

# The AI Side-Hustle Field Guide

For anyone with a laptop, a phone and an internet connection who wants to earn more from AI work — and learn real skills without spending money.

**Everything listed here is free to join unless marked otherwise.** If anyone asks you for money to access a platform in this guide, it is a scam.

## START HERE — THIS WEEK

1. Sign up to 2–3 platforms in Section 01. Free, no fees, ever.
2. Register at [ajiradigital.go.ke](https://ajiradigital.go.ke) — free government training, plus free centres with computers and internet across Kenya.
3. Set up your payment rail (Section 02) so money can actually reach you.
4. Begin the learning path (Section 03) — 30–60 minutes a day is enough.

## 01 Earn — AI work platforms

You already do annotation. The two moves that raise income are: **(a)** qualify on several platforms so work never dries up, and **(b)** move from basic labelling into higher-paying task types — **rating AI answers, writing prompts, and fact-checking**. Those tasks pay more per hour and reward good English and careful reading, not technical skills.

### Remote platforms currently active for Kenyan workers

#### Outlier

[outlier.ai](https://outlier.ai)

Scale AI's platform (it absorbed Remotasks). Rating and improving AI answers. Weekly payouts via PayPal or Airtm. Very active in Kenya.

#### DataAnnotation

[dataannotation.tech](https://dataannotation.tech)

Well-paid AI training tasks. The entry test is strict and many people wait for approval — apply, do the test carefully, be patient. Pays via PayPal.

#### Alignerr

[alignerr.com](https://alignerr.com)

Labelbox's platform matching people to AI projects. Strongest if you have a speciality: languages, science, writing, coding.

#### Mercor

[mercor.com](https://mercor.com)

AI-training marketplace — apply with a CV and an AI-run interview. Rates rise sharply with domain skills.

#### OneForma

[oneforma.com](https://oneforma.com)

Beginner-friendly microtasks, plus language and voice projects.

#### CrowdGen (Appen)

[crowdgen.com](https://crowdgen.com)

Long-running crowd platform: search evaluation, data collection, annotation.

#### Clickworker

[clickworker.com](https://clickworker.com)

Microtasks; also a gateway to UHRS (Microsoft's task marketplace). Some tasks work on a phone.

#### Toloka

[toloka.ai](https://toloka.ai)

Microtasks with a low entry barrier. Lower pay, but a useful filler platform.

### TELUS Digital — AI Community

[telusdigital.com](https://telusdigital.com)

'Online data analyst' and search-rater roles — steady part-time work rating search and map results.

**Rule of thumb:** stay qualified on at least three platforms and treat every single one as temporary. Remotasks closed in Kenya in 2024 with almost no notice, and people who relied on it lost their main income overnight. Diversification is your job security.

## Nairobi companies with real offices — stable jobs and a promotion path

### Sama

[sama.com/careers](https://sama.com/careers)

AI data company with Nairobi offices. Employment, training and progression rather than gig work.

### CloudFactory

[cloudfactory.com](https://cloudfactory.com)

Managed data teams with a long-standing Kenya workforce.

### Digital Divide Data (DDD)

[digitaldividedata.com](https://digitaldividedata.com)

Nairobi BPO doing ML data work — hiring annotators (including 3D/LiDAR roles) in 2026.

**The career ladder these companies offer:** Annotator » Quality reviewer » Team lead » Data operations. Every step pays more, and the experience transfers to remote international roles later.

## Your unfair advantage: languages

- **English + Swahili** (plus Sheng or any Kenyan language) is genuinely valuable. AI companies are actively building African-language datasets, and bilingual evaluators face far less competition. **List every language on every platform profile** and ask for language-specific projects.
- **Mozilla Common Voice** — [commonvoice.mozilla.org](https://commonvoice.mozilla.org) — contribute Swahili voice recordings. Unpaid, but it builds the open ecosystem and looks good on your profile.
- **Masakhane** — [masakhane.io](https://masakhane.io) — the open African-languages AI research community. Free to join; excellent for learning and networking with African AI researchers.

## When your skills grow: sell directly

**Upwork** ([upwork.com](https://upwork.com)) and **Fiverr** ([fiverr.com](https://fiverr.com)) let you sell annotation, transcription, data-entry and virtual-assistant services straight to clients — higher rates than platform queues once you have reviews.

## 02 Get paid — without losing money

- **PayPal to M-Pesa:** link your accounts inside the **M-Pesa app** (Global / international payments section) or dial \*840#. Small withdrawals usually land within minutes to hours. Expect to lose roughly **3–4% on the exchange rate** (reported figure) — that is the price of speed.
- **Payoneer** — [payoneer.com](https://payoneer.com) — used by Upwork and Fiverr; supports M-Pesa payout and is often better value for larger amounts.
- **Wise** — [wise.com](https://wise.com) — strong exchange rates; worth setting up once you earn regularly.
- **Names must match exactly.** Your PayPal, M-Pesa and national ID names have to be identical, or linking and withdrawals fail.

- **Keep two working payment methods.** Platforms change payout options without warning; never let one rail be a single point of failure.

