

Reciprocal and wage labour in rural Ecuador. A quantitative analysis

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Abstract

This paper analyses the determinants for rural Ecuadorian households to participate in community works, to exchange labour, and to use paid labour. The results show that participation in community work is more common among indigenous peoples who are more committed with community and live in areas with relatively high population densities. Exchange labour agreements are more common among indigenous households settled in areas where industrial agriculture has not penetrated yet. Instead, paid labour is used by small and educated households which have access to credit.

Keywords: reciprocal labour, community work, wage labour, Ecuador

1 Introduction

Reciprocal labour is reported to be a widespread practice in rural areas of developing countries. Literature about this topic includes descriptions of these activities in countries as diverse as Peru, (Mayer, 1974; Mayer & Zamalloa, 1974; Guillet, 1980; Mitchell, 1991; Martínez, 2004), Ecuador (Ferraro, 2004), Venezuela (Hames, 1987), Mexico (Cohen, 1999), Cameroon (Geschiere, 1995), Tanzania (Ponte, 2000), Uganda (Shiraishi, 2006), Sudan (Kevane, 1994), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Suehara, 2006), Nepal (Adams, 1992) and Indonesia (Gilligan, 2004). According to Guillet (1980) there is almost no socioeconomic study carried out in the Andes that does not refer to reciprocal labour in any of its forms.

In the Ecuadorian context, Ferraro (2004) distinguishes two kind of reciprocal labour relationships:

labour exchange, mostly known as “prestamanos” (“borrowed hands”); and communal work widely referred as “minga” (Kichwa word for collective work with social purposes) in the Ecuadorian highlands. In the “prestamanos” system an individual asks others for labour support in order to carry out agricultural tasks with the compromise of reciprocating the service in the future. Instead, the “minga” is used to accomplish works that benefit the whole community such as the maintenance of irrigation systems or the expansion of the electrical network. As the works are of collective benefit, the participation of all community members is compulsory.

The motivations for reciprocating labour are of diverse nature. Some studies (Mayer, 1974; Mayer & Zamalloa, 1974; Sánchez Parga, 1984) pointed out that by means of this practice, rural Andean households have been able to access the human resources required to carry out agricultural activities that could not be accomplished without extra labour. Gilligan (2004) stated that one of the main motivations for rural households to exchange labour is that team work yields higher returns

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than individual work. Martínez (2004) argues that reciprocal labour has been a strategy developed by Andean peoples in order to counteract the individualism imposed by western societies after colonization.

In the case of communal work, the incentives for participation are mainly linked to the collective benefits to be gained from community works or projects (Cohen, 1999; Ferraro, 2004), the possibility of accessing communal natural resources (Mayer, 1974; Martínez, 2002a), and the reinforcement of the community identity (Sánchez Parga, 1984; Cohen, 1999)

The main risk of the potential disappearance of reciprocal work goes beyond the erosion of ancient traditions. Liquidity constrained households which are located in regions affected by labour scarcity may face difficulties in raising the resources to hire wage labour. Studies carried out in migrant-sending regions of southern Ecuador (Jokisch, 2002; Pribilsky, 2007) described the difficulties that non-remittance recipient households face to raise money to hire wage labour. In contrast, it was reported that receiving households are able to cope with inflated wages and labour scarcity by using remittances to hire agricultural labourers. In the case of Tanzania, Ponte (2000) argued that market liberalization and the penetration of fast crops have led to the decline of reciprocal work agreements. According to the author, this process has been detrimental for marginal households which can neither recruit labour by means of social networks nor pay wage labour. For liquidity constrained households the abandonment of reciprocal work may seriously threaten their possibilities of cropping and hence their livelihood strategies. Furthermore, Korovkin (2005) stated that the abandonment of labour reciprocity may hamper development projects which have community organization as the core of their development strategies.

Reciprocal labour was reported to be weakened due to several factors among them: out-migration (Mitchell, 1991; Cohen, 1999; Martínez, 2002b; Mutersbaugh, 2002; Martínez, 2006), the dissemination of cash crops and commercial agriculture (Mitchell, 1991; Martínez, 2004), the difficulty of arranging working days at everybody's convenience (Martínez, 2004), land scarcity (Martínez, 2004), and the high labour demands for the production of agricultural exportable commodities (Martínez, 2004; Korovkin, 2005). Under such conditions, the use of reciprocal labour would be restricted to liquidity constrained households in regions suffering from labour scarcity (Mitchell, 1991).

Challenging this position, Guillet (1980) argued that reciprocal labour survives even in monetized areas with no wage labour scarcity where cash crops have already been introduced. The author argued that peasants are rational actors who first analyse costs and returns before choosing between reciprocal, wage or even both forms of labour. Similarly, Gilligan (2004) was able to conclude that labour exchange coexists with wage labour in several parts of the world and that the former is an alternative to paid work in an environment of high labour transaction costs.

Using data from the Living Standards Measurement Survey 2005–2006 (INEC, 2007b), this study quantitatively analyses the factors affecting reciprocal labour and the demand for wage labour in rural Ecuador.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 The data

Data principally came from the “Living Standard Measurement Survey 2005–2006”. This cross sectional data set was carried out by the Ecuadorian National Institute of Statistics (INEC), and contains information about housing, household composition, health, education, household assets, entrepreneurship, agricultural activities as well as migration and remittances for as many as 13,581 Ecuadorian households. Details about the methodology and sampling methods used to conduct the survey can be found in INEC (2007a). The part concerning agricultural activities dedicates a section to labour force which makes this data set useful for the purposes of this study. While the survey considered 13,581 urban and rural households, the analysis was restricted to 4,720 households which were located in rural areas. In order to account for road infrastructure, which can be an important determinant of labour transaction costs, this work relied on data from the National Agricultural Census 2000 INEC (2001).

2.2 Variables and specification

The outcome variables of interest for this study were three dummies indicating whether a household has participated in community works during the twelve months preceding the survey or not, whether a household has taken part in exchange labour agreements during the twelve months preceding the survey or not, and whether a household has hired wage labourers during the three months preceding the survey or not, in each case (Table

1). In this study, community work refers to construction or maintenance of roads, schools, irrigation channels and any other kind of work of collective benefit.

Among the explanatory variables, models included household head characteristics such as age, sex, ethnicity and education. Head's age and gender can determine household's ability to participate in reciprocal labour (Gilligan, 2004; Gray, 2009). To take account for this, the age of the head and a dummy taking the value of 1 if the head was a woman were added to the specification. In order to control for the effect of education on the dependent variables, the number of years of formal education of the head was included in the model. Ethnicity may be a determinant factor for a household to participate in reciprocal work. In order to capture the effect of ethnicity on the outcome variables proposed, three dummy variables were added to the models, indicating whether the household head defined himself/herself as indigenous or not, whether the household head considered himself/herself white or not, and whether the household head identified himself/herself as Afro-Ecuadorian or not. The group of households self-defined as "mestizo", the largest one (69% of the total sample), was left as the baseline.

In rural Ecuador, labour division is defined by age and gender (Martínez, 2000, 2004). For this reason, the number of children, young men, young women, adult men and adult women were included as separate predictors (Table 1). The models also included the average education of household members which was reported to influence decisions of participation in labour exchange agreements and use of wage labour (Gray, 2009).

A number of authors (Kyle, 2000; Martínez, 2002b, 2006; Camacho & Hernández, 2009) stated that international migration has undermined labour reciprocity in Ecuador while others reported that it stimulates the use of reciprocal labour (Carpio, 1992; Gray, 2009). In order to estimate the effect of international migration on the outcome variables proposed, a dummy taking the value of one has the household a member who migrated was added to the models.

Household asset predictors included landholding size and a dummy variable accounting for home ownership. As referred above, liquidity can determine a household's participation in reciprocal work. A dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the household has received a loan and 0 otherwise was used as a proxy for households' liquidity.

In order to account for the economic environment and off-farm job opportunities, specification included the average per-capita income, the average years of education,

and the share of the population working in salaried agriculture, all estimated at community level. It was expected that households located in communities where these values are higher are less likely to participate in both community work and labour exchange agreements. The median of the distance to the closest road and the median of the time needed to reach the closest market, both taken from the National Agricultural Census 2000 (INEC, 2001), were added to the model to control for road and market infrastructure respectively. Due to the high variability in the values of both the distance to the closest road and the time needed to reach the closest market, the median was considered to be a more accurate measure of central tendency than the mean. Finally, the specification included a set of provincial dummies (twenty one) which were expected to account for regional differences.

2.3 Empirical strategy

The estimation of the likelihood for a household to participate in community works was carried out by means of a probit model of the following form:

$$Pr(CW_i = 1|X_i) = \phi(X\beta) \quad (1)$$

Where CW_i is a dichotomous variable taking the value of 1 if a household has participated in community works during the year preceding the survey, X_i stands for a set of explanatory variables that were described before and ϕ is the cumulative density function. The analysis is focused on determining the size and direction of β . Following Greene (2003) and assuming that there is an unobservable variable CW^* :

$$CW = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } CW^* \leq 0 \\ 1 & \text{if } CW^* > 0 \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

The same approach was used for assessing the effect of migration on exchange labour EL_i and WL_i use of wage labour:

$$Pr(LE_i = 1|X_i) = \phi(X\beta) \quad (3)$$

$$Pr(WL_i = 1|X_i) = \phi(X\beta)$$

3 Results

3.1 Community works

International migration had no effect on the likelihood for a household to participate in community works (Table 2). This finding suggests that international migration has neither undermined nor encouraged community

work in rural Ecuador. Instead, community work occurred more often among indigenous households. Indigenous households were 13 % points more likely to participate in community works.

Furthermore, households with more children were more likely to participate in community works. Home ownership was another factor that positively affected households' participation in community works. Having a home of one's own increased the likelihood for a household to take part in communal works by 8 %.

The likelihood of participation in community works was negatively correlated with the time needed to reach

the closest market. An increment of one minute in this value reduced the odds for a household to work in communal activities by 0.5 %.

3.2 Labour exchange

The likelihood for a household to take part in labour exchange agreements was not influenced by migration either. As in the case of community work, exchange labour was positively affected by ethnicity. The likelihood for a household to exchange labour was 11 % higher for households with a head defining himself/herself as indigenous.

Table 1: Used variables, definitions and descriptive statistics to analyse the factors affecting reciprocal labour and the demand for wage labour in rural Ecuador.

Variable	Definition	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Dependent variables</i>			
Community work	Household participated in community work (0/1)	0.193	0.365
Labour exchange	Household exchanged labour (0/1)	0.280	0.449
Wage labour	Household hired labourers (0/1)	0.177	0.382
<i>Predictors</i>			
<i>Household head predictors</i>			
Age	Age of household head	50.885	16.061
Age squared	Squared age of household head	2,847.218	1,712.567
Sex	Female household head (0/1)	0.163	0.370
Indigenous HH	Indigenous household head (0/1)	0.212	0.409
White HH	White household head (0/1)	0.059	0.235
Afro-Ecuadorian HH	Black household head (0/1)	0.026	0.161
Education	Years of education of household head	4.992	3.860
Education squared	Squared years of education of household head	39.827	58.133
<i>Household predictors</i>			
Children	Number individuals younger than 16	1.768	1.792
Young men	Number of males ages 16–30	0.491	0.729
Young women	Number of females ages 16–30	0.506	0.687
Adult men	Number of males older than 30	0.855	0.559
Adult women	Number of females older than 30	0.875	0.572
HH education	Average education of household members	4.992	2.924
Migration	Household has migrants (0/1)	0.064	0.245
Owned home	Household owns home (0/1)	0.843	0.363
Landholding	Number of hectares of owned land	9.832	85.191
Landholding squared	Squared number of hectares of owned land	7,352.802	363,455.5
Credit	Household has received agricultural credit (0/1)	0.094	0.292
<i>Community predictors</i>			
Per capita income	Per capita income at parish level	113.04	59.417
Parish education	Average education at parish level	5.408	1.623
Salaried employment	Share of population working in salaried agriculture	0.018	0.043
Distance to the closest road	Median of the distance to the closest road at provincial level in 2000 (km)	0.432	0.721
Time to the closest market	Median of the time to the closest market at provincial level in 2000 (minutes)	49.058	12.851

Notes: Specification also includes provincial dummies. (0/1) identifies dummy variables.

