

World population heading up, not down

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By the year 2100, the world is set to add another 50 per cent (3.6 billion) to its current population of 7.3 billion, according to United Nations projections.

Speaking on World Population Day (July 11), Flinders University demographer Dr Udo Saikia said the staggering increase is in spite of an expected decline of fertility for countries where large families are still prevalent.

The latest projection, issued in 2013, overturned earlier consensus among world demographers that the [global population](#) and its related stresses would peak by 2050 at around nine billion people.

"The new figure brings huge challenges for the sustainability of humanity as a whole," Dr Saikia said.

Dr Saikia says that while the conventional threats of this increase are obvious in various aspects such as poverty, health, education, environment and food security, another major threat is the potential for inflated social conflict.

"It is not just mere increase in [population numbers](#) but also the change in [population](#) age structure that plays, and will play, a crucial role in overall socio-economic development and social stability," Dr Saikia said

"The United Nations echoes the concerns relating to the destabilising effect of demographic trends by stating that societies currently in

conflict or in post-conflict transition are facing a demographic challenge of extremely high proportion of young population at a time when people in these societies are still recovering from the scars of occupation, an economic slump, and periodic outbreaks of political violence."

However, Dr Saikia said, high numbers of youth can be depicted as either "a blessing or a curse", depending on their country's economic performance and strength of governance.

Dr Saikia points to Timor Leste as a case in point.

Although a tiny nation, Timor Leste showed the fifth highest population growth rate in the world (from 2005 to 2010), and faces enormous problems in the nation building process.

Dr Saikia is currently conducting research on the impact of rapid population growth on various sectors in Timor-Leste, with a special focus on youth bulge and social conflict.

At the invitation of the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Mr Rui Maria de Araújo, Dr Saikia recently led a Flinders University team on a visit to Dili to deliver a series of presentations to the Council of Ministers and the Members of Parliament, Timor-Leste Government.

"These presentations highlighted how and why the population issues need to be integrated to the country's development strategy to maintain peace and sustainable development," Dr Saikia said.

Provided by Flinders University

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