WORKING MATERIAL 4.5 · CHAPTER 4 — THE CERTIFIER'S LENS · SETTING: SIWA, EGYPT

When the Certifier Talks to Your Neighbours

Source: Francesco Dore, The Helm and the Lens, Volume 7b — GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0, subchapter 4.5 (book page 251)

GUIDING QUESTION

A hotel's documents describe its relationship with the community in the hotel's own words. Sometimes an auditor needs to hear the community's words as well. When may a certification body interview people outside the hotel, when must it, and what is an owner entitled to know about the conversation?

WHO THE RULES BIND

The GSTC Accreditation Manual (AM-I v4.1) cited on this sheet binds certification bodies, not hotels. Where a row refers to it, it describes what the certifier must do and what the hotel can check; it is not a requirement of the GSTC Hotel Standard.

1 · Verification Pact: market claims against the standard

Copied from the book. The last column is for your property: what holds here, and how you know it.

What is claimed	Binding?	What actually holds	In our property
The auditor needs the hotel's permission to speak to neighbours	No	Clause 8.11.6 requires the hotel to be informed in writing, not to consent	
Stakeholder interviews happen only when someone complains	No	They may be held to clarify activities, and are required where there is significant doubt about information	
The hotel will be told everything stakeholders say	No	Information stakeholders ask to keep confidential is not shared with the client	
Social media complaints are irrelevant to certification	No	Clause 8.13.5 allows the certifier to use online information in its risk assessment	
A hotel may describe its community partnerships in its own words	Only partially true	It may, but under A5.2 every claim must be supported by verifiable evidence	
A hotel without complaints on file has no community issues	No	B4.4, A10.4 and C1.3 require channels; without them, the absence of complaints proves nothing	

2 · Common mistakes — a self-check

Tick each mistake you recognise in your own property, and note where it shows.

☐ Believing that the hotel's permission is needed for an auditor to meet stakeholders.

☐ Describing community partnerships in public without evidence the partners would confirm.

☐ Having no grievance channel, so that concerns surface on social media instead.

☐ Attending, arranging or briefing the stakeholders the auditor will interview.

☐ Expecting to be told everything stakeholders said, including what they asked to keep confidential.

☐ Treating an online complaint as irrelevant to certification.

☐ Confusing the absence of recorded complaints with the absence of problems.

☐ Objecting to a required interview instead of supplying the evidence that would remove the doubt.

3 · A Checklist Before an Auditor Meets the Neighbours

The book's checklist, with a column for your own answer.

Question	Why it matters	Our answer
Which public claims name a community, cooperative or partner?	Each is a claim another party can confirm or contradict under A5.2	
Do we hold current, written evidence of engagement with each of them?	Indicator A9.1 requires documented engagement	
Do local communities have a grievance channel, and is it logged?	Indicators B4.4, B4.5 and A10.4 require it; its absence invites doubt	
What would an online search reveal about our relationships?	Clause 8.13.5 lets the certifier use online information	
Are we ready to provide contacts without attending or briefing?	The value of the interview depends on its independence	
Do we know where to dispute an outcome we disagree with?	Clause 8.6 requires complaints and appeals procedures to be public	

4 · What would show this is working

Questions drawn from the subchapter's reading of the standard and its practical application. Indicator references point to the GSTC Hotel Standard v4.0; where the evidence lives is this book's practice, not a requirement of the standard.

Question	Where the evidence lives	Seen?
Is engagement with local stakeholders, including cooperatives, documented (A9.1)?	Written agreements; minutes of meetings	☐
Is there a community grievance system, with issues documented, addressed promptly and outcomes shared (B4.4, B4.5, A10.4)?	Grievance log kept by a named person	☐
Is every claim about the community supported by verifiable documentation (A5.2)?	Agreement and payment records behind each claim	☐
Does the hotel keep a list of the local entrepreneurs' products and services it supports (B3.1)?	Supplier and partner list	☐
Are guest and guide guidelines in place where guests visit community resources (B4.1)?	Written route and guidance issued with bookings	☐

> *What this sheet is not: the GSTC Hotel Standard does not prescribe this form. It is a working aid drawn from the book; the standard's criteria, indicators and guidelines govern the real case. Independent material; not affiliated with or endorsed by the GSTC. The standard's own text at www.gstc.org prevails.*