



TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

Innovation and Technology Management in Community Based Tourism and Hospitality

Innovation and technology are no longer optional extras for tourism—they are essential tools for growth, efficiency, and sustainability. For Community Based Tourism Organizations (CBTOs), adopting these tools, supported by the **Kitara Foundation's** training ensures your authentic, local product can successfully compete in the global market. This lesson breaks down how to manage both innovation and technology effectively within your CBTO.

1. 💡 **Managing Innovation: The Culture of Continuous Improvement**

Innovation is simply finding new and better ways to do things. Effective management of innovation means embedding this forward-thinking mindset into your CBTO's daily operations.

A. The Three Pillars of CBTO Innovation

1. **Product Innovation:** Focuses on creating new, high-value experiences.
 - **Management Strategy:** Regularly consult with the community (especially elders and youth) to identify **underutilized cultural assets** (e.g., specific crafts, unique agricultural practices, traditional recipes). Manage the testing of **pilot products** (e.g., a new herbal tea tasting tour) with small groups before launching widely.
 - **Example:** Developing an "**Agri-Tourism Day Pass**" where visitors pay to participate in farming tasks like traditional harvesting or goat milking, linking the experience directly to the local food system.
2. **Process Innovation:** Focuses on making internal operations more efficient and reliable.
 - **Management Strategy:** Identify your biggest pain points (e.g., double-bookings, slow payment tracking). Implement simple, digital tools to solve these specific problems. **Start small**—don't buy expensive software you don't need.

- **Example:** Shifting from paper-based scheduling to a shared **digital calendar app** on all guides' and hosts' phones, instantly resolving scheduling conflicts.
3. **Social Innovation (Kitara Foundation Focus):** Focuses on strengthening the community's organizational structure and equity.
- **Management Strategy:** Establish a formal system for **reinvesting profits** that reinforces community goals (the CDF). Innovate benefit-sharing by tying incentives to sustainable behavior (e.g., higher dividends for homestays that achieve certified water conservation standards).

B. The Innovation Committee

Establish a small, dedicated **Innovation Team** (ideally including a youth member for digital skills and an elder for cultural knowledge) responsible for collecting ideas, testing solutions, and reporting successes and failures to the main management committee.

2. 🧩 Technology Management: Tools for Transparency and Reach

Technology is the engine that drives your innovation and connects your rural destination to the world. Effective technology management ensures tools are affordable, accessible, and aligned with your mission.

A. Managing Digital Visibility and Market Access

- **The Tool: Booking Platforms (e.g., Equera) and Social Media.**
- **Management Strategy:** Treat your digital listings as your most important asset. Assign a specific, digitally literate member (often a young person) to be the **Digital Steward** responsible for:
 - **Accuracy:** Ensuring prices, availability, and descriptions are **always up-to-date**. Inaccurate listings lead to lost sales and bad reviews.
 - **Quality:** Managing the quality of **photos and video content**, focusing on authentic, high-resolution visuals that tell the community's story.
 - **Communication:** Responding to inquiries and comments on time, professionally and in the language of the inquiry.

B. Managing Financial Technology (FinTech)

- **The Tool: Mobile Money (M-Pesa, MTN MoMo), Simple Accounting Apps, Shared Digital Ledgers (Google Sheets).**
- **Management Strategy:** Prioritize **Financial Transparency and Traceability**.

- **Standardization:** Mandate the use of one approved digital tool for all financial tracking.
- **Digital Auditing:** Regularly reconcile digital records with bank/mobile money statements. The use of a traceable system minimizes corruption and builds confidence in the **Equitable Benefit-Sharing Mechanism**.
- **Capacity:** The **Kitara Foundation** training must focus on ensuring the CBTO Treasurer and key management members are proficient in using the chosen FinTech tools.

C. Managing Guest Technology and Service

- **The Tool: Guest WiFi, QR Codes, Digital Feedback Forms.**
- **Management Strategy:** Use technology to enhance the guest experience, not detract from it.
 - **Information Delivery:** Use QR codes at arrival points to link to the **Digital Welcome Packet** (cultural protocols, emergency contacts, activity schedule), reducing the need for printing.
 - **Feedback System:** Implement a simple digital form for guest feedback. The data collected must be **immediately actionable**—it should be reviewed weekly by the management team to identify and fix service issues promptly.

3. Managing Technology Risks and Sustainability

Adopting technology comes with risks, especially in remote areas. Management must plan for continuity and security.

A. Data and Financial Security

- **Risk:** Loss of financial records, hacking, or misuse of customer data.
- **Management Strategy:** Use strong passwords, limit access to financial records to key personnel, and utilize secure, reputable platforms (like **Equera**) for payment processing. Keep regular backups of offline records.

B. Digital Capacity and Succession Planning

- **Risk:** Reliance on one young, digitally skilled person who might leave the community.
- **Management Strategy:** Implement a formal **digital skills transfer program**. The current Digital Steward must train at least one junior member as a backup, ensuring the

technology knowledge remains within the CBTO—a core focus of the **Kitara Foundation's** empowerment model.

C. Infrastructure Resilience

- **Risk:** Power outages or poor internet connectivity disrupting operations.
- **Management Strategy:** Invest in **resilient infrastructure** (e.g., solar charging stations, power banks) to ensure essential communication and booking operations can continue even without grid power. Always have a simple, paper-based **backup system** for emergency contact details and essential guest information.

By strategically managing innovation and technology, your CBTO can transform its authentic local assets into a globally competitive, resilient, and transparent business model that benefits the entire community.