

## VoicesOnTheMove\_EP04 Transcript

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*Issah:* I will not discourage my people from migrating. Migration is to ensure that you can seek alternative livelihoods for yourself and your family, to have access to some larger opportunities.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* In the context of environmental stressors, climate change migration will continue to take place within the borders of countries and might become even more short distance.

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*Rachel Keeton:* We universally need to be able to understand migration as a really complicated choice that people make.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* We often hear that climate change will only increase the number of people on the move, with Global North regions such as Europe and North America portrayed as top destinations. But is this view really backed up by research? Do millions really aspire to move thousands of miles from home? And how do perceptions of climate change influence people's decisions where to migrate, or whether to migrate at all? Welcome to Voices on the Move, where we delve into stories of climate change and mobility, the people it affects, and potential solutions. I'm Sophia Burton from Migration Matters, and this episode is a collaboration with the HABITABLE research project.

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*Issah:* Our parents, who are farmers, made us aware that the only option for us to escape the ladder of poverty is to get educated. To not go through what they are going through.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Issah, a man in his 40s, grew up in the small village of Prima in the Northeast region of Ghana. The White Volta River runs through the region, providing water for the villages that predominantly rely on small-scale farming.

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*Issah:* Well, we left home to feel home. So I'm looking for opportunities to get to greater heights. An opportunity to earn more. To ensure that we reach all the needs of the family back home.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Issah moved and now lives 700 kilometers further south in Adenta, a city just outside Ghana's capital, Accra.

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*Issah:* Unfortunately, I'm not satisfied, but it's better than where I was. I would say that about 45% of my income now goes back home. For a while I was in Germany, too. Then I realized there is an opportunity for me in Accra. Fortunately for me, I met

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a family who was selling spare auto parts. So I worked with them and from there I was able to save money. Not much, but reasonable. A year later, I applied for university. My family came in to support me and pay the school fees. When I completed university, I was doing some small internship programs and doing some data collection and other exercises. Just anything to make sure that I support myself.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* How mobile are people today when it comes to securing their livelihoods? The HABITABLE project is a large-scale research initiative exploring the relationship between migration and climate change around the world. Two academics conducting research for the project in Ghana are Dr. Rachel Keeton, and Dr. Ricardo Safra de Campos. Rachel specializes in contemporary urbanization processes across Africa, while Ricardo focuses on spatial mobility related to environmental change and sustainability.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* We can look at some of the data that we collected in Ghana, both in the Volta regions or the coastal parts of the country, as well as the Savanna in the north. The predominant reasons to move are associated with work, economic reasons, so looking for employment or ways to diversify income. In second place, family reunion. So they're moving to reunite with husbands or another family member. Then the third reason was seeking to improve or acquire different skills or acquire higher level of formal education. Environmental stressors were ranked very, very low in the order because it's not what people are thinking about when they're asked point-blank, "what's the main reason for migration?"

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*Issah:* The village I come from currently has a population of about 15,000 people. Considering that my grandmother was born here, this place is special to me. This was a village where our family had a role, where we have our lineage from the royal family, the family of chiefs. So I am very deeply rooted in the community because of my lineage. The people here all farm vegetables, tomatoes, onions, and okra. It's easy to cultivate them in our area, if you have access to water. This region was rich in food. Our founding fathers and the regime established a tomato factory here, because at that time there was an abundance of tomatoes. If you ask people who grew up in the Upper East Region, they will tell you we never had a problem because fruit and vegetables were growing all year round, even to a point that the tomato factory could not process the harvest anymore. Because of the negligence of our conservative government the factory became a white elephant. It cost a lot but wasn't productive anymore.

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*Issah:* Currently I live in the Accra Delta. It's a big city, a big city with opportunities

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abound. Opportunities for white collar jobs and menial jobs and hustling. The population is around 200,000.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* One of HABITABLE's main research aims in Ghana is to understand the reasons people cite for leaving their homes. How do individual perceptions of climate change influence these migration decisions? Rachel Keeton explains more.

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*Rachel Keeton:* Environmental and climate change, it's almost never given as the main reason that people decide to migrate. Whereas with the method that I'm working with, which is called fuzzy cognitive mapping, which is basically where you're interviewing individuals and creating a mental model of their kind of worldview, it's an entirely different story. It's an open question that says, what were the factors that influenced your decision to migrate? And this is really different than the results you get from a survey, with sort of multiple choice answers. So people can say, well, this x, y, z. It's because of the differences in the methods and the way they pull information out of people. The fuzzy cognitive mapping adds a lot of nuance to our understanding of the whole kind of climate related migration in general.

