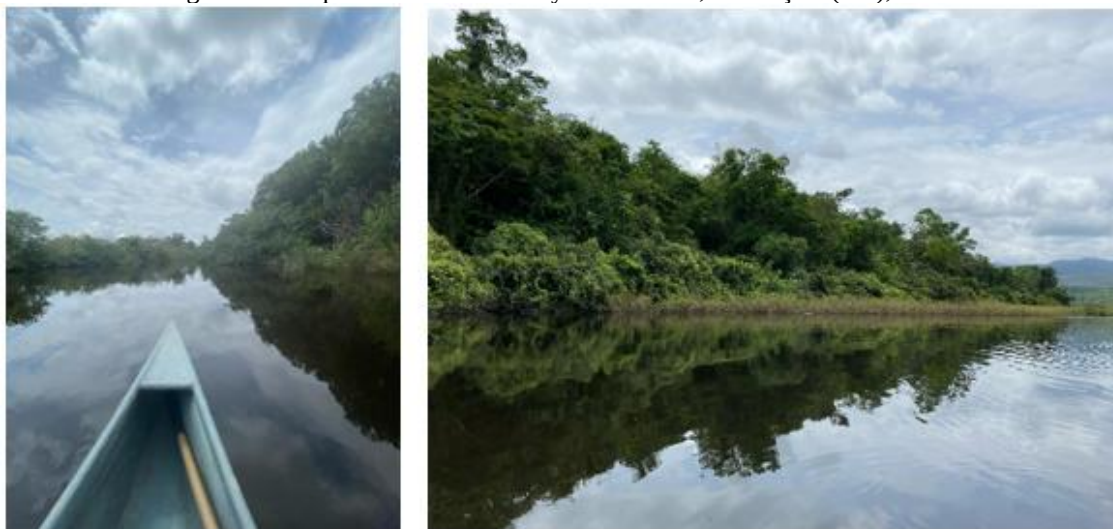
The community's residents exhibit a strong sense of solidarity and interact frequently, as if they were part of an extended family. Nicknames are common in everyday conversation, and festive occasions and community gatherings are highly valued, often marked by collective meals and regional musical styles, such as axé. The two focus groups were held in a large community warehouse, adorned with local cultural elements and regularly used for social events.

Religiosity is a prominent cultural expression among quilombo members. Jarê , an African-based religion—also known as Candomblé do Caboclo—is practiced exclusively in the Chapada Diamantina region. One of its central characteristics is religious syncretism, incorporating elements of Catholicism and Umbanda. It is common to find images of saints inside homes, including Saint Barbara, Saint Cosmas, and Saint Damian.

Another notable cultural tradition is Marujada, a performance created by Afro-Brazilians to chronicle the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil. It involves theatrical performances in which people dress as sailors and officers, participating in local festivals and celebrations.

The community is also located near a vast wetland known as Marimbus, a floodplain ecosystem whose biodiversity, fauna, and flora resemble those of the Pantanal (Figure 3). Residents maintain a close relationship with this natural environment, engaging in fishing, ecotourism, and leisure activities. One of the main livelihoods for many quilombolas is transporting tourists across the waters of the Marimbus.

Figure 3. The quilombola community of Remanso, in Lençóis (BA), Brazil.



Source: authors' personal archive (2024).

The region has strong agricultural potential, especially in the cultivation of tropical fruits such as mangoes, bananas, and watermelons, as well as cassava. Farmers from the community often walk to the Lençóis municipal center to sell their produce at local markets.

The community is located 18 km from the municipal center of Lençóis, and much

of the route remains unpaved. Furthermore, there is no public transportation connecting the community to the city center, forcing residents to walk this distance or rely on shared private transportation.

