

VoicesOnTheMove_EP07 Transcript

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Stacey: If we Maasai women only do farming and livestock farming, climate change will really destroy our lives more and more.

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Rita: The situation for women hasn't improved much. We're often overlooked when it comes to decision making and resource distribution.

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Nassim Majidi: "Women may lack representation simply because women lack wisdom." And this is a quote from one of our interviews. So this is the reality we live in.

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Sophia Burton (Host): Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change. Around the world, women are more dependent on natural resources like firewood, water, and crops for household chores, yet they have less access to these resources. They're also often the ones to eat less when food is scarce, are pulled out of school when their labor is needed, or are forced into early marriages to support their families. In many climate vulnerable areas, men often migrate for work, leaving women behind to manage households and communities. All of this puts women on the frontlines of climate change adaptation. How can we ensure that women's experiences and wisdom are reflected in climate change and mobility policies? Welcome to Voices on the Move, where we delve into stories of climate change, migration, and potential solutions. I'm Sophia Burton from Migration Matters, and this episode is a collaboration with Samuel Hall, a social enterprise specializing in migration and displacement research.

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Sophia Burton (Host): In Kenya's Great Rift Valley, we meet with Stacey. Stacey is a Maasai woman and gender activist.

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Stacey: We love nature, including the wild animals and the trees. But the environment changes. Normally we know the months that we can farm, but now it is unpredictable. You can plant today, but tomorrow there is a lot of sun and it burns everything, and even the areas that were never flooded, nowadays they are flooded.

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Sophia Burton (Host): Kenya contributes less than 0.1% to global greenhouse emissions annually. Yet despite this, the country faces significant climate challenges, including erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, rising temperatures, and elevated sea levels.

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Nassim Majidi: Women are disproportionately affected by climate change. They are

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more reliant on natural resources for their day to day chores, but at the same time they have less access to them.

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Sophia Burton (Host): This is Nassim Majidi, co-founder of Samuel Hall, who has spent seven years working in Kenya. Researchers at Samuel Hall have documented the experiences and coping strategies of the Maasai, revealing how environmental changes impact mobility and require gender sensitive climate adaptation.

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Nassim Majidi: I think it's important to recognize that there have been a lot of advances in climate change response and programs, but the research shows that they oftentimes are still gender blind. We need to start by looking at how climate, gender and mobility, but also conflict are connected, and then not just address these issues separately, but look at the bigger picture and look at the different ways in which supporting women's voices is critical.

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Stacey: Normally Maasai people migrate when there are a lot of droughts. Our men usually migrate and look for greener land for the cows to graze. Sometimes when a man migrates, he goes to an area where the people do not want him to come with his cows. This causes conflict between people and families of different areas. Nowadays, men have to go far to find more grazing land for their cattle, and you get a woman left alone in the home for one, two, or three months and she has to do everything.

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Nassim Majidi: So we have seen this in Somalia, in Nigeria, Afghanistan, in Kenya, and many of the countries where we, as Samuel Hall, conduct research. Climate induced displacement forces women to take on additional economic, household, and community responsibilities.

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Stacey: I think the role of a woman has really become more of a business woman. The days when my husband is around, it's a 50/50 division of labor between us. But the days when he is not there, I wake up in the morning, take the kids to school, come back to prepare the house, go to the farm, farm, come back to go to work at our butchery. Get out of there and go to the office to work for another 1 or 2 hours. So you see, I have to do everything alone.

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Nassim Majidi: On the one hand, mobility and displacement can provide new opportunities to improve women's and men's lives. It can lead to changes in gender roles that can change previously oppressive gender relations. But this process can also cement or worsen existing gender inequalities.

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Sophia Burton (Host): In collaboration with the United Nations Development Program, or UNDP, Samuel Hall conducted a research study to encourage women-led climate strategies in Africa.

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Stacey: Women are at a very high risk when their men are gone and they are left alone at home. We are not safe, because the man in the family is the security and if people maybe want to harm us, they'll just do it. When mothers have to leave during the day to collect firewood or water, you never know who will come to the house and rape the girls.

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Stacey: It can be the case that when the husbands come back, they think the wives have been misbehaving and doing things behind their backs, which also causes conflict within families. And if the men have lost some cows or have no cows anymore, they will sell their daughters so they can get new cows. They see girls as livestock, like their cows, and they use them to solve their problems and get money and accumulate wealth again.

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Sophia Burton (Host): While Stacey appreciates the culture and cultural values of the Maasai, she reveals that beneath this cultural richness lies a problematic reality for women. Stacey's observations resonate with Samuel Hall's research. With men leaving the household, women face particular risks and they shoulder additional responsibilities, including securing food and walking long distances for water. What can be done to support women to become more independent and adapt better to climate change?

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Nassim Majidi: We approach your question through three dimensions that I believe we all need to act on, and these are the cultural, the economic, and the political dimensions. So let's break them down first at the cultural level, we first need to begin here with a look at how patriarchy and power relations in many societies still profoundly influence gender roles.

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Stacey: I think there is a big problem in our culture. The woman is owned by the man. Women don't own land and assets. Assets are for men. Land is for men.

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Nassim Majidi: Hearing from the woman we interviewed in Kenya and in other countries, women need more support in accessing and deciding on financial resources and assets. The systems, whether it's cash based programing, whether it's financial services, that can actually benefit them and lead them to make decisions and not end up in the hands of men making the decisions.

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Sophia Burton (Host): To deal with strained incomes and gain autonomy, Kenyan women often form groups or "Chamas" as they are known, or village savings and loans associations. Through these channels, they access financial resources, such as short term loans, to invest in climate adaptive farm inputs, water storage tanks for the rainy season, or to pay school fees. Some also turn to women focused microfinance institutions, like the Kenya Women Finance Trust, to borrow high interest loans when needed. However, the repayment of these loans becomes a struggle due to poor farm yields. But there are other cultural barriers, too.

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Stacey: And if I do my "Chama" and I get a small amount of money out of it and buy a cow, I still don't have access to the cow I bring home, or the permission to do anything with it. If it comes to the home, it is the man's. Women always see themselves as lower than men and they don't really know their rights. So once they get to know their rights, and once men are educated about the rights of women, too, I think the community will be so much better.

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Nassim Majidi: We really need to be better at integrating women's indigenous knowledge systems in the response to climate change. Due to the lack of inclusion in many formal institutional structures, their voices might not be heard there, but what we found is that women then perceive that forming their own groups is a form of power, using them to advocate for and to support themselves to achieve a wider reach and impacts.

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Sophia Burton (Host): One successful example from Kenya of how women have been supporting themselves is the Naretoi Suswa Women CBO, founded by Stacey with five other women. These women are either survivors of female genital mutilation or, like Stacey, were married at an early age.

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Stacey: We Maasai women never had that free voice and democratic rights to stand in front of men and talk. With our community-based organization we've come far. We started Naruto Suswe Women CBO in 2019. We work on women's empowerment, and we do climate action and environmental work, because if we leave our lands and neglect the environment and fight only for women, the environment will not be beneficial for us either. So it's all connected.

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Nassim Majidi: Women's self-help groups for capacity building are really crucial, because these are the groups that act as a channel for passing information onto the community. So women have been great communicators, but also great conveners in those settings.

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Stacey: Most recently, we have organized a roadshow, a campaign for couples. Every couple should plant trees in their home. Planting trees depends on both, men and women. If a couple works together, then it is more likely to be a success.

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Sophia Burton (Host): As traditional norms continue to shape realities and responses, what do policymakers need to be better prepared for the challenges ahead?

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Nassim Majidi: Three words: prevention, inclusion, and coalition building. So first, there needs to be more investment in prevention. But prevention also means addressing negative coping mechanisms, where communities extract and sell resources like wood, water, and grass.

