The total population of the Basin was estimated to be about 950,000 people in 2010, having grown from less than 100,000 in the early 20th Century. Over the past 30 years, the population has grown by about 2.2% each year.

Most growth over the past 10 years has been around Oshakati, Ondangwa and Oshikango and also in the emerging towns of Okongo, Eenhana, Oshikuku, Otapi, Okahau, Taesi and Otavi. Further from towns, significant numbers of new homesteads have been established south of Okahau near Ruscana and around Onandikai and Omuithya.

Most residents live in one of eight major Ovambo tribal authority areas; Kwareyana, Holonga, Omulamba, Ombasindja, Ongandjera, Uukolokolokwe, Uukwalukalhu and Uukwanamb. Many Zambian people live close to the Kunene River, while a mix of people live south of Etosha and in southern Oshikoto which was traditionally a Herero area.

Levels of wealth vary widely, the wealthiest people being in the freehold farms and in towns. Most people living in the densely populated zone between Omuithya, Oshakai, Ruscana and Oshikango are significantly wealthier than those in more remote areas.

The Basin has a history of boom and bust. During times of plenty, surplus food is harvested and stored in large gourds. However, at other times droughts and plagues of locusts and armys worms have caused terrible famines.

The worst recorded famines occurred in 1877/1879, 1907/1908, 1915, 1920 and 1925-1931. Some of those famines caused the death of 30-40% of the population.

This image is of people building dams during the 1920-1931 "Famine of the dams".