



Inter-municipal vs. Inter-governmental Cooperation: Their Impact on International Aid

Julio C. Zambrano-Gutiérrez^{1,2} · Claudia N. Avellaneda²

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Abstract

This study combines the type of partners and the number of partnerships' purposes to assess municipal partnerships' effectiveness in bringing international aid. First, the study tests whether inter-municipal cooperation (homogenous partners) is more effective than inter-governmental cooperation (heterogeneous partners) in increasing international aid at the local level. Second, the study tests whether partnerships with the sole purpose of raising international aid (single purpose) are more effective than partnerships with additional purposes (multiple purposes). Using panel data with 2,431 municipal-year observations, results confirm that inter-governmental partnerships with multiple purposes are the most effective partnership to increase international aid.

Keywords Municipal partnerships · International aid · Ecuador · Local government performance · Wicksellian-efficiency

Introduction

Local chief executives consider inter-municipal partnerships as part of their managerial strategies to improve organizational performance across several dimensions, yet executive experiences with such partnerships are not always successful (Bryson et al., 2006; Fierlbeck, 2010; Matthews & Missingham, 2009). This variation in success led to the necessity to research the characteristics of inter-municipal partnerships and

✉ Julio C. Zambrano-Gutiérrez
julio.zambrano@tum.de

¹ School of Social Sciences and Technology, Department of Governance, Technical University of Munich, Richard-Wagner-Straße 1, Room B.257, 80333 Munich, Bavaria, Germany

² O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs, Indiana University Bloomington, Bloomington, Indiana, U.S.A.

their effect on the performance of public organizations (Bauer et al., 2020; Bryson et al., 2015; Soukopová & Vaceková, 2018). Joining an inter-municipal partnership is not a minor strategic decision for local chief officials. Who the participants and what the purpose will be are fundamental choices in starting a collaboration (Biddle & Koontz, 2014; Emerson et al., 2012; Siddiki et al., 2017). This is because diverse participants might improve organizational outcomes but also conflict in the collaborative process (Cuppen, 2012; Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Jehn, 1994; Jehn et al., 1999). Also, multiple-purpose partnerships might increase legitimacy and representation but also ambiguity in the mission of the collaboration (Rainey & Jung, 2015; Vangen & Huxham, 2012). While previous research has explored separately the effect of the type of cooperative partners and goal clarity on collaborative settings on organizational outcomes (Biddle & Koontz, 2014; Klok et al., 2018), scarce attention has been devoted to examining whether the *type* of participating organizations (e.g., heterogeneous vs. homogeneous) and the number of goals (e.g., single vs. multi-purpose) pursued in a collaborative arrangement influence organizational outcomes.

To fill this gap, this study integrates the type of participating partners and the number of partnership purposes for analyzing the effectiveness of municipal partnerships. To do so, the study classifies municipal partnerships into a continuum that ranges from homogeneous partners with a single purpose to heterogeneous partners with multiple purposes. Specifically, this study first tests whether inter-municipal cooperation (homogeneous partners) is more effective than inter-governmental (heterogeneous partners) cooperation in bringing international aid to municipal coffers. Second, this study also tests whether partnerships with the sole purpose of raising international aid (single purpose) are more effective than partnerships including additional purposes, such as waste management (multiple purposes) in raising international aid.

The study offers three contributions. First, the research introduces an integrative framework that combines: (a) the type of participating partners and (b) the number of partnership purposes to explain the effectiveness of the municipal partnership. Second, the study advances theory by testing the underpinnings of goal-ambiguity and transaction cost theories in a different setting – the 221 Ecuadorian municipalities that combine a unitary decentralized system with a relatively new democracy. Third, the study assesses local government performance based on integrative frameworks at the partnership and organizational levels (Boyne, 2002; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Moreover, non-reimbursable international cooperation is used as a performance indicator to measure “wicksellian-efficiency”, which is based on the idea of seeking to achieve economic benefits (e.g., more municipal revenues) with the lowest political costs (e.g., without increasing municipal tariffs) (Breton, 1998). Results from cross-sectional time series data with 2,431 municipal-year observations confirm that inter-municipal and single-purpose partnerships are effective strategies to bring in non-reimbursable international cooperation. Nonetheless, inter-governmental and multi-purpose types of partnerships outperformed in increasing international aid.

Municipalities as Partners Across inter-governmental Agreements

The reasons and factors that drive municipalities to engage in different types of partnerships have been significantly discussed. Inter-municipal cooperation refers to a managerial strategy to cope with societal high expectations about fiscal pressures, collective action dilemmas, and the quality of public services (Bel & Warner, 2015; Feiock 2013; Hulst & Van Montfort, 2007). However, the concept of inter-municipal cooperation has an ambiguous definition. Some authors define the term *inter-municipal* as partnerships between municipalities (Steiner, 2003), while others allow for the inclusion of other tiers of government and sectors (Hulst & Van Montfort, 2007). This study refers to *inter-municipal cooperation* when two or more municipal governments formally agree to join efforts to manage and provide public goods and services. Meanwhile, *inter-governmental cooperation* represents an instance in which one or more municipal governments formally agree to join efforts with other tiers of government to manage and provide public goods and services.

