

CLICK CAPTIVES

THE UNSEEN STRUGGLE OF DATA WORKERS



**BY WILINGTON
SHITAWA**

CREDITS

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PREFACE

THIS COMIC STRIP DELVES INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF DATA ANNOTATORS IN KENYA WHO HAVE WORKED FOR TWO PROMINENT OUTSOURCING COMPANIES, SAMA AND CLOUD FACTORY. IT SHEDS LIGHT ON THE STRIKING SIMILARITIES IN THE CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKERS AT BOTH COMPANIES, INCLUDING LOW WAGES, LONG WORKING HOURS, AND THE DASHING OF HOPES AND DREAMS. THE COMIC STRIP'S SIDE-BY-SIDE PORTRAYAL OF LIFE AT SAMA AND CLOUD FACTORY HINTS AT AN UNSETTLING POSSIBILITY: THAT THE STRIKINGLY SIMILAR CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKERS AT THESE COMPANIES COULD BE THE RESULT OF BEHIND-THE-SCENES COLLABORATION OR SHARED PRACTICES WITHIN THE OUTSOURCING INDUSTRY.

BY WILINGTON SHITAWA.

INