

Whole-of-government co-ordination in practice

Lessons from the Italian experience

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Italy combines central direction with distributed delivery

STEER

Political and strategic direction

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation provides overall direction. The Prime Minister chairs Interministerial Committee for Development Cooperation (CICS) and drives high-level alignment; the Mattei Plan has reinforced political leadership.

DELIVER

Specialised implementation

The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), embassies, line ministries and the Italian Development Finance Institution (CDP) translate policy into programmes, technical action and financing through distinct mandates.

CONNECT

Layered co-ordination

The CICS, Joint Committee, CNCS and country-level structures link political priorities, financing decisions, stakeholder dialogue and delivery.

A delegated model: policy authority remains concentrated, while implementation is shared across the system.

The most effective mechanisms connect three levels of action

STRATEGIC

Set a shared direction

Interministerial Committee for Development Cooperation and the Three-Year Programming and Policy Planning Document align government priorities.

OPERATIONAL

Turn priorities into decisions

The Joint Committee brings Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, AICS and MEF together on programmes, financing and major approvals.

COUNTRY

Build coherence upstream

Embassies, AICS offices, Team Italy and system-wide missions shape initiatives around partner-country priorities.

Operational coherence is built before projects are approved

01



Shared priorities

Three-Year Programming Document and partner-country dialogue

02



Joint design

Embassies, The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, ministries, Italian Development Finance Institution and other relevant actors

03



Coherent decisions

Joint Committee approvals and aligned financing instruments

04



Country delivery

Team Italy, local partnerships, monitoring and policy dialogue

The key shift: from co-ordinating completed proposals to jointly shaping initiatives upstream.

Two practices turn political ambition into country delivery

The Mattei Plan

High-level leadership has mobilised ministries, public institutions and private actors around multi-year, multi-sector partnerships with Africa.

What it demonstrates

Political leadership can create shared incentives and accelerate cross-government engagement.

System-wide missions

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation - led missions bring together The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation , Italian Development Finance Institution , ministries, private-sector representatives and the Mattei Plan Task Force when relevant.

What it demonstrates

Joint engagement with partners improves upstream alignment and generates new initiatives.

In both cases, embassies and agency offices provide the bridge between headquarters and local delivery.

Four challenges for effective whole-of-government action

CHALLENGE	WHY IT MATTERS	ITALY'S RESPONSE
Institutional alignment	Political steering must work through existing institutions	Link the Mattei Plan's political direction to the bodies and responsibilities established by Law 125/2014.
System complexity	More actors and instruments can blur ownership and sequencing	Engage relevant institutions from the design stage and define responsibilities and decision points clearly.
Country adaptation	Central priorities must reflect diverse partner-country contexts	Use embassies and AICS offices to adapt shared priorities and co-ordinate Team Italy at country level.
Shared accountability	Fragmented information limits joint decisions and learning	Develop common information, monitoring and portfolio reviews across institutions.

Strengthen the links across existing structures

1

Co-ordinate upstream

Jointly shape priorities and pipelines before projects reach formal approval.

2

Clarify responsibility

Connect political steering, technical expertise, financing and country delivery through explicit roles.

3

Build shared evidence

Use interoperable information, portfolio reviews and common learning to sustain coherence.

Whole-of-government effectiveness depends less on adding structures than on making existing connections work.