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Beyond the Developer: Cascading Public-Participation Obligations in a Leading Tourism Project

SESSION	Public Participation in IA Follow-up for Ongoing Communication and Providing Sound Information
ABSTRACT ID	From Assessment to Action
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Note to the reader. This paper is one of three coordinated contributions from Red Sea Global to IAIA26, and the three are intended to be read as a set. This paper examines the system — the multi-altitude organising model that distributes participation obligations across the project ecosystem and supports follow-up over the destination’s operational life; a companion paper by Almansour (Abstract 1991) examines the goal — how communication design contributes to public trust; and a companion paper by Shaabein (Abstract 1567) examines the method — how focus group discussions inform Community Development Plans. Together they describe one coordinated approach; individually, each stands on its own and is cross-referenced where the arguments connect. The underlying abstract was submitted as “From Assessment to Action: Creating Lasting Social Impact in a Leading Tourism Project”; the fuller working title above makes the analytical angle explicit. Both describe the same paper.

Abstract

Lasting social impact in a leading tourism project depends on moving beyond developer-led assessment toward a model in which public-participation obligations are progressively distributed across the project ecosystem. This paper draws on Red Sea Global’s emerging four-altitude organising model, which we term CPCD (Corporate, Project, Community, Destination), a practitioner framework coined and used internally at Red Sea Global rather than a previously published model. It describes how Social Impact Assessment findings can be translated into operational obligations for contractors, operators, and tenants, each carrying a distinct slice of the public-participation function. It presents a worked example tracing one commitment across the four altitudes, identifies indicators that make the model auditable, and acknowledges the areas in which it is still maturing. The intent is to offer a structured response to a persistent question in IA follow-up practice: how to sustain meaningful engagement over the multi-decade operational life of destinations delivered by multiple parties.

1. The Handover Problem in IA Follow-up

The impact assessment (IA) community has invested decades in maturing the assessment phase of the IA cycle. Screening, scoping, baseline establishment, impact characterisation, mitigation planning, and stakeholder engagement during assessment are now well developed (IAIA, 2006). The same cannot be said of follow-up.

Despite repeated attention, the post-decision phase, monitoring, evaluation, management, and ongoing communication, remains the weakest link in the cycle (Morrison-Saunders & Arts, 2004).

The problem is most acute at one transition: the handover between the developer's primary delivery role and the operational phase. For ordinary infrastructure with operational lives of five to ten years, the gap is uncomfortable but manageable. For tourism giga-projects with operational lives measured in decades, delivered by multiple operators and tenants, the gap is structural. The developer who conducted the original Social Impact Assessment will not be the party most present at the community interface during operations; hotels, retailers, tour operators, and service contractors will be. A follow-up system designed around the developer alone therefore weakens precisely at construction handover, the moment the operational social footprint begins. This is the handover problem, sometimes described as the diffusion-of-responsibility problem (Morrison-Saunders & Arts, 2004). Calls to "engage more" do not, on their own, produce sustained engagement. What appears to be a structural arrangement in which obligations are formally distributed across the ecosystem and remain in force regardless of any single party's role transitions.

This paper presents Red Sea Global's emerging organising model as one response. It is not a fully codified governance system operating uniformly across all altitudes; it is an organising logic that captures how the project's existing instruments are intended to work together, with some altitudes more developed than others. The intent is to offer a usable analytical model alongside an honest account of where it is in place and where it is still developing.

2. Why Developer-Only Participation Is Insufficient

Social Impact Assessment and Socio-Economic Baseline studies produce findings about social receptors, vulnerabilities, and likely impacts. Those findings translate into community outcomes only when they shape the behaviour of those operating at the community interface. In a tourism destination, three categories of downstream party shape that interface in ways the developer's central engagement function cannot fully reach, each carrying a distinct slice of the participation obligation.

Contractors shape the construction-phase interface, labour influx, worker conduct, traffic, accommodation, and procurement signals. The General Social Employer Requirements is the contractual instrument that begins to translate developer-level commitments into contractor-level obligations.

Operators shape the operational-phase interface, the longest phase of the destination's life, long-term trust, employment pathways, cultural authenticity in guest experience, and sustained communication. The General Sustainability Requirements for Hotel Asset Operators extends commitments into this period.