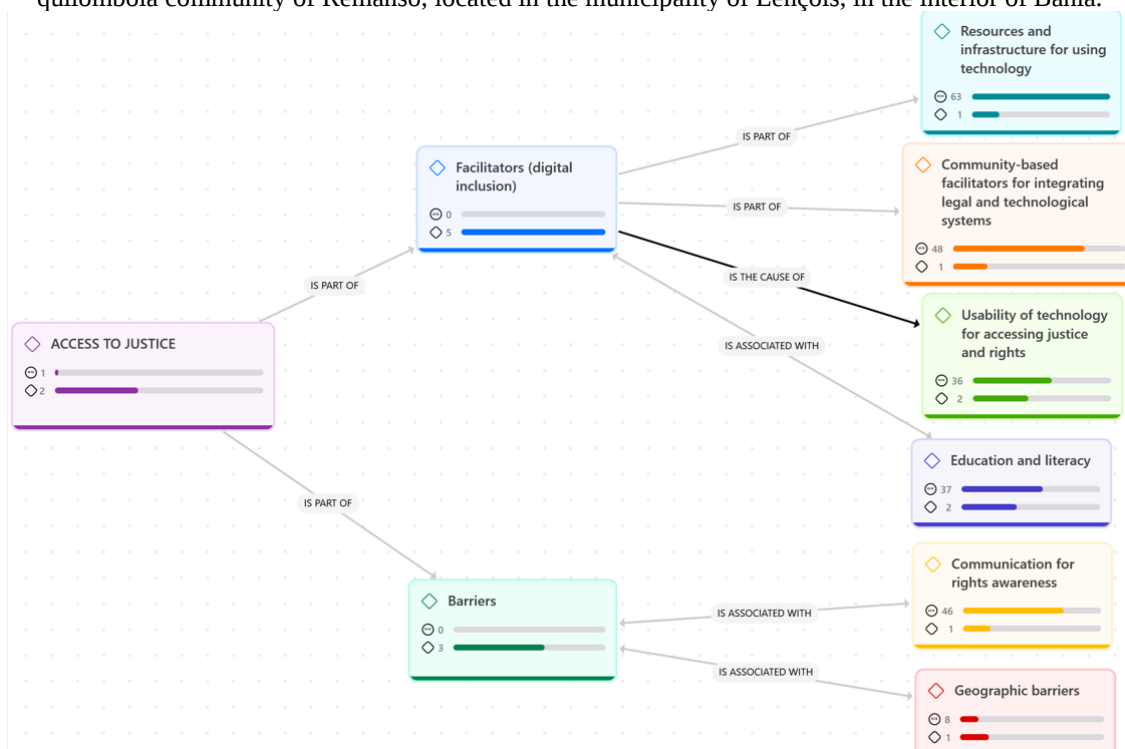
4.2 The focus group and quilombola perceptions about access to justice and rights through Digital Justice

After conducting two focus groups, each composed of five different members of the Remanso Quilombola community, the collected data were analyzed using the content analysis method proposed by Bardin (2020). The objective was to transform the raw data into meaningful and valid information, enabling the creation of tables, diagrams, figures, and conceptual models that synthesized the information produced by the analysis (Bardin, 2020).

With the support of the *ATLAS.ti software*, six dimensions related to Digital Justice (and, more broadly, digital governance) and access to justice were identified based on focus group discussions. These dimensions were obtained by categorizing the collected data and include: (i) usability of technology for access to justice and rights; (ii) community facilitators for integration between legal and technological systems; (iii) resources and infrastructure available for the use of technologies; (iv) geographic barriers; (v) communication to raise awareness about rights; and (vi) education and literacy.

Figure 4 presents these six dimensions, identified from the contextual themes that emerged from the discussions on Digital Justice and access to Justice, as well as the relationships between them.

Figure 4. Dimensions of Digital Justice and access to Justice from the perspective of members of the quilombola community of Remanso, located in the municipality of Lençóis, in the interior of Bahia.



Source: prepared by the authors using *ATLAS.ti*, based on content analysis of primary data collected in focus groups held with members of the Remanso quilombola community (2024).

In the diagram presented in Figure 4 (above), below the name given to each dimension, the following are presented: i) the number of inferences derived from the content analysis of the focus groups, which allow us to identify the degree of relevance attributed by the participants to each topic addressed in the form of a question, and ii) the number of times in which a given dimension is related to others listed in the table.

Initially, the expression "is part of" is used to denote a stronger degree of influence in the relationship between dimensions, while "is associated with" indicates a weaker relationship, mainly due to a smaller number of inferences. Furthermore, the expression "is a cause of" signifies a causal relationship between one dimension and another.

The first prominent dimension refers to the resources and infrastructure available for technology use. This construct refers to the availability and quality of technological and structural resources accessible to participants. Most respondents indicated that *smartphones* and internet access are the most common resources in the community, although the signal quality is sometimes poor:

[...] We have internet at home. Almost the entire community here does. [...] I have internet access; I have my cell phone [...] (P6).

[...] There are a lot of people who have cell phones, but some are not literate [...] (P2).

[...] We have cell phones, and we have internet, right? But the internet service here isn't very good. We've gone two or three days without being able to access the internet [...] (P1).

