



TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

Strategic Communication for Rural Community Tourism Organizations

Effective communication is the lifeblood of a Community Based Tourism Organization (CBTO). It's how you build trust internally, attract ethical tourists externally, and maintain strong partnerships. This lesson from the **Kitara Foundation** outlines practical strategies for clear, consistent, and impactful communication, ensuring your message supports your mission.

1. 🗣️ Internal Communication: Building Trust Within the CBTO

Strategic communication starts at home. Clear internal communication is essential for maintaining **transparency, resolving conflicts, and ensuring community buy-in** for the tourism project.

A. The Principle of Radical Transparency

- **Financial Reporting:** Use simple, accessible tools (like shared digital ledgers facilitated by **Equera** or public notice boards) to display regular financial updates. Show clearly: the **Total Revenue**, the **Operating Costs**, and the amount allocated to the **Community Development Fund (CDF)**. This prevents rumors and fosters trust.
- **Decision-Making:** Communicate **how and why** decisions are made. If the management committee raises the price of a homestay or allocates CDF money to a new well, the justification must be shared with all community members *before* the action takes place.

B. Consistent Channels and Language

- **Use Existing Channels:** Don't rely on complex systems. Use communication channels that the community already trusts and accesses daily, such as **mobile phone calls, SMS text messages, and community WhatsApp groups**.

- **Hold Open Meetings:** Schedule **regular general assembly meetings** (e.g., quarterly) where all community members, not just CBTO members, are invited to ask questions, review financials, and approve major CDF spending.
- **Simple Language:** Use clear, local language. Avoid confusing business jargon or complex financial terms. Simplify concepts like "net profit" and "leakage" into terms everyone understands.

2. 🌍 External Communication: Marketing Your Impact and Authenticity

External communication is how you market your product and attract the specific kind of traveler who values your work.

A. Define Your Core Message (The "Why")

Your communication must center on your **Unique Selling Proposition (USP)**: the verified social and cultural impact of your tourism model, as championed by the **Kitara Foundation**.

- **Impact-Driven Storytelling:** Do not just advertise a beautiful place. **Advertise the difference the traveler's money makes.** *Example: Instead of "Visit our beautiful forest," say, "Walk with Guide Peter: Your fee directly funds the local forest conservation patrol he leads."*
- **Authenticity Over Glamour:** Use honest photos and language. Avoid promising five-star luxury if you offer a humble, clean homestay. **Authenticity sets correct expectations** and leads to better reviews.

B. Strategic Use of Digital Platforms

- **Booking Platform (Equera):** Your listing must be a communication tool. Use the description space to tell your community's story and clearly state your **Social Responsibility Statement**. This is the first place potential guests check for ethical commitment.
- **Social Media:** Use platforms like Instagram or Facebook to share **behind-the-scenes content**. Post photos of the CDF money being used (e.g., the school roof being repaired), a guide learning a new skill, or a host preparing a traditional meal. This visual proof builds trust.
- **Pre-Arrival Packets:** Once a booking is confirmed, send a simple digital packet (PDF or mobile-friendly link) that communicates essential information: **cultural protocols, simple language phrases, transport options, and your emergency contact number.**

3. 🤝 Partner Communication: Building Long-Term Relationships

Communicating effectively with external partners (tour operators, NGOs, donors) is key to securing stable revenue and funding.

A. Professionalism and Reliability

- **Response Time:** Respond to emails and inquiries from partners **quickly and professionally**. This demonstrates reliability, which is essential for business relationships.
- **Use Data, Not Just Promises:** When asking a donor for a grant or negotiating a contract with a tour operator, use **verifiable data** provided by your digital systems.
 - *Example:* Instead of saying, "We help women," say, "Our digital payment system shows that **45% of our member dividends were paid directly to women-owned homestays** in the last year."

B. Standardized Information

- Maintain a digital **Press Kit** (a single folder accessible online) that contains all standardized communication documents:
 - CBTO Logo and High-Quality Photos.
 - **Social Responsibility Statement.**
 - Price List and Commission Structure.
 - Summary of key **Impact Metrics** (e.g., total CDF amount generated).

C. Honesty in Negotiation

Communicate your **non-negotiable limits** (both financial and cultural) clearly and early. Do not agree to unsustainable discounts or activities that harm your culture, just to secure a deal. Good partners will respect your boundaries.

By making communication transparent, consistent, and focused on the verified impact of your work, your CBTO will significantly strengthen its internal foundations and external brand visibility.