Tenants shape the local-inclusion interface, procurement openness, local employment access, and the social perception of the destination through retail and service touchpoints. The General Sustainability Requirements for Retail Asset Tenants brings tenant practice within the participation arrangements.

The implication is consequential. The IA literature has documented the implementation gap extensively, but solutions have tended to be exhortatory rather than structural (IFC, 2012; Morrison-Saunders & Arts, 2004). For long-life, multi-operator destinations, what supports durable participation is an arrangement that binds each downstream actor to specific obligations, with named accountability owners, defined performance standards, and verification mechanisms.

3. The CPCD Organising Model

Red Sea Global's Social Impact Management framework distributes public participation across four altitudes: Corporate, Project, Community, and Destination. These are not departments but levels of social impact management, each with its own audience, evidence requirements, accountability owners, and key outputs (Figure 1). The model is an organising logic that captures how existing instruments are intended to operate together; some altitudes are well documented, others still maturing.

CPCD = Corporate • Project • Community • Destination

Four altitudes of social impact management, each with its own audience, evidence, owners, and outputs.
upward feedback: community insight informs corporate strategy



Figure 1. The CPCD organising model, four altitudes of social impact management, with the vertical cascade and upward feedback loop.

3.1 The Four Altitudes

The **Corporate** altitude establishes the policy mandate that anchors the cascade, ESG positioning, sustainability reporting, and cross-departmental integration. The **Project** altitude is where the formal Impact Assessment is conducted and maintained, through ESIA studies, construction and operational ESMPs, and social risk and mitigation plans. The **Community** altitude runs the live interface: baselines and programme assessments characterise the community; focus group discussions and outreach gather its views; and the External Grievance Mechanism captures concerns, which are logged, routed to an accountable owner, resolved within defined service levels, and analysed for recurring patterns that feed back into programme design. This altitude is structured by the Impacted Community Identification Methodology and the External Stakeholder Engagement Plan. The **Destination** altitude extends obligations to operators and tenants through operator assessments, social-request routing, orientation, and volunteering activation.

3.2 The Vertical Cascade

The cascade is most easily understood through a worked example. Cultural-heritage protection at a coastal destination illustrates how a single commitment is translated across the four altitudes (Table 1).

Altitude	What the commitment becomes
Corporate	Cultural-heritage protection established as a binding policy commitment, embedded in sustainability reporting and ESG positioning.
Project	Cultural receptors identified; impacts on tangible and intangible heritage characterised; mitigation embedded in management plans.
Community	FGDs with heritage practitioners; cultural baselines developed; heritage integrated into Community Development Plan priorities.
Destination	Staff orientation on cultural protocols; guest-experience design respecting heritage;

Altitude	What the commitment becomes
	procurement supporting heritage-based suppliers; operator reporting.

Table 1. The vertical cascade, cultural-heritage protection translated across the four altitudes.

The same commitment changes form at each altitude, from policy to assessment finding to community engagement to operator behaviour, and at each there are documents, owners, and verification mechanisms. The cascade is a documented chain.

3.3 Horizontal Differentiation and the Upward Loop

At the Destination altitude the same commitment differentiates further across operator types. A contractor's heritage obligation focuses on workforce orientation and avoidance of physical disturbance; a hotel operator's on guest-experience design, staff training, and ongoing engagement with heritage communities; a retail tenant's on procurement openness toward heritage-based suppliers and product design that respects rather than commodifies cultural symbols. This differentiation prevents uniform application that would over-burden some operators and under-engage others.

A cascade that flows only downward is a contracting framework, not an IA follow-up arrangement. What makes CPCD a follow-up arrangement is that information also flows upward, and is validated as it rises rather than treated as purely internal management reporting. At the Community altitude, findings from focus groups and grievances are returned to communities for confirmation before they are acted on, a member-checking step that keeps the evidence base accountable to the people it describes. Validated insight then consolidates: operator reports feed Destination-level oversight; social requests consolidate at the Community altitude; and grievances filed at any altitude feed the External Grievance Mechanism, where an oversight committee spanning governance, external affairs, communications, social development, and sustainability reviews them. This is how a community-level insight can inform Corporate strategy in the Saudi context. For example, a recurring grievance about cultural authenticity at operator venues escalated through this committee into a Kingdom-relevant Social and Cultural Guideline applied across destinations. Quarterly lessons-learned cycles translate these field issues into procedural updates, training revisions, and design changes, converting follow-up from an aspiration into a documented governance rhythm.