Apart from building a consensus around the conceptualization of municipal partnerships, the approach to studying the performance of municipal partnerships varies. This is in part because performance variables can be measured in different ways, across different dimensions (Boyne, 2003), and signal different performance results (see Nicholson-Crotty, Theobald, & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006). For example, the effectiveness of inter-municipal cooperation has been measured based on the capacity to reduce costs (Bel & Warner, 2015) and even in terms of accountability and responsiveness (Warner, 2006). Another set of studies has highlighted the complexity of measuring the performance of a collaborative setting (Agranoff, 2005; Emerson & Nabatchi 2015; Moynihan et al., 2011). For example, a community could benefit from more access to new services for fewer costs in a public mental health network, but it could be incompatible with the organizational mission of some service providers (Provan & Milward, 2001).

Emerson & Nabatchi (2015) encourage studying the performance of a collaboration in a comprehensive way. A simplified version of their proposition includes three elements: (1) whether performance measurement happens at the output or outcome level, (2) whether performance measurement is about the organization (micro-level) or the collaboration as a whole (macro-level), and (3) identifying the most salient dimensions to evaluate the intersection between performance levels and unit of analysis. For example, a participating organization may want to generate efficient outputs and effective outcomes (see Boyne 2002). In a different unit of analysis, the collaboration to which that participating organization belongs may aim to perform actions with efficacy and obtain results with external legitimacy. Here, we assess the performance of municipal partnership at the municipal level (micro-level) by assessing the municipal effectiveness in rising international aid, which is the purpose (i.e., single-purpose), or one of the purposes (i.e., multi-purpose) of the municipal partnership (see Table 1 for a detailed explanation).

Table 1 Performance dimensions to assess Ecuadorian municipal partnerships

Performance Level	Unit of Analysis	Description
Output (quantity)	Municipal partnership	Efficacy translates into whether the partnership was able to manage international cooperation. The quantity of non-reimbursable international cooperation (US dollars) acquired through municipal partnerships operationalizes this performance indicator.
Output (efficiency)	Municipal government	Efficiency corresponds to actions (outputs) with the highest economic benefit and the lowest political cost (i.e., <i>wicksellian-efficiency</i>). Non-reimbursable international cooperation (US dollars) increases municipal revenue without imposing extra charges on the citizenry (e.g., municipal tariffs).
Outcome (effectiveness)	Target goals	The national government's goal is to devolve the responsibility to manage international cooperation from the national to the subnational governments. Effectiveness is based on the extent to which more international cooperation is available at the municipal level. Again, the quantity of non-reimbursable international cooperation (US dollars) acquired through municipal partnerships operationalizes this performance indicator.

Source: adapted from Breton (1998), Boyne (2002), and Emerson & Nabatchi (2015)

Whom to Partner with? The Expected Effect of Municipal Partnerships

Voluntary cooperation among governmental jurisdictions holds great potential for addressing complex problems with a broader scope. While cooperation arrangements may generate benefits by addressing gaps in governance — as existing mechanisms and institutions fail to produce viable solutions (McKinney et al., 2014) — cooperating also involves costs in designing, developing, and maintaining the arrangement (Feiock & Scholz, 2010). Some costs include ceding some degree of autonomy, as well as complying with rules, agendas, strategies, and contributions in time, resources, and commitment. Thus, institutional arrangements have to overcome collective action problems (Olson, 1965) and the transaction costs of designing, developing, maintaining, and enforcing the arrangement rules (Feiock, 2013; Woods & Bowman, 2018). To overcome these costs, cooperation arrangements adapt to mitigate their transaction costs, as well as the defection, coordination, free-rider, and gain-and-cost-division problems.

In a cooperation arrangement, each participant organization contributes relative strengths and weaknesses. Participants come with different motivations, capacity, and incentives to address collective action problems. Participants' incentives depend on severity of the problem/need, fiscal health, policy preferences, and design of agreement (Woods & Bowman, 2018). Consequently, the performance effects of an existing cooperation arrangement should be a function of the group composition.

Homogeneity/heterogeneity of group composition influence the costs and benefits of cooperation, making "who with whom" crucial (Zamani, 2016). While cooperative arrangements among governments range widely in terms of policy objectives, they also vary in composition (Bowman, 2004; Bowman & Woods, 2007; Piña & Avelaneda, 2018). Given the growing reliance of governments on multi-jurisdictional cooperative agreements (Buenger et al., 2016), it is imperative to understand whether the homogeneity or heterogeneity of group members affects cooperation performance through the degree of goal attainment.

Inconsistencies exist as to whether cooperation with stronger/weaker peers (e.g., heterogeneity) or equal peers (e.g., homogeneity) affects performance levels (Fiol, 1994; Zamani, 2016). The performance effects of group composition have received considerable attention in the literature on contests by focusing on situations in which symmetrical groups compete against each other (see Dechenaux et al., 2015; Sheremeta, 2018, for overviews). There also exists a growing number of studies investigating the performance effects of various types of asymmetries, including group size (Abbinck et al., 2010; Ahn et al., 2011), wealth (Heap et al., 2015), and level of communication (Cason et al., 2017). Assessing performance effects across various types of asymmetries — including size, function, power, resources, reputation, ideology, economic development, level of government, etc. — may explain inconsistencies of results. Each type of group asymmetry is expected to have different effects on cooperation efforts.