## 03 Learn free — a 6-month path

30–60 minutes a day. Each phase makes the next one easier, and Phases 0–1 directly improve the quality of your platform work — which is what unlocks the better-paying task queues.

### PHASE 0 · WEEKS 1–2 — Set up your base

- **Ajira Digital** — [ajiradigital.go.ke](http://ajiradigital.go.ke) — free government training in online work, plus 100+ free youth centres with computers, internet and mentorship.
- **NYOTA Project** — dial \*254# — free training with a monthly stipend (reported KES 6,000) for Kenyans aged 18–29 with Form 4 or below. Rollout is phased — verify the current intake.
- **Coursera Financial Aid** — [coursera.org](http://coursera.org) — apply for aid on any paid course (including Google's AI certificates); approval typically takes about 15 days and makes the course free.

### PHASE 1 · MONTH 1 — Understand AI

- **Elements of AI** — [elementsofai.com](http://elementsofai.com) — free university course, no maths required.
- **DeepLearning.AI short courses** — [deeplearning.ai/short-courses](http://deeplearning.ai/short-courses) — free; the prompt-engineering courses directly raise your rating-task quality.

### PHASE 2 · MONTHS 2–3 — Learn Python

- **CS50 Python (Harvard)** — [cs50.harvard.edu/python](http://cs50.harvard.edu/python) — free, world-class.
- **freeCodeCamp** — [freecodecamp.org](http://freecodecamp.org) — free courses and certifications.
- **Kaggle Learn** — [kaggle.com/learn](http://kaggle.com/learn) — short, practical, with free cloud notebooks.

### PHASE 3 · MONTHS 4–6 — Data & machine learning basics

- **Hugging Face courses** — [huggingface.co/learn](http://huggingface.co/learn) — free courses on language models and AI agents.
- **fast.ai** — [fast.ai](http://fast.ai) — practical deep learning, completely free.
- **Zindi** — [zindi.africa](http://zindi.africa) — African data-science competitions with cash prizes. Join a team and learn by doing.

**Free computing power — no money needed:** **Google Colab** ([colab.research.google.com](http://colab.research.google.com)) and **Kaggle notebooks** give free GPU time for learning ML. **Google AI Studio** ([aistudio.google.com](http://aistudio.google.com)) gives a free Gemini API key for building projects. The free tiers of **Claude** and **ChatGPT** are your personal tutors — paste anything from this guide and ask them to explain or quiz you.

## 04 Kenya programmes & community

- **Microsoft AI Elevate National Skilling** — [smartacademy.go.ke](http://smartacademy.go.ke) — free national AI-skills programme run with Kenya's ICT Authority.
- **ALX Africa** — [alxafrica.com](http://alxafrica.com) — flagship tech and AI career programmes; Mastercard Foundation sponsorship brings the cost to about **\$5/month** for eligible learners.
- **Power Learn Project** — [powerlearnprojectafrica.org](http://powerlearnprojectafrica.org) — free software-development scholarships for young Africans.
- **KamiLimu** — [kamilimu.org](http://kamilimu.org) — free structured mentorship programme for tech students in Kenya.

- **Google Developer Group Nairobi** — [gdg.community.dev](https://gdg.community.dev) — free meetups; real-life networking beats any online course for finding opportunities.
- **Where news breaks first:** Kenyan tech Twitter/X, r/Kenya, and each platform's official Discord — new project openings and pay changes spread there before anywhere else.

## 05

## Protect yourself

### NON-NEGOTIABLE RULES

- **Never pay to join, 'activate', or 'unlock tasks'.** Legitimate platforms never charge workers — anyone selling registration, training slots or 'guaranteed approval' on WhatsApp or Telegram is scamming you.
- **Never buy or rent accounts, and never use VPNs or proxies to fake your location.** Platforms detect it, ban the account, and keep your unpaid earnings. (Some Kenyan forums recommend proxies — that advice costs people their balance.)
- **Diversify.** The Remotasks shutdown is the lesson: three platforms plus one application to a Nairobi employer is the safe setup.
- **Keep records.** A simple Google Sheet of hours and earnings protects you in payment disputes — and helps with KRA if your income grows.
- **Guard your ID.** Upload identity documents only on the official platform website, never to an 'agent'.

## 06

## The 90-day plan

WHEN	DO THIS
<b>Weeks 1–2</b>	Register on Outlier, DataAnnotation and OneForma. Register on the Ajira portal. Link PayPal and M-Pesa. Start Elements of AI.
<b>Weeks 3–4</b>	Pass platform qualification tests. Work 1–2 hours/day on tasks. Visit your nearest Ajira centre.
<b>Month 2</b>	Add Alignerr or Mercor. Start CS50 Python or freeCodeCamp. List all your languages on every profile and ask for Swahili projects.
<b>Month 3</b>	Apply to Sama, CloudFactory and DDD for stable roles. Enter one Zindi competition. Target the higher-paying evaluation and prompt-writing queues.

**After 90 days you should have:** three or more active platforms, a backup payment method, basic Python, and a CV that says '*AI data specialist*' — not '*gig worker*'.

Compiled July 2026 · Platforms, programmes and links change — always verify before sharing personal details, and remember: **you never pay to work.**