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Stacey: We've just developed different information sessions with women to teach them about climate change and not to cut down trees, but most of them still depend on charcoal. They're cutting the trees down for the charcoal they need for cooking and heating, because it's a woman who wants firewood, you see, she is the one that cooks. She is the one that prepares food for the kids.

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Nassim Majidi: In Kenya, the government has proposed supporting women's initiatives through practical solutions by promoting, for example, tree planting exercises in collaboration with the private sector. So those are first steps.

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Sophia Burton (Host): Nassim highlights the government's need to work on prevention responses, balancing immediate needs like affordable energy supplies for households, with long term solutions such as the use of renewable raw materials like biogas.

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Stacey: We wrote a proposal to an organization that provides biogas because if we could get biogas for our homes, we would not need to cut down trees anymore. I think if women are empowered with skills to do something other than farming, it would help a lot. Personally, I've gone to different counties to check what other women are doing, to see if we can adapt it here in my area too. And you can see what other women are doing. Beadwork, for example. Beadwork can't be affected by climate change, because you don't need to wait for it to rain so that you can do these kinds of craft and needlework.

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Nassim Majidi: Women are diversifying their livelihoods, venturing into economic activities that are less affected by climate shocks. So, for example, body decorations

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using henna, rope making, mat weaving, or domestic work in high income households. That's how they're adapting. But women in Kenya also told us on the political dimension that, for example, the county government needs to improve infrastructure in the regions where they live so that the products that they generate through their farming can actually leave the farm and make it to the markets, generating an income for them.

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Stacey: The traditional knowledge and real education comes from our Maasai leaders and elders. I wish I had the funds to bring these different elders to talk to the community and teach people about our traditions, rather than depending only on external NGOs and organizations. I feel like that would encourage the community to take the initiative and save the environment.

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Sophia Burton (Host): You are listening to Voices on the Move - climate change and migration stories from around the world.

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Sophia Burton (Host): Now let's travel northwest to Bokkos in Nigeria's Plateau State. Bokkos is known for its rolling hills, lush green valleys, and vast agricultural lands where mice, yam, and potatoes are grown. Here we meet Rita, a middle aged woman who has recently moved to Bokkos from the nearby village of Bot.

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Rita: We were living peacefully in the village until the violence in the region forced us to leave. We were attacked by gangs of young men. Moving has not been a good experience. It's a horrible experience. It's very difficult for us here to feed our family. We wish the people attacking us would leave us alone, so that we can have peace and things can get better for us.

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Sophia Burton (Host): Samuel Hall's research in Nigeria with the UNDP reveals high chances of men being recruited into criminal groups, due to intense conflict over land and water. This competition between herders against farmers gives rise to communal tensions, especially as these groups frequently have different ethnic origins. Women, responsible for gathering essential resources, face increased labor and threats of violence. Many are forced to leave their homes in search of safety.

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Rita: In Bokkos town, we were able to secure land, but it's not as good as the one in the village. It's overcrowded in the city. In the village we had vast, fertile land. We understood everything in the village. We knew how to farm. Even during floods. There were hills we could climb for safety. But here the land is not as good. And it's very difficult to fetch water. The boreholes around here are not working. Most people in Bokkos town built houses on the water paths, so the rain is not enough for

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our crops. During the dry season, we have to go far to the river to fetch water and it's very far.

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Sophia Burton (Host): How are women coping with these increasing challenges, and what sustainable solutions are being implemented to support them? We turn to Priscilla Achapka, a Nigerian environmental activist and founder of the Women Environment Program, founded in 1997. The Women Environment Program has transformed lives by addressing environmental pollution, conflict transformation, climate change, and governance. Priscilla also serves in leadership roles with the UN Environment Program and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council.

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Priscilla Achapka: People don't understand the links between climate change and displacement. Most of the time, displacement is only seen as a political issue, but climate change, as we can see, affects women more directly, because they have to trek kilometers looking for water and for firewood. My advocacy started making sure that in terms of policy making, women will also evolve to be able to have a voice to state what was affecting them.