In studying inter-group contests, Fallucchi et al., (2020) follow Konrad's (2009) standard assumption of purely self-interested individuals to experimentally investigate whether asymmetry or symmetry of group composition (e.g., homogeneous or heterogeneous) contributes to a group's success. Fallucchi et al. assumed that group heterogeneity may increase the free-rider problem, as low-ability players may rest on their laurels and rely on their high-ability peers' effort: "within heterogeneous groups only the member with the highest ability should exert any positive effort (the others should free ride), while in homogeneous groups there is a continuum of optimal effort combinations" (Fallucchi et al., 2020, p. 7). Interestingly, findings of Fallucchi et al., (2020) indicate that heterogeneity within groups per se has no discernable effect on group success.

The nature of group composition also may affect group cohesiveness which, in turn, should affect performance. According to Deutsch's (1949) theory of cooperation and competition, cooperatively interdependent, interpersonal relations among members increase "we-feeling" or cohesiveness, which in turn may result in ingroup-outgroup bias (Deutsch, 1949; Dion, 1973). However, this line of research has focused on questions concerning the effects of cooperation and competition between groups on subsequent relations between and within the groups (Kennedy & Stephan, 1977).

This study is interested in comparing performance effects of inter-municipal cooperation (a homogenous arrangement) versus inter-governmental cooperation that involve municipalities and other tiers of government (a heterogeneous arrangement). Heterogeneous cooperation arrangements should be more successful in mitigating transaction costs and collective action problems for the following reasons. First, joined-up governments possess greater technical knowledge, resources, administrative help, and political power. This power translates into more capacity and legitimacy to enforce agreement rules. Moreover, because municipalities depend on other levels of government, localities are expected to build a compliant reputation, thus reducing the potential behavior of free-rider and promoting group-member cohesiveness. In sum, heterogeneous institutions can be expected to provide, on balance, greater net benefits to their participants. Therefore,

Hypothesis 1 Inter-governmental cooperation improves municipal performance (e.g., in securing international aid) in a higher proportion, compared to inter-municipal cooperation.

On the other hand, collaborative arrangements between two or more organizations are likely to pursue ambiguous goals (Rainey & Jung, 2015; Vangen & Huxham, 2012). This is because: (1) participating organizations might have distinct priorities to invest resources to fulfill multiple organizational and collaborative goals, (2) external sources might have imposed collaborative goals, and (3) the true purposes to join a collaboration are unknown or might change over time (Bryson et al., 2016; Chun & Rainey, 2005; Rainey & Jung, 2015).

Indeed, goals in collaborations have been understood as a paradox in public administration literature (Vangen & Huxham, 2012). A common driver to establishing successful collaborations is to share core organizational goals that are compatible with the purpose of the collaboration to facilitate a shared understanding between participants (Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2012). However, reaching a shared understanding implies reciprocity, trust, and conflict management to reconcile different positions. Due to the difficulty of accomplishing shared understanding in collaborative settings, public administration scholars coined the term “mutual understanding” to signal that participants in a collaboration do not need to fully agree on each other’s perspectives to collaborate (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Vangen & Huxham, 2012).

While the relationship between goal ambiguity and collaborative performance is understudied, the effect of goal ambiguity on an array of organizational outcomes provided guidance to formulate the second hypothesis in this study. In fact, goal ambiguity is associated with lower organizational performance (Chun & Rainey, 2005; Favero et al., 2016; Jung, 2011; Latham et al., 2008), increment in turnover intention, and a reduction in job satisfaction in public sector organizations (Jung, 2014a, b). In an effort to better understand goal ambiguity in public organizations, Rainey and Jung (2014) proposed a framework to disentangle the sources of goal ambiguity. Table 2 contains a synthesis of the main elements that contribute to goal ambiguity and their proposed expected effect on municipal performance.

Table 2 The expected effect of multiple goals in the performance of a collaboration

Component	Factor	Subfactor	Expected effect on municipal performance
Environmental	Constitutional and Legal Principles for Structure and Process of Governance	Democratic Accountability	Negative
		Influence of Formal and Informal Political Authorities	Other Governments
Executive	Executive Delegation of Authority	Hierarchical Complexity	Negative
Subunit	Manager's Goal Ambiguity (perceived)	Employee's Goal Ambiguity (perceived)	Negative

Note: Adapted from Rainey and Jung (2014)

Rainey and Jung (2014) differentiate between environmental, executive, and subunits sources to increase goal ambiguity in organizations. This study focuses on Rainey and Jung propositions for collaborative settings. Specifically, collaboration between other tiers of government can bring different sources of democratic accountability that could increase the tension between participating organizations about the prioritization of multiple goals. Furthermore, collaborations without a hierarchical structure to execute collaborative routines could hinder the coordination and prioritization to pursue multiple collaborative goals. Finally, the translation from collaborative purpose to operational goals can increase the perceptions of goal ambiguity for public managers and employees of organizational subunits participating in a collaborative setting. Collaborating in pursuing more than one goal may result in managers' and employees' prioritization issues, which may be resolved through individual-value alignment rather than through organizational-value alignment. Thus, the second hypothesis for this study can be formulated in the following way:

Hypothesis 2 Municipal partnerships with multiple purposes increase goal ambiguity and are negatively associated with municipal performance (e.g., in securing international aid).