4. Why the Distributed Arrangement Supports Better Follow-up

The case is not that distribution produces better outcomes by itself, but that it improves the likelihood that findings are implemented consistently and that follow-up is sustained across transitions. Three observations support it. First, **continuity of communication**: when obligations are distributed across four altitudes and three actor types, no single actor's transition collapses the system, operators continue engaging communities long after the developer's construction role has reduced. Second, **quality of social information**: multiple reporting altitudes triangulate rather than single-source the evidence base, with operator reports, grievance data, baseline updates, and programme assessments each compensating for the others' blind spots. The External Grievance Mechanism's headline indicators, acknowledgment within a 24–48 hour standard, resolution within service levels, a decreasing recurrence rate, and overdue cases under five percent, are published periodically in aggregated form, creating an external verification incentive. Third, **durability across transitions**: when obligations are written into procurement, lease, and operating standards, they survive personnel changes and operator handovers, a change of hotel general manager does not reset the operator's engagement obligations, which attach to the entity rather than the individual.

5. Limitations and Areas Still Maturing

The model is best understood as an organising logic in active development. **Differential maturity:** the Project and Community altitudes are most established; the Corporate altitude is well developed in policy terms; the Destination altitude is the most recently formalised and contains the most active development work. **Verification at scale:** the model assumes operator and tenant reporting is accurate and that operator orientations are absorbed, assumptions the Social Auditing and Inspection regime and Operator Assessor Checklist are intended to verify, with cadence still maturing. **Upward information flow:** the downward flow of obligations is easier to design than the upward flow of insight; the quarterly lessons-learned cycle functions, but the analytical capacity to detect early-warning signals across operators is still being built. **Contractual coverage:** hotel operators and retail tenants are well covered, while smaller service operators, supply-chain partners, and transport providers are more variable. Finally, the four-altitude logic, the integration of the grievance mechanism into operator obligations, and the use of community tiering to calibrate operator engagement are areas where the practice contributes to follow-up methodology; the underlying commitments are imported from IFC Performance Standards, the Equator Principles, and IAIA guidance, and adapted to the Saudi context (IFC, 2012; Equator Principles Association, 2020; IAIA, 2006).

6. Lessons for IA Practice

1. **Build obligations in before handover.** Write operator and tenant social obligations into procurement and lease documents before construction handover; retrofitting them afterward is significantly harder.
2. **Treat operator orientation as a follow-up deliverable.** Orientation that addresses engagement, grievance handling, and cultural sensitivity benefits from the design attention follow-up requires, not HR onboarding alone.
3. **Cascade grievance mechanisms rather than centralising them.** A single developer-level mechanism is rarely accessible enough across a destination; cascading it into the operator layer brings it closer to communities while preserving consolidated oversight.
4. **Use community tiering to calibrate engagement intensity.** Treating all communities uniformly is both inefficient and disrespectful.
5. **Treat post-construction arrangements as permanent.** For long-life destinations with continuing impacts, the Destination altitude, under whatever name, is a permanent function, not a transitional phase.

7. Conclusion

The underlying abstract, *From Assessment to Action*, is sometimes read as a single transformation: assessment ends, action begins. The CPCD model points elsewhere. In a multi-decade destination, assessment does not fully end, and action lives in a distributed arrangement of mutually reinforcing obligations across the delivery ecosystem and across the operational life of the destination. The shift from assessment to action occurs progressively, as obligations are translated into operational practice at each altitude that shapes community experience over time. The model is offered to the IA community as one structured response to the handover problem in long-life, multi-operator destinations, not a finished solution, but a usable analytical framework supported by a working set of instruments. The methodological foundations that produce credible community voice, and the communication design that supports public trust, are treated in the companion papers from the Red Sea Global team.

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