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STD a worry among natives near Bakun

MIRI: Sexually-transmitted diseases (STD) and other diseases have become a serious concern among natives in settlements surrounding the Bakun hydro-electric dam project site in central Sarawak.

The influx of workers from other areas and sexual promiscuity between natives and logging camp workers are the major contributory factors.

These revelations were highlighted in a report concerning the health of the natives in Belaga district affected by the construction of the RM9bil Bakun Hydro-electric dam project.

The report is part of the social impact assessment report submitted to the state government concerning the Murum dam, which is located 70km inland from Bakun dam.

The report on the RM3bil Murum Dam was compiled based on feedback from the Health and Medical Services Department, Education Department, District Office, Land and Survey

Department and Christian churches.

The report also touched on the impact of the Bakun dam on 15,000 people from the Balui Valley who were uprooted from their original settlements and relocated to the Sungai Asap Resettlement Scheme in 1996.

Besides the increase in sexually-transmitted diseases, there was also a sharp rise in cases of alcohol abuse, smoking, infant mortality, malnutrition and diarrhoea among the natives.

The report said more cases of gonorrhoea and syphilis were detected in the upper reaches of Bakun, but no HIV infections was reported.

"The proximity of the logging camps to the longhouses encouraged social interaction between camp workers and native girls, especially during the weekends," the report stated.

It noted that Bakun natives married at a very young age, with girls getting hitched at 15 and the boys at 17.