The Linkage Between International aid Funds and Local Government Performance: The Ecuadorian case

Local government performance has been comprehensively analyzed at the organizational and partnership unit of analysis (Boyne, 2002; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). On the one hand, Emerson & Nabatchi (2015) proposed a matrix for assessing the

productivity of collaborative governance regimes (e.g., municipal partnerships) at different levels (e.g., outputs, outcomes) and units of analysis (e.g., participant organizations, collaboration, target goals). On the other hand, Boyne (2002) described a comprehensive list of performance indicators for organizations by merging the inputs-outputs-outcomes (IOO) model and the economy-efficiency-effectiveness (3Es) model.

We applied both the collaborative and organizational approaches to assessing the performance of the Ecuadorian local governments in this study. In fact, the quantity of non-reimbursable international cooperation (US dollars) is the variable to operationalize municipal performance. Table 1 provides three reasons to consider acquiring more international aid as a valid performance indicator for the Ecuadorian case. First, municipal governments have the discretion to join municipal partnerships to manage international cooperation. Municipal partnerships (i.e., *mancomunidades*) are strategies for municipal governments to manage international cooperation after the Ecuadorian legislation devolved this responsibility (competence) from the national to the subnational governments (CNC, 2011; CRE, 2008). Second, Ecuadorian law defines non-reimbursable international cooperation (international aid) as a mechanism to receive resources for contributing to or complementing initiatives to fulfill governmental strategic planning (COPFP, 2010, Art. 65). We argue that municipal governments seek international aid based on the principles of *wicksellian-efficiency*.

Breton (1998) defines *wicksellian efficiency* as the connection between the costs (e.g., municipal tariffs) and benefits of public goods: the capacity to generate the highest economic benefit with the lowest political cost. It is different from economic efficiency because it does not assume perfect competition since governments have the capacity to influence prices (tax-prices) and public goods are not homogeneous. Also, it is different from political efficiency because it is not about competition between politicians and mutually exclusive policies. Thus, the main argument is that political and economic competition (see Stigler 1972 for a detailed definition) are not independent and, in fact, both are necessary to increase *wicksellian-efficiency*.

Finally, the effectiveness of the devolution policy regarding international cooperation is conditional on the capacity of local governments to manage international cooperation, which can be measured by the amount of non-reimbursable international cooperation (US dollars) available at the municipal level through municipal partnerships.

Data and Methods

The above hypotheses will be tested in the context of the 221 Ecuadorian municipalities. The Territorial Organization section in the Ecuadorian Constitution allows subnational governments to form “*mancomunidades*” (inter-governmental cooperation and/or inter-municipal cooperation) for managing their responsibilities (CRE, 2008, Art. 243). For example, municipal decentralized autonomous governments (municipal GADs for its acronym in Spanish) could form inter-municipal cooperation to jointly provide solid waste management to their communities.

The Ecuadorian Constitution created the National Council of Competences (CNC for its acronym in Spanish) to regulate and coordinate the devolution of responsibilities from the national to subnational governments (CRE, 2008, Art. 269). The CNC is responsible for evaluating the fulfillment of the inter-municipal and inter-governmental partnerships (COOTAD, 2010, Art. 287) and keeps administrative records, including membership and purpose(s) of each partnership. The CNC provided a list of all the subnational government agreements, along with their memberships and purposes, registered between 2011 and 2018 after an official request (CNC, 2019).

The Ministry of Ecuadorian Foreign Relationships and Human Mobility (MREMH for its acronym in Spanish) maintains a database with information about international aid and cooperation based on donors' reports. After an official request, MREMH provided non-reimbursable international cooperation (international aid) in US dollars at the municipal level for the 2007–2018 period (MREMH, 2019). Given the nature of the data, it was possible to identify for each year and for each of the 221 municipal GADs the funds granted and assigned for concept of international aid through their respective partnerships. This study focuses on the donors' granted monies that are not directly given to the municipality but to the municipal partnership. In sum, the unit of analysis for this study is municipality-year's total international aid funds assigned to a given municipality but administered by the respective awarded municipal partnership. It is important to note that it is not possible to differentiate monies granted through each inter-municipal and/or inter-governmental agreement but only the aggregated amount for the concept of municipal partnerships.

Additional data to control for municipal traits came from the Ecuadorian Central Bank (BCE, 2019), the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF, 2019), and the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC, 2019). Data from the BCE and INEC are publicly available, and MEF provided data related to subnational governments' budgets after an official request. This study includes information for all 221 Ecuadorian municipalities between 2007 and 2018. The final database is a balanced panel with 2,431 municipality-year observations.

Dependent Variable

This study uses the amount of international aid yearly assigned to a municipality through inter-municipal and/or inter-governmental partnerships whose single purpose or one of multiple purposes is securing international aid. This study measures the performance of a municipality through its partnership effectiveness. The international aid is quantified in US dollars and corresponds to the non-reimbursable monies granted through international cooperation and registered at the MREMH. As mentioned before, it is not possible to assess the performance of individual partnerships due to unavailable data. The unit of analysis is the "municipal year," which captures the aggregated value of international aid channeled through all the municipal partnerships, whose single goal or one of their multiple goals is securing international aid.

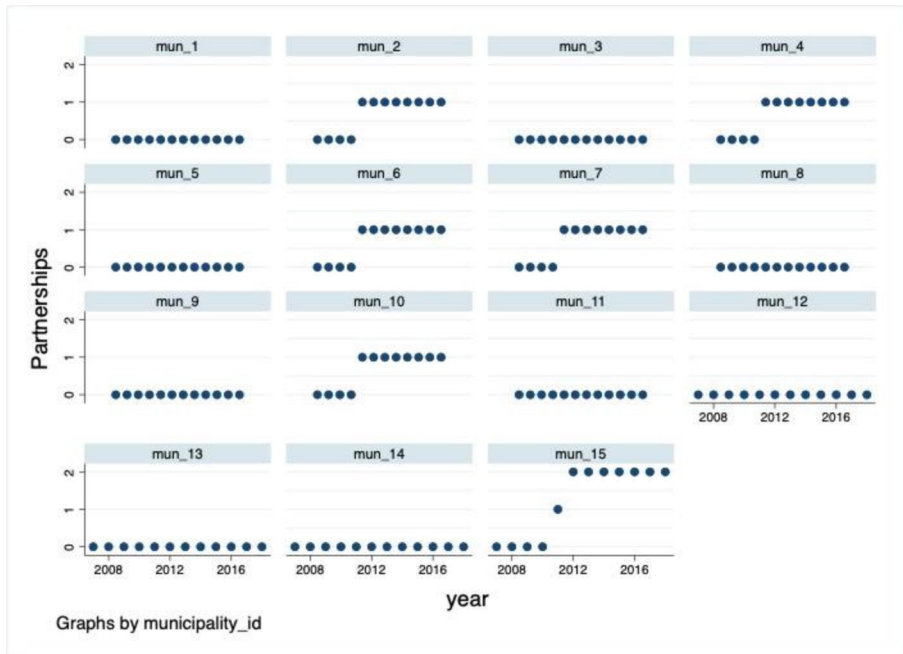


Fig. 1 Example of the number of partnerships to manage international cooperation and secure international aid at the municipal level in a given Ecuadorian province. Note: Ecuador has 24 provinces. The figure illustrates the 15 municipalities within the province of Azuay in the Ecuadorian Andean region

Independent Variables

This study distinguishes the performance of Ecuadorian municipal partnerships based on their *purpose* and *membership*. A municipal partnership can have a single or multiple purposes. Single purpose means the sole reason to form a partnership was to manage international cooperation and obtain international aid. Multiple purposes means that managing international cooperation and obtaining international aid was only one of the partnerships' purposes or goals. Additional goals or purposes may include solid waste management, environmental sanitation, and water supply. A municipality may belong to none, one, or several partnerships. Figure 1 shows an example of the variation in the number of partnerships within one of the 24 Ecuadorian provinces at the municipal level. It could be that municipalities did not have any partnerships to manage international cooperation and obtain international aid in a particular year or through the entire period of study (2007–2018). On the other hand, in our sample 20% of the Ecuadorian municipalities belonged at least to one partnership with the goal of managing international cooperation and securing international aid.

Because the type of members is a key aspect of a partnership, here we focus on it. Municipalities can create horizontal and vertical cooperation agreements. On one hand, *inter-municipal cooperation* happens when the members of the partnership are only municipalities, thus illustrating a homogeneous partnership. On the other

Table 3 Number of municipalities participating in each type of partnership as a fraction of total participating local government organizations

	Inter-municipal	Inter-governmental	Municipalities per participating organizations
Single-purpose	46	20	66 out of 97
Multi-purpose	6	12	18 out of 43
Municipalities per participating organizations	52 out of 52	32 out of 88	

hand, *inter-governmental cooperation* includes a more diverse type of members. For the Ecuadorian case, inter-governmental cooperation includes at least one province (state-level), one municipality (local-level), and one rural parish (local-rural level) as members of the partnership.

The number of municipalities participating in a partnership to manage international cooperation and secure international aid is available in Table 3. Of the 221 Ecuadorian municipalities, 84 municipalities joined a partnership during our period of analysis. Inter-municipal cooperation with the single purpose of managing international cooperation to secure international aid was the most popular type of partnership, as approximately 55% of participating municipalities joined this type of collaborative agreement. On the other extreme of the continuum, 14% of participating municipalities joined an inter-governmental agreement with multiple purposes — international cooperation to secure international aid, in addition to solid waste management, environmental sanitation, and water supply. In relative terms, municipalities represent approximately 36% of the members in the inter-governmental cooperation type of partnership.

The analysis below includes four different types of municipal partnerships. Each independent variable in Table 4 represents the number of times a municipality has joined a type of municipal partnership.

Control Variables

During the study's period of analysis, CNC officially devolved the responsibility to manage international cooperation and secure international aid from the national to subnational governments in September 2011 (CNC, 2011) and implemented since 2012. Therefore, this study controls for this policy change through a dichotomous indicator, labeled international aid devolution policy, which equals one (1) from 2012 to 2018 and zero (0) otherwise.

In 2013, the Presidential Decree No. 16 introduced unforeseen barriers to civil society organizations, including international NGOs (PD16, 2013). Civil society organizations perceived that the national government had a wide range of discretion to renew the legal status of their organizations after Presidential Decree No.16

Table 4 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Source
<i>Dependent variable</i>			
International aid (US\$ thousand)	0.27	4.60	(MREMH, 2019)
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Single-purpose and inter-municipal	0.13	0.34	(CNC, 2019)
Multi-purpose and inter-municipal	0.02	0.12	(CNC, 2019)
Single-purpose and inter-governmental	0.05	0.24	(CNC, 2019)
Multi-purpose and inter-governmental	0.04	0.19	(CNC, 2019)
<i>Control variables</i>			
International aid devolution policy (yes=1)	0.58	0.49	(CNC, 2011)
Legal status regulatory policy (yes=1)	0.33	0.47	(PD16, 2013)
Central government international aid (US\$ thousand)	65.47	342.02	(MREMH, 2019)
Other partnerships (# partnerships)	0.39	0.62	(CNC, 2019)
Supply index	0.0	1.0	(MREMH, 2019)
Fiscal dependency (%)	67.17	14.88	(MEF, 2019)
Gross domestic product (US\$ million)	361.71	1771.36	(BCE, 2019)
Population (thousands)	70.59	240.49	(INEC, 2019)

was in place. As a result, several civil society organizations stop their operations in Ecuador which reduced the amount of international aid available at the subnational and municipal levels (see Zambrano-Gutiérrez & Avellaneda, C.N., 2021; Zambrano-Gutiérrez & Avellaneda, C.N., 2022a for a reference). Legal status regulatory policy captures this contextual change over time, and it is operationalized with a dichotomous indicator equal to one (1) between 2015 and 2018 and zero (0) otherwise.

The CNC provides information about other subnational government partnerships, unrelated to international aid, that were operating in a municipality. As a result, this study includes the number of other partnerships in a municipality to control for other collaborative efforts that could have an effect on collaborative capacity.

The MREMH database identifies donors' country of origin, donor organizations, as well as the organization at the municipal level that implemented projects with international aid funds. For example, the origin of the international aid funds could be the United States, channeled through the USAID and implemented by a municipality. This study includes an index to capture donor supply using factor analysis. The donor supply index has an eigenvalue of 2.74, accounting for 92% of the variance for the donor variables.

Ecuadorian municipalities rely heavily on transfers from the central government (see Zambrano-Gutiérrez & Avellaneda, C.N., 2022b for a reference). However, financial support from the central government varies over time and across munic-

Table 5 Correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 International aid	1												
2 Single-purpose and inter-municipal	-0.0108	1											
3 Multi-purpose and inter-municipal	0.0383*	-0.0496*	1										
4 Single-purpose and inter-governmental	-0.0088	0.0987*	-0.0285	1									
5 Multi-purpose and inter-governmental	0.2432*	-0.0758*	0.2018*	-0.0436*	1								
6 International aid devolution policy	0.0487*	0.2314*	0.1072*	0.1354*	0.1147*	1							
7 Legal status regulatory policy	-0.0413*	0.1383*	0.0641*	0.0896*	0.0685*	0.5976*	1						
8 Central government international aid	0.0512*	-0.0431*	-0.0874*	0.0631*	0.0579*	-0.1274*	-0.3194*	1					
9 Other partnerships	-0.0281	0.2881*	0.0449*	0.1202*	-0.0565*	0.4537*	0.4655*	-0.1580*	1				
10 Supply index	0.0159	-0.0465*	-0.0394	0.2520*	-0.0529*	0.0428*	-0.0720*	0.4531*	-0.0309	1			
11 Fiscal dependency	0.0161	0.0529*	-0.0798*	0.0317	-0.0168	-0.0965*	-0.1387*	-0.0881*	0.0111	-0.2114*	1		
12 Gross domestic product	-0.0055	-0.1266*	-0.0614*	0.0171	-0.0627*	0.0838*	0.0699*	0.2264*	-0.0473*	0.5305*	-0.4414*	1	
13 Population	0.0046	-0.0872*	-0.0265	-0.0208	-0.0213	0.0129	0.0128	0.1865*	-0.0856*	0.6099*	-0.2472*	0.5460*	1

Note: * p<0.05

palities. For that reason, the analysis controls for: (1) central transferances as a proportion of the total municipal revenue (i.e., fiscal dependence), and (2) the level of international aid secured by the central governments and then redirected to municipalities. Finally, the municipal economy's size (i.e., GDP) and the municipal population control for local capacity to acquire international aid funds. Table 4 provides descriptive statistics and sources for all variables.

Methods

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF:2.14) suggests that multi-collinearity is not an issue. Moreover, the correlation matrix (Table 5) reports no serious correlations issues among the explanatory variables. All models in Table 6 used two-way fixed effects regression to analyze within-municipality changes. Municipal fixed-effects allow us to control for observable and unobservable factors that do not change over time. This is important because current evidence suggests that group size, function, resources, reputation, ideology, economic development, and location are factors fixed over time but have effects on partnerships (Abbink et al., 2010; Ahn et al., 2011; Heap et al., 2015). For example, municipalities can join a partnership because of territorial proximity. Additionally, year fixed-effects allow us to include over time trends that can affect cross-sectional time-series. Standard errors are clustered by municipality to account for potential correlations between observations from the same municipality during the analysis period. Control variables are lagged one period to improve identification of models in Table 5.

Findings

Table 6 reports results to examine whether the integration of partnership membership and purpose influence the municipal effectiveness in securing international aid. Based on the results, inter-municipal cooperation with a single-purpose and inter-governmental cooperation with a multi-purpose are positively associated with municipal effectiveness in securing international aid. However, municipality members of inter-governmental partnerships (with partners from different tiers of government) with multiple purposes were the most effective cases in attaining international aid funds. In fact, one extra inter-governmental cooperation with multiple purposes increases by about 45% the level of international aid in a municipality, holding all else constant. Meanwhile, inter-municipal cooperation was an effective partnership to secure international aid if the sole purpose of the partnership was to secure and manage international aid. For each extra inter-municipal partnership with the single goal of securing international aid, a municipality tended to increase international aid by approximately 3%.

Although not the focus of this study, the legal status regulatory policy enacted by the Ecuadorian government in 2015 had a negative effect on the level of international aid secured by municipalities. Additionally, one standard deviation increased in the number of inhabitants in a municipality is associated with a 12% increase in international aid funds.

Table 6 The effect of type of members and purpose in a municipal partnership on organizational outcomes

	International aid (logged)
Single-purpose and inter-municipal	0.0317* (0.0157)
Multi-purpose and inter-municipal	0.0338 (0.0408)
Single-purpose and inter-governmental	0.0017 (0.0182)
Multi-purpose and inter-governmental	0.3738*** (0.0120)
International aid devolution policy	0.0719+ (0.0367)
Legal status regulatory policy	-0.1373*** (0.0374)
Central government international aid (logged)	-0.0036 (0.0047)
Other partnerships (# partnerships)	0.0241+ (0.0137)
Supply index	-0.0088 (0.0158)
Fiscal dependency (%)	0.0003 (0.0007)
Gross domestic product (logged)	0.0010 (0.0206)
Population (thousands)	0.0005** (0.0002)
Constant	-0.0448 (0.1075)
Municipality fixed-effects	Yes
Year fixed-effects	Yes
Observations	2431
Municipalities	221
R ² (within)	0.0693

Note: control variables lagged one period
Cluster standard errors in parentheses: + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The supplementary material for this study in Annex 1 contains other model specifications in which each dimension of the municipal partnership is analyzed at a time. Specifically, one model tested the effect of the type of partnerships (inter-municipal vs. inter-governmental) and another one the effect of purpose (single purpose vs. multiple purpose). On one hand, inter-governmental cooperation was more effective for securing international aid than inter-municipal cooperation. For each extra partnership involving different tiers of government (i.e., province, municipality, and rural parishes), a municipality increased its international aid by approximately 14%. On the other hand, multiple purpose cooperation was more effective to raise international aid, compared to single purpose cooperation. For each extra partnership in which the purpose was not only to manage international cooperation and secure international aid but also to accomplish other goals (e.g., solid waste management), a municipality increased the level of international aid by approximately 27%.

Annex 1 The effect of type of members and purpose in a municipal partnership on organizational outcomes

	International aid (logged)	International aid (logged)
Inter-municipal cooperation	0.0265 (0.0200)	
Inter-governmental cooperation	0.1336*** (0.0372)	
Single-purpose cooperation		0.0199+ (0.0113)
Multi-purpose cooperation		0.2378*** (0.0341)
International aid devolution policy	0.0901* (0.0354)	0.0784* (0.0366)
Legal status regulatory policy	-0.1302*** (0.0373)	-0.1335*** (0.0373)
Central government international aid (logged)	-0.0004 (0.0046)	-0.0020 (0.0047)
Other partnerships (# partnerships)	0.0139 (0.0121)	0.0208 (0.0132)
Supply index	-0.0201 (0.0165)	-0.0113 (0.0156)
Fiscal dependency (%)	0.0004 (0.0007)	0.0004 (0.0007)
Gross domestic product (logged)	-0.0163 (0.0183)	-0.0057 (0.0192)
Population (thousands)	0.0005** (0.0002)	0.0005*** (0.0002)
Constant	0.0109 (0.0964)	-0.0228 (0.1018)
Municipality fixed-effects	Yes	Yes
Year fixed-effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	2431	2431
Municipalities	221	221
R ² (within)	0.0589	0.0651

Note: control variables lagged one period

Cluster standard errors in parentheses: + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

Both extremes in the continuum of municipal partnerships were successful in improving municipal performance. Both inter-municipal cooperation with a single purpose and inter-governmental cooperation with multiple purposes contribute to increasing municipal international aid. Interestingly, while inter-governmental cooperation appears more effective than inter-municipal cooperation, partnerships with a single purpose do not necessarily outperform partnership with multiple purposes. Thus, this study's first hypothesis is supported. Nevertheless, additional research should explore whether the superior role of inter-governmental cooperation arrangements applies to other (a) settings, (b) levels of governments, and (c) policy goals, such as waste management, infrastructural works, environmental management, etc.

