

# Compete Caribbean Partnership Facility

## When Nature Calls...(and giants pick up!)

### *Rupununi Project Benefits Conservation and Amerindian Communities*

The Arapaima Fish can grow to be ten feet long and weigh up to 440 pounds. This massive fish and endangered species has become the super star in a new category of tourism product for Guyana! The Arapaima fish has been dwelling in Guyana's rivers for close to 14,000 years. Their scales are so tough that Piranha teeth cannot pierce them! What's also interesting is that the Arapaima breathes



oxygen and surfaces every 10 – 20 minutes to do so. This habit almost made them extinct. For many years, the indigenous communities frequently captured the Arapaima for food and made their primary income from the sale of its meat. By the 2000s however, overfishing had significantly depleted the Arapaima numbers and conservations laws were passed to protect the world's oldest and largest freshwater fish. The indigenous communities have since turned to Eco-tourism as a primary income earner but the Amerindian eco-lodges of Surama, Rewa and Karanambu have found an innovative way to incorporate the Arapaima into this package while protecting the species in its natural habit ---Catch & Release Fishing. Catch & Release, also known as Sport Fishing, is the act of returning the fish to water unharmed after capturing it. Anglers use barb-less hooks which reduces the chance that the fish will be

hooked deeply (in the gut). The hooks are removed while the fish are supported in the water. Overall, it is a swift process with minimal stress to the catch. Sport fishing is a major economic and conservation driver across the world. In the United States, Sport fishing generates USD \$45 billion in retail sales, USD \$16 billion in taxes, and 1 million jobs, while an estimated 40 million people fish annually. Of its 40 million anglers, an estimated 10.3 million have fished outside of the United States in the last 5 years. In 2014, Compete Caribbean awarded the North Rupununi Cluster with \$US500,000 and worked alongside the Amerindian groups to design and implement scientifically based protocols for Arapaima Sport Fishing; upgrade to solar power and strengthen the hospitality product with best practices through technical assistance. The lodges clustered to offer a single Rupununi experience for the traveller (accommodation, food, transportation, guide and sport fishing expedition) coupled with a unique cultural immersion at each lodge.

By project closing, the results were clear:

1. Scientifically developed procedures for safe Arapaima Sport Fishing implemented.
2. Draft legislation presented to the Government of Guyana for the sustainable management of the Arapaima
3. Dynamic best practices for hospitality adopted within the lodges and key knowledge for sustaining operations transferred to over 35 members of the Amerindian Community.
4. Rewa, Surama and Karanambu eco-lodges are now powered by 100% green energy (solar).
5. Direct employment during the high season increased by 133% with 57% being women.