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NO BUSINESS LOANS FROM BAKUN TRUST FUND

BINTULU, July 8 (Bernama) -- Bakun Trust Fund, launched last year to benefit people directly affected by the Bakun hydroelectric project, will not disburse business loans as it would divert from the original intention of providing scholarships to needy students.

Its chairman Dr James Jemut Masing said the fund would stick to its primary objective of giving financial help to deserving students to pursue higher studies.

"Until now we have not given out business loans. If we want to, we have to refer to the state and federal governments first to change the relevant ordinance," he told reporters after opening a five-day workshop on "Social and Cultural Issues Including Business Opportunities for Women of Belaga" last night.

So far, the Bakun Trust Fund launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has received a total of RM10 million -- RM5 million from the Sarawak state government and another RM5 million from the Federal government.

The fund, claimed to be first of its kind in the world, aims to train the people of Belaga, through workshops and seminars, to participate actively in the state's economy.

Dr Masing, who is also Sarawak Tourism Minister, said a workshop similar to this would be organised frequently as it would enable the people to seek more business opportunities when the RM13.6 billion hydroelectric Bakun dam becomes operational by the year 2003.

He said the workshop received overwhelming response much to the surprise of the organisers -- The Bakun Development Committee and Bakun Trust Fund.

He expressed confidence it would enhance the knowledge and confidence of the people of Belaga, who are most affected by the Bakun project, to venture into business.

A total of 60 participants from 15 longhouses, including 45 women, are attending the workshop. -- BERNAMA

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