Likewise, further exploration is needed to determine whether performance effects of inter-organizational cooperation exhibit a tipping point both in terms of the number of members and levels of government involved in the partnership.

Unlike the first hypothesis, our second hypothesis fails to be supported. Findings suggest that in the Ecuadorian inter-municipal and inter-governmental partnership contexts, multiplicity of goals seems not to obstruct goal achievement, contrary to those studies that report a negative relationship between goal ambiguity and organizational performance (Chun & Rainey, 2005; Favero et al., 2016; Jung, 2011; Latham et al., 2008). In fact, the expectation, based on Rainey and Jung (2014) framework described in Table 2, was that collaboration with other tiers of government boosts issue prioritization at the partnership level given multiple interests from different organizations. Issue prioritization at the cooperative arrangement, however, may increase perceptions of goal ambiguity inside the municipality and, consequently, municipal performance is negatively affected.

Our contradictory results contribute to the theoretical understanding of goal ambiguity in collaborative settings. Our finding calls for further research on the performance effects of goal ambiguity in collaborative arrangements pursuing goals in a different policy area to see if the results hold. Securing international aid is a tangible and visible goal, and this salient nature may mitigate the potential ambiguous effects of adding more goals to the collaborative arrangement. Therefore, more studies should explore the performance effects of goal ambiguity in collaboration arrangements in different settings, other levels of government, and across other policy areas.

Our study shows evidence that municipal partnerships with multiple purposes and with members from different tiers of government are the most effective strategies to boost municipal performance in securing foreign aid. Attaining extra revenue at the local level is a necessity in developing and transitioning economies. Resource scarcity deprives local governments from delivering so much needed goods and services. The Ecuadorian case depicted in this study provides different perspectives to better understand the role of goals and the nature of partners in collaborative regimes. Moreover, Ecuador is an interesting case because it shows evidence from collaborations that were the result of municipal choice instead of mandates. Thus, it could be that municipalities that have voluntarily chosen their partners to collaborate on multiple purposes are less likely to “fail into their role in the collaboration” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 45) compared to those municipalities forced to participate in a pre-determined collaborative arrangement.

Unfortunately, due to data availability, it is impossible to disentangle other dimensions of performance in collaboration. For example, the level of equity is unclear among participating organizations since it is unknown whether the non-reimbursable international cooperation was fairly and/or equitable distributed across participating organizations. For instance, it could be that multiple-purpose partnerships were more successful because the destination of the international aid funds secured through the partnership was linked to attaining the other goals of the partnership. For example, the international aid could be used to improve waste management for all the members of the partnership. On the contrary, when the partnership solely exists to secure and manage international aid, chances are the target and distribution are perceived by donors to be less transparent. As a result, attaining international aid as a single

purpose fails to boost municipal coffers in a higher proportion. Finally, further studies are needed to determine the collaborative governance process of secured monies from international aid.

Conclusion

This study contributes by applying an integrative framework to predict municipal performance through cooperation. It extends and expands explanations of collaboration based on goal ambiguity and type of partners. The results also contribute to a better understanding of collaboration, a trendy strategy and research endeavor that requires more attention in both developing and transitioning economies. Findings indicated that the number of goals and type of members affect collaboration outcomes and thus municipal effectiveness in achieving the pursued goals. In responding to whom to partner with, our results reveal optimistic implications. Findings suggest that both inter-municipal (homogenous partners) and inter-governmental cooperation boost collaboration outcomes and, in turn, municipal performance.

Our results also depict that inter-governmental cooperation targeting multiple goals is superior to inter-municipal cooperation with a single goal when securing international aid. In responding to whether single-purpose or multiple-purpose collaboration matters, our results suggest that it depends on the nature of the members. Multi-purpose collaboration overperforms single-purpose collaboration but only through inter-governmental but not through inter-municipal collaboration. It seems that *heterogeneity in membership* brings members with different capacities, degrees of interest, and willingness to bear the costs necessary to attain goals.

We conclude that the nature of partners and the number of goals in a collaborative arrangement matter for understanding performance in securing international aid both at the member-level and at the collaboration as a whole (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). Moreover, inter-municipal and inter-governmental collaboration contribute to boost international aid. However, inter-governmental and multiple purpose collaboration arrangements outperform inter-municipal and single-purpose collaboration arrangements in increasing international aid. And the enactment of regulations also tends to decrease municipal effectiveness in securing international aid. Given the emphasis on maximizing partnership efforts in the public sector, we recommend new research on collaboration in different policy areas, across other settings, and including other levels of government to explore whether our findings hold. New research may shed light on whether contingencies exist in the purpose-collaboration and member nature-collaboration relationships.

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