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Rita: We need water for almost everything in the house. We don't have tap water here, so we have to buy water in sachets from pushcart vendors, but there often isn't enough money to buy it.

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Rita: Men don't stay at home. Everytime they go somewhere you don't see them till night. If you tell the man to assist in anything, he will say he can't. He will say that he has some kind of injury or something. Even if you are not well, as a woman, you must always try your best to get something to eat. The woman is with the children when they are feeling hungry, you have to worry about how to get something to feed your children. Like the Bible said, he made the woman a helper. We are always helping our husbands. In the evening he just takes a bath and goes to Bokokos town to meet his friends. So basically we can't ever leave the house. Everything rests on the women.

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Priscilla Achapka: When men go somewhere else, women stay back because they need to look after their children, need to take care of the elderly, and of course, as caregivers at home they're faced with a lot of challenges.

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Sophia Burton (Host): Samuel Hall's research indicates that women are not only burdened with domestic labor, but are also more involved in agriculture than men. Women's farming responsibilities often require them to work outside, even during harsh weather, increasing their risk of heat related illnesses.

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Rita: Last year on my farm, I planted Irish potatoes, but the plants suffered damage because of the excessive rain. Instead of getting the usual 60 or 70 bags that I would get from that large farm, I only managed to harvest 11 bags. Our yields have declined.

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Priscilla Achapka: First and foremost, the farmers need information on weather conditions for better planning. There's the need to know the kind of soil texture that will be used. So yes, they need a lot of insights on how they can do their farming.

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Rita: Farms here need fertilizer before you start farming, so providing affordable fertilizers is very important for us. We have some crops that we can farm without fertilizer. When I started farming as a young lady, I farmed fonio. This is also known as acha. It's a grain that doesn't need fertilizer. Growing up, we learned these things from our parents.

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Sophia Burton (Host): In Nigeria we can already see several examples of community led adaptation strategies to climate change.

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Priscilla Achapka: What kind of innovations we can bring onto women, for instance, cookstoves, alternative sources of cooking instead of firewood . But we also think that women have so much indigenous knowledge. So when we go to them, we sit down and we prioritize how they can work together on the issues of what they want precisely.

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Rita: In markets, particularly in potato and corn markets, it's the women who hold sway and who are often the key decision makers. If you go to the market, you will see women. If you go to churches, you will see women, and on the farm, too. That's why women are more and more involved in politics.

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Sophia Burton (Host): In 2020, the Federal Ministry of Environment in Nigeria launched a Gender Action Plan. The main objective of this action plan is to ensure that women can equally access and benefit from climate change programs and funds. Beyond gender mainstreaming, the experts we've heard from today emphasized the need to address poverty in the wake of climate change, as well as the fight over land, where women are still the most disadvantaged.

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Rita: Access to water remains one of the most important issues in our community. While some households have boreholes, many others, like ours, still depend on rivers which can be unreliable. I think it's essential to involve women in decision

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making processes related to water access. We need to be able to sustain ourselves properly, in spite of climate change. And growing up with good innovations, we will see a better future.

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Sophia Burton (Host): That wraps up this episode of Voices on the Move. You'll find links to the research that informed this episode in the show notes. A special thank you goes to Stacey and Rita for sharing their stories with us. To protect their identities, we've either changed their names or used only their first name. Thank you also to our experts, Dr. Nassim Majidi and Priscilla Achapka, for their insights. We hope this series has helped you better understand the complex relationship between climate change and migration. If so, we encourage you to share Voices on the Move with two or three friends or colleagues, to help spread awareness about this important topic.

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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. The project is funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and 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 Devyani Nighoskar, Mwara Namelok, Wendy Indira, and Frankie Reid. The series is edited by Line Schulz. Audio engineering and sound design by Tim Strasburger-Schmidt and Eduard Hutuleac. Original music by Eliah Arnold. Studio facilities provided by alias film und sprachtransfer. The voice actors in this episode are Nele Mailin Obermueller and Lizzie Roberts. I'm Sophia Burton, your host. Thank you for listening to and sharing Voices on the Move.