Source: Own author's calculations with data from the Living Standards Measurement Survey 2005-2006.

Table 2: Determinants for community work participation, labour exchange and use of wage labour in rural Ecuador.

	Community work	Labour exchange	Hired labour
<i>Household head predictors</i>			
Age	0.045	0.002	0.002
Age squared	-0.000	-0.000 *	-0.000
Sex	-0.022	-0.015	-0.004
Indigenous HH	0.131 ***	0.110 ***	-0.078 ***
White HH	-0.049 *	-0.022	0.012
Afro-Ecuadorian HH	0.024	0.029	-0.043
Education	0.000	0.000	0.017 ***
Education squared	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000
<i>Household predictors</i>			
Children	0.013 ***	0.003	-0.017 ***
Young men	0.009	0.010	-0.032 ***
Young women	-0.009	0.000	0.004
Adult men	0.026	0.015	0.006
Adult women	0.008	-0.015	0.011
HH education	-0.001	-0.001	0.013 ***
Migration	-0.0032	-0.011	0.090 ***
Owned home	0.084 ***	0.016	0.022
Landholding	-0.000	-0.0004 **	0.0002 *
Owned land squared	0.000	0.000	-0.000
Credit	0.023	0.064 ***	0.164 ***
<i>Community predictors</i>			
Per capita income	-0.0006 ***	-0.0007 ***	-0.0003 ***
Town education	-0.002	-0.015 **	-0.002
Salaried employment	0.174	0.842 ***	0.118
Distance to the closest road	0.045	-0.051	0.081
Time to the closest market	-0.005 **	0.005 **	-0.006 **
Number of observations	4,712	4,712	4,712
Wald (χ^2)	528 ***	999 ***	519 ***
Pseudo R^2	0.146	0.236	0.134

Notes: *, ** and *** stand for significance at the 10, 5, and 1 % levels, respectively. Specifications also include provincial dummies.

Source: Own author's calculations with data from the Living Standards Measurement Survey 2005–2006.

Availability of credit increased the odds for a household to engage in labour exchange agreements by 6%. Per capita income at town level was negatively correlated with the likelihood of exchanging labour; but the magnitude of the effect was negligible. That was not the case of the share of the population working in salaried agriculture. An increase of 10% in this share led to a reduction of 8.4% in the likelihood for a household to exchange labour.

3.3 Hired labour

Having a migrant increased the likelihood for a household to hire agricultural labourers by 9%. Having a self-defined indigenous head reduced the probability for a household to hire wage labour by 8% points. This is consistent with the results obtained for community work and labour exchange participation and indicates that indigenous households mainly meet their labour needs via reciprocal work. Education had a positive effect on the likelihood of hiring wage labour. Each extra

year of education of the head increased the likelihood of using paid labour by about 2%. In the case of the household average education, each extra year raised the likelihood by 1%. Regarding household composition, households with more children and young men were less likely to hire wage labour.

Another factor positively influencing the use of wage labour was availability of credit. As for community work and wage labour, per capita income had the expected negative sign but the size of the effect was negligible. A one minute increase in the time needed to reach the closest market led to an increase of 0.6% in the likelihood of hiring wage labour.

4 Discussion

The results revealed that the most important determinant of participation in labour reciprocity schemes was ethnicity. Indigenous households were more likely to join communal works and to exchange labour than their mestizo equivalents. On the other hand, indigenous peoples were less likely to hire wage labour. One possible explanation for these results is that indigenous people have a stronger sense of community and hence are more committed with community issues and with the welfare of other community members. In this sense, the results also showed that households which have a home on their own were more likely to take part in community works. This could reflect that families which have put down roots in a village are more committed to participate in communal activities than those which in an opposite scenario are not permanent settlers.

Households with more children were more likely to participate in community works. This suggests that labour quotas are met with marginal labour force, probably because adults are either absent or engaged in income generating activities. This finding is consistent with several studies (Pribilsky, 2001; Caguana, 2008) reporting that children's labour has come to meet households' labour obligations for communal works in areas where adults have left in search of work. The occurrence of paid labour was negatively correlated with the number of children and young men in a household. This may reflect that these age groups are the main source of labour for agricultural activities.

Both household head education and household average education had a positive effect on the likelihood of using paid labour. These results may indicate that members of more educated households have access to off-

farm jobs and hence must rely on wage labour to carry out agricultural chores.

There is abundance of literature stating that international migration has hampered social relationships and community cohesion in rural Ecuador (Kyle, 2000; Martínez, 2002b, 2003, 2006; Camacho & Hernández, 2009). However, the results of this study indicate that international migration has no effect on the likelihood of participation in both community work and labour exchange. As suggested by Martínez (2004) reciprocity had been already hampered by exposure to market economy and off-farm employment, therefore international migration has not substantially affected labour reciprocity traditions. Instead, migrant households were more likely to use paid labour. This result may reflect that such households rely on hired labour to fill the labour gap left by migrants once they leave.

The access to credit had a positive effect on the likelihood of both exchanging and hiring labour. This finding contradicts former literature (Mitchell, 1991) stating that reciprocal labour flourishes mostly among liquidity constrained households unable to pay wage labour but is consistent with another strand of literature (Guillet, 1980; Geschiere, 1995; Gilligan, 2004; Arias, 2005; Shiraishi, 2006) holding that reciprocal work does appear even in non-liquidity constrained areas. In addition, this result is consistent with former research (Jokisch, 2002; Gilligan, 2004; Pribilsky, 2007) holding that exchange and wage labour coexists and that the use of one of these labour sources does not necessarily mean the exclusion of the other.

Participation in labour exchange agreements was less likely to occur in areas where large-scale agriculture demands large amounts of labour. This is consistent with several works (Korovkin, 2003; Martínez, 2004; Korovkin, 2005) that observed that ancient forms of reciprocal labour have been undermined in Ecuadorian regions where the production of exportable commodities demands large amounts and intensive use of labour. This result is also consistent with other studies carried out worldwide (Mitchell, 1991; Ponte, 2000) which argued that reciprocal labour declines in areas where commercial agriculture has irrupted.

Overall, the results could show that labour reciprocity survives principally among indigenous peoples who are settled in remote areas where commercial agriculture has not penetrated yet. Nevertheless, it is not exclusive of deprived households which lack the resources to hire labour. On the contrary, labour exchange coexists with paid labour and seems to be a complement to the latter in an environment of labour scarcity.

5 Conclusions

This study has quantitatively analysed the determinants of community work participation, labour exchange and use of wage labour in rural Ecuador. Community work appears to be more common among indigenous households which are permanent settlers of the village, and live in areas with high population densities. Exchange labour is more likely to occur among indigenous households which have access to credit, and are located in areas with low population densities. In contrast, households located in areas where large scale agriculture demands high amounts of labour, are less likely to exchange labour. In the case of wage labour, its use is less frequent among indigenous households with a larger number of children and young men, which are located in remote areas. Instead, it is more common among educated households which have access to credit.

Rural livelihoods in developing countries are subject to a continuous process of change. Factors such as exposure to market economy, off-farm employment and improvement of infrastructure have allowed a part of the rural population to diversify their income sources. However, this process has been detrimental for a segment which still relies on subsistence agriculture to earn their livelihood. These households, which in many cases are not able to pay wage labour, are the most affected by weakening of reciprocity traditions.

A number of studies (Martínez, 2004, 2006) report the failure development projects which had community organization and community work as their main component. The results presented here show that such kinds of projects are more likely to fail if they are executed in areas located near urban centres where commercial agriculture has already irrupted. Instead, these kinds of projects could have more chances of success among indigenous populations where community identity and cohesion are stronger.

Exchange labour, the potential of which as a development tool is highlighted by Gilligan (2004), should be encouraged in areas with low population densities, where the size of the landholdings is larger and where labour costs are higher due to deficient access infrastructure. Instead, it should be avoided in regions where the production of agricultural exportable commodities demands high amounts of labour.

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