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*Issah:* It's family you depend on. We base ourselves on the extended family system. Everybody comes to support you if you have a need. So for everyone, whenever one person has a problem, it becomes a collective problem. It's a good thing. The collectivity.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Even when environmental changes make life harder, that bond to the place where family and community are rooted can greatly influence whether someone decides to migrate and, if so, to where and for how long.

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*Issah:* Here in Accra, you are meeting many people from a different background with different cultures. So you learn to shake off some of your own beliefs, traditional systems and culture to be able to adjust to the current environment that you find yourself in. Just that you miss that kind of bond as a family. The connection with the people back home. The social harmony.

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*Rachel Keeton:* One of the key differences from what we've seen in the research and the kind of narratives that we hear, particularly in Western media, is that, first of all, the vast majority of migrating people are staying close to home, particularly within the African continent.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* People go from a village to village, sort of in migration research we call stepwise migration.

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*Rachel Keeton:* And it's a very small minority that is actually migrating internationally.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* Climate migration can be politicized, particularly in global North countries. It has to do with the way that it is presented. You know, it often really is around bombastic figures. 1.3 billion people will be displaced and forced to move. And the evidence so far points to the contrary, that such migration will continue to take place within the borders of countries and might become even more short distance as people will try to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* You are listening to *Voices on the Move*, a podcast on how climate influences people's mobility.

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*Issah:* Why I think the onus lies on governments that prioritize actions to mitigate the effects of climate change. It's just that our leaders have not committed to eradicating poverty. They want to appear as if they were fighting. They want to appear like they are working, but they are not really committed to these things. If so, they would ensure that they establish a system and a structure of funding that works. For instance, the irrigation system is a large-scale kind of investment and it should be coming out of there.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* What Issah's arguing for is that politicians at both national and international levels need to rethink their approach to climate change and how to mitigate its most destructive impacts. But there is also an urgent need to reconsider migration, how it is shaped by climate change, and the challenges and opportunities it brings.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* Human mobility should be a cornerstone of development policy. Policies should see mobility and migration as a way to support and recognize translocal aspects of livelihoods. So people might make different livelihoods in different places.

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*Issah:* What is wicked is the obvious fact that our government seems to formulate policies which at the end, benefit them, rather than the people. People have been voting for leaders who are now misleaders. The Minister of Food and Agriculture should make sure to prioritize more on resources for plants, for food, and jobs.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Issa points out a solution that would make a significant difference for the region, providing essential water resources for villages that predominantly rely on small scale farming.

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*Issah:* There is a need for a coordinated structured irrigation system, which cuts into the various rivers that flow within the Northern Territory. The irrigation system should be a calibration system that runs through the communities and makes it possible for more communities to tap into the source so that they can get their water supplies to do their farming.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Following the White Volta River in the northern region of Ghana, we meet with Lamin, another man of Issa's generation who grew up and still lives in this rural area.

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*Lamin:* I was born and bred here. Lungbunga is located in the Northern Region of Ghana. Some communities have fishermen along the White Volta River, which is not far away from the community. In the past, you wouldn't get a car to come here.

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*Lamin:* My family and I, we used to do some crop farming. Soya beans and maize. You know, we weren't farming to sell. Farming was to feed the family. It was just for the family. So even when we had some crops and produce to sell, we wouldn't get a huge market for it. The next bigger town, Tamale, is just too far. With the increasing rainfall and unpredictable weather, it's becoming even more difficult. If you have spent all your money on farming and then see it all washed away by the river, how will you get money in your pocket? How will you feed your family? We needed money, so we decided to go south to Kumasi.

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*Lamin:* Moving really helped me. In Kumasi, I got to know some new friends who helped me and gave me financial support so I could buy incubators for a hatchery. Now I'm back in Lungbunga. I'm on livestock farming. I do animal husbandry, but I didn't go to school to acquire this knowledge. I just have a feeling, a passion for animals, and now it's turned into my business.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* One topic the HABITABLE project explores is the so-called tipping points that lead to a decision to migrate. Especially in the context of climate and environmental changes.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* When we speak about tipping points for migration in

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Ghana, it's important to differentiate between objective reality and personal perceptions or personal beliefs.

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*Rachel Keeton:* What is reality for you is your perception for all of us, right? And how we make decisions is based on perception. It's not based on reality. And that changes all the time. It's based on our emotions, our life experiences.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* The project's research aims to better understand the point at which people are forced to leave, rather than choosing to leave.

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*Rachel Keeton:* What is that threshold where people can no longer produce enough crops to maintain their livelihoods? What is that threshold where people don't have enough water for their livestock? The idea of putting tipping points is to really try and identify that, so that we can act before we get to that place. And if we understand what that is, we can address it.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Recognizing that perceptions often drive people's migration decisions more than objective reality, highlights the importance of addressing both, the tangible and intangible aspects of climate change impacts.

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*Lamin:* Sure there is environmental change. In the old days when there was a cloud in the sky. I could tell you the time that the rain will come. But now I would have to lie. Yeah, I, I really can't tell you. The way the White Volta River has been flooding is new. It wasn't so huge like it is today. The floods were always limited to a certain time. Now it's flooded for a month or more. Heavy rainfalls can destroy everything. Floods wash away the soil, the fertile soil in the farm, which is the source for our plants. The source for a good yield. After flooding, it all gets soaked in the water and then rots. We could make use of the water, yeah, we would need the water to rise up over the banks and reach other areas. And therefore we need an irrigation system so the water can do a good job for us. Also, for our livestock, it's water we need. After flooding, a huge portion of the land is covered with water, so animals only have a small portion left to find food.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Issah's region is prone to flooding from the White Volta River, making agriculture harder and daily life much more unpredictable. But it's not uninhabitable. The HABITABLE project aims to uncover what drives people, either to migrate or stay put in their communities under these challenging conditions.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* The approach we are deploying in the project diverges from previous analysis of hotspots of climate change, for example, because we are

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including the social identity and construction of places. People are connected to places, attached to places, and they want to be able to adapt in the places that they live. So in many ways, we're really going deeper by really understanding the social dimension, the social identity and connection that people have to places.

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*Lamin:* I cannot run away from Lungbunga because of ancestral grounds. Our great grandfathers were buried here. We want to die here, too, and we can still live here.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* It's not that people can't or don't want to adapt by staying and adjusting to their changing conditions, but in doing so, they are often dependent on the infrastructure around them.

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*Lamin:* Thing that would help me stay in Lungbunga is potable water. A sustainable source, this is what we need. And then we need a good hospital, a clinic, and also the roads need to be fixed to bridge the gap from my community to Tamale to sell my produce there.

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*Lamin:* Instead of thinking what the NGOs or the governments should do, I think in the community we should rather focus on planting more trees. But if there's no water to drink, how can you plant trees? How can you water them? So water is what we need most. I think additional vocational skills training for our people is very important to keep the community running without a famine. But new skills and trades need to be useful to the people here. If your neighbors can't pay for your services, who would you supply your new expertise to? If they can't buy, you can't sell something.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* In villages where the market for new skills and products is limited and the distances between towns are considerable, migration to a city can be an opportunity to supplement the family's finances.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* Households might decide to send one of their members to work in Accra for a period of time, so that that individual can send remittances back to the household. Remittances being money that migrants send back to support livelihoods.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Remittances don't always come in the form of money sent from a migrant to their family back home. As Ricardo explains, there is another common type of remittance.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* When the migrant goes away, learns new skills, new

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techniques, is exposed to a different agricultural technologies or improvements, and then brings back that knowledge, either through return migration or when that migrant is spending time with their family, this is a different type of remittances, which is known as social remittances.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* People adapt in many different ways, and mobility is an integral and long standing part of that adaptability.

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*Ricardo Safra de Campos:* And what the future policies in Ghana can do, is to stop coming with policies that are predominantly assuming a sedentary lifestyle.

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*Rachel Keeton:* We kind of forget how much a migrant remains connected to their place of origin. We talk about migration as a choice that's made, and I would kind of like to just normalize it. Migration is not good or bad. It's just part of people's lives.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Thank you for listening to this episode of Voices on the Move. You'll find links to the HABITABLE project research that informed this episode in the show notes. A special thank you goes to Issa and Lamine for sharing their stories with us. To protect their identities, we've changed their names. Thank you also to our experts. Dr. Rachel Keeton and Dr. Ricardo Safra de Campos for their insights. Join us next time as we travel to Canada. There, we'll hear from people who directly experienced how environmental disasters can make their towns uninhabitable from one day to the next.

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*Sophia Burton (Host):* Voices on the Move is a podcast series developed by Migration Matters, York University, Samuel Hall, and the HABITABLE research project. It is funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and HABITABLE, an EU funded Horizon research project. The podcast is hosted by the Dahdaleh Institute for Global Health Research at York University. Our producer and senior story editor is Bernadette Klausberger. Our editorial team includes Frankie Reid and Isabelle Schwengler. The series is edited by Line Schulz. Audio engineering by Tim Strasburger-Schmidt, and Eduard Hutuleac. Sound design and original music by Eliah Arnold. Studio facilities provided by alias film und sprachtransfer. The voice actors in this episode are Jeff Burrell and Nick Welsh. I'm Sophia Burton, your host. Until next time, with more Voices on the Move.