This empirical evidence reinforces the critical importance of communication infrastructure and information technologies for the advancement of Digital Justice—particularly digital judicial governance—as they constitute an essential prerequisite. It is also worth noting that cell phones often reduce the digital divide, as they are more accessible than computers in most households.

Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) show a significant increase in mobile internet access in Brazil, especially in Bahia. In 2019, Bahia recorded the second-highest growth in internet use in the country, with 71.3% of the population using the internet. Notably, smartphones were the preferred device for 98.9% of the state's 9.2 million internet users (Bahia, 2021).

The development of mobile applications that facilitate access to information about legal rights can therefore play a fundamental role in expanding access to justice.

Focus group participants also strongly emphasized the importance of community facilitators in integrating legal and technological systems—a relationship closely linked, secondly, to education and literacy. These facilitators were seen as essential to the culture of mutual aid and highly valued by the community, especially for addressing legal issues and the realization of individual and collective rights. At the same time, participants recognized the role of education as a driver of progress, highlighting how those who have had educational opportunities can support those who have been deprived of such access:

[...] We go after it, you know? Like: “What now?” I want to go to the forum, but I need this or that.” “Oh no, man, it’s like this and like that. Go this way so you don’t get lost” [...] (P2).

[...] Having people from the community who have studied law – like lawyers, prosecutors, judges – would be very helpful. It's like writing to someone more knowledgeable and asking for information [...] (P4).

[...] The easiest thing is, as my uncle just said, friends. Friends, people from other communities who have representatives to guide us [...] (P5).

[...] We were raised like this in the community – one person helping another [...] (P7).

This context reveals new facilitators of access to justice and rights, based on trust, a strong sense of community, and the significant support provided by those with knowledge—especially in the area of education—to those without. Participants emphasized the value of community support that goes beyond the theoretical model of community justice, noting that, in some cases, designated community justice agents are not from the community itself.

In this context, training community members to provide guidance on the existence of rights and how to access them through digital justice platforms emerges as a significant factor in expanding access to justice.

Other relevant dimensions highlighted by participants include the usability of technology for access to justice and rights, as well as geographical barriers and communication for rights awareness. The findings also confirmed that, although geographical barriers persist, the community often finds ways to overcome them through mutual support:

[...] Instead of going from here to Lençóis to participate in an in-person hearing, we can do everything online. You can access it without spending a lot of money [...] (P7).

[...] The problem, as we've already said, is transportation. If we need to run an errand, we either have to go at night or take a car. Because the roads aren't very good [...] (P5).

This indicates that geographic barriers are indeed present in the quilombola community studied. However, such barriers are even more pronounced in other remote communities in Brazil, such as the Amazon region (Moraes; Lunardi; Correia, 2024).

Participants also made it clear that, even without complete or advanced knowledge of digital tools, they perceive concrete improvements in access to rights when technology is used for this purpose. Of particular note is the widespread availability of *smartphones* and internet access, which has allowed the community to intuitively navigate digital platforms:

[...] I think technology has made access to justice much easier [...] *WhatsApp* is something everyone uses, [as well as] *Instagram*, because they're right there – you just click and go. But when it's a government website, like Gov or the digital identity app, there are a lot of things to use [...] (P2).

[...] What really helped and became a means of communication was technology. We have this access now. You have your cell phone, download the

app, and can access the information [...] (P4).

[...] So today, with technology advancing every day, we have the opportunity to have more freedom and go further. This technology thing really makes it easier [...] (P7).

Based on the theoretical framework adopted, the analysis suggests that Digital Justice has great potential to expand access to justice—especially if easy-to-access *smartphone apps are developed* and widely available among Quilombola community residents. Such tools could facilitate communication with professionals involved in administering judicial services and reinforce the value of training local community members to act as facilitators in this process (Alves; Lunardi; Correia, 2025a).

Figure 5 was created based on content analysis of focus group data using *ATLAS.ti* software. It complements the structure of the findings previously illustrated in Figure 4. The objective of Figure 5 is to illustrate the interconnections that may exist between the identified dimensions, in light of the concept of Digital Justice (in the context of digital governance) and access to justice and rights.

Figure 5. Dimensions of digital judicial governance and access to justice according to the perceptions of members of the quilombola community in Bahia and the interconnections between these themes.



Source: prepared by the authors using *ATLAS.ti*, based on the analysis of primary data from focus groups conducted with members of quilombola communities in the interior of Bahia.

