



TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

Tourism Product Development and Marketing for Rural CBTOs

Kitara Foundation provides a practical, easy-to-use guide for rural Community Based Tourism Organizations (CBTOs) on how to turn their local assets into attractive tourism products and effectively market them to the world. This approach aligns with the **Kitara Foundation's** focus on community empowerment and leverages the digital tools provided by partners like **Equera** for global reach.

1. Developing Your Tourism Product: Finding Your Unique Selling Point (USP)

Your product is not just a room or a meal; it is the **experience** you offer that no one else can copy.

A. Identify Your Assets

Start by listing everything unique about your community in three categories:

Category	Description	Example Assets
Culture & Heritage	Traditions, history, skills, food, and daily life.	Storytelling by elders, traditional weaving, local cuisine (cooking class), ceremonies.
Nature & Environment	Landscapes, plants, animals, and conservation areas.	Guided forest walks, birdwatching trails, medicinal plant identification, waterfalls.
Livelihood & Agriculture	Farming methods, local crafts, and traditional trades.	Coffee/tea harvesting experience, basket weaving workshops, brick making demonstrations.

B. Crafting the Experience

Group your assets into themed, multi-day packages. Experiences should be **immersive, authentic, and participatory**.

- **Focus on 'Doing,' not just 'Seeing':** Instead of showing a traditional hut, let the guest help build one or learn how to maintain the roof. Instead of serving local food, offer a **hands-on cooking lesson** with a local family.

- **The Story is the Product:** Every product needs a compelling narrative. Train guides (and all hosts) to be excellent storytellers who can interpret the meaning of traditions and the importance of conservation.

Kitara Tip: Ensure that products are developed in a way that **respects cultural boundaries**. The community must agree on what is shared and when, putting safeguards in place to protect sacred sites or private rituals.

C. Standardizing Quality and Price

- **Quality Checklist:** Create a simple, non-negotiable checklist for every product (e.g., "Homestay: Clean sheets, functioning mosquito net, safe drinking water, friendly greeting"). Consistency builds trust and leads to positive reviews.
- **Fair Pricing:** Your price must be set high enough to cover all costs, pay fair wages, and still contribute substantially to the **Community Development Fund (CDF)**. Do not compete on price; compete on **authenticity and impact**.

2. Marketing Your Product: Telling Your Story to the World

Once you have a great product, you need to reach the right customers—conscious travelers who value authenticity and direct community impact.

A. Digital Presence is Non-Negotiable (The Equera Advantage)

Rural CBTOs must operate in the global marketplace, and that requires digital tools.

- **Global Listing:** Use platforms like **Equera** to list your products.¹ This immediately gives you visibility to international tourists and travel agents without you needing to build an expensive website.
- **Visual Storytelling:** Use good quality photos and short, impactful videos that show the **people and the experience**, not just the scenery. Focus on warm smiles, hands-on activities, and the natural beauty of your area.
- **Update Information:** Ensure your prices, availability, and contact details are **always accurate** on the digital platform. An outdated listing loses business immediately.

B. Content Focus: The Impact Hook

Modern travelers want their spending to mean something. Your marketing should always answer the question: "**How does my money help this community?**"

- **Highlight the CDF:** Clearly state what percentage of the price goes directly to community projects (e.g., "15% of your booking fee funds school scholarships").
- **Showcase the Host:** Feature the faces and names of the hosts, guides, and artisans. This builds a personal connection and shows tourists they are supporting real local entrepreneurs.

Example: Instead of "Guided Nature Walk, \$20," say, "**Walk with Mama Zola: Discover the secrets of the forest's medicinal plants. Your fee supports her traditional craft workshop and protects the local watershed.**"

C. Strategic Partnerships

You cannot do this alone. Build strong relationships with intermediaries who can send you customers.

- **Responsible Tour Operators:** Target tour operators who specialize in **ethical, sustainable, and fair-trade tourism**. They understand and respect the CBTO model and pricing.
- **Kitara Foundation Linkages:** Use the Foundation's network to attend tourism trade shows and connect with large organizations looking for authentic and impactful experiences for their clients.

3. Feedback and Improvement

Tourism is an ongoing learning process. You must constantly listen and adapt to ensure long-term success.

- **Collect Feedback:** Use simple digital forms (easily created on a phone) to collect reviews from every guest, focusing on three areas: **Quality, Authenticity, and Hospitality**.
- **Act on Reviews:** Hold regular CBTO meetings to discuss all feedback. If guests consistently complain about the same issue (e.g., cleanliness, timing), you must dedicate resources and training to fix it immediately.
- **Reward Success:** Use your internal quality checklists and guest reviews to identify and **reward members** who consistently provide excellent service. This incentivizes high performance and raises the bar for the entire organization.

By embracing digital tools for market access and focusing on authentic experiences backed by transparent quality standards, rural CBTOs can build a sustainable, resilient, and empowering tourism business.