The analysis reveals a correlation between the identified dimensions of Digital Justice and access to justice, indicating a constructive interaction between the two. The results highlight the potential for improving accessibility for individuals in geographically vulnerable quilombola communities through the adoption of Digital Justice, as demonstrated by specific insights drawn from empirical research.

It is clear that Digital Justice is closely linked to the usability of technology in facilitating access to justice and rights. In this sense, it can function as a judicial policy instrument capable of expanding access to justice. However, this potential depends on the education of those involved and the minimum availability of infrastructure and technological resources (Alves; Lunardi; Correia, 2025b) . In this context, access to justice can be expanded through the work of trained community facilitators, who assist in mediating between legal and digital systems, improving communication so that rights are better understood and exercised.

The empirical findings reinforce the theoretical argument (Torlig ; Gomes; Lunardi , 2023) that geographic barriers hinder access to justice, especially in certain regions of Brazil—such as the Amazon—where such barriers can be so significant that access can be virtually impossible . The data also highlight the importance of community justice as a mechanism for expanding access to justice, in addition to highlighting education and literacy as crucial facilitators for the exercise of rights, as repeatedly emphasized by research participants.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Effective access to justice is essential for quilombola communities to assert their fundamental rights and, in particular, to achieve cultural and social sustainability through the protection of their knowledge systems and cultural continuity (Bertoldi, 2017). These vulnerable communities are frequently exposed to illicit actions by economic and political interests and, in many cases, face the threat of state expropriation of their territories (Brugaca; Sousa, 2015; Bruzaca; Vieira, 2019).

Technological transformation within the Judiciary (Ontanu, 2019) has the potential to improve the delivery of judicial services to these communities, especially by increasing accessibility. However, achieving access to justice depends on effective actions by the Judiciary, from a judicial governance perspective (Akutsu; Guimarães, 2015), considering the peculiarities of the context involved, which requires humanization and respect for the populations, with a focus on the user of the judicial service (Bevir , 2012; Borba; Lunardi ; Guimarães, 2024; Oliveira *et al .*, 2024). Given the geographic isolation and unique cultural and social characteristics of quilombola communities, it is essential to investigate how new judicial technologies can support access to justice and

rights in digital formats.

Analyzing the perceptions of individuals in geographically vulnerable situations regarding the digitalization of judicial services provided valuable insights into the topic. The Remanso community generated significant data for this research, thanks to its representativeness. The study also enabled an understanding of the community's perception of both the potential and limitations of the Digital Justice model, with the aim of informing diagnoses and reflections that can support improvements in access to justice for geographically vulnerable populations.

The empirical research identified six central dimensions from the findings: (i) usability of technology for access to justice and rights; (ii) community facilitators for the integration of legal and technological systems; (iii) resources and infrastructure available for the use of technology; (iv) geographical barriers; (v) communication for awareness of rights; and (vi) education and literacy.

In the context of the research participants, technology can act as a facilitator of access to justice and rights—especially when accompanied by educational initiatives and the presence of trained community agents to assist both in the use of information and communication technologies and in the exercise and enforcement of rights. Although geographic vulnerability was observed in the region studied, it was not as pronounced as in studies conducted in the Brazilian Amazon (Moraes; Lunardi; Correia, 2024), where access to justice and rights was, in many cases, practically impossible.

The conclusions derived from qualitative research—based on a combination of participant observation and focus group methodological strategies—allow for the description of various facets of the case's complexity. In this research, the case study was not employed as an isolated methodological technique, but rather as a holistic analytical framework aimed at obtaining comprehensive information about the context under investigation. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the social reality under analysis, revealing aspects that would be difficult to uncover in purely statistical analyses (Goldenberg, 2024).

Based on the findings, which align participants' perceptions with the observed context, it was possible to identify central dimensions related to both the barriers and facilitators of digital transformation in the realization of rights. It is important to emphasize, however, that the case study method allows generalizations to theory, but not to broader populations or universes (Yin, 2015). Thus, the analytical dimensions derived

from empirical research can inform theoretical frameworks and serve as a basis for new empirical studies. In addition to contributing to the academic field, they can support the development of new judicial policy strategies.

As a recommendation for future research, we suggest greater attention be paid to the impacts of judicial technological transformation on access to legal rights and services. This includes analyzing the ethical implications involved, the perspectives of other actors in the justice system, and the geographic scope of similar studies in different regions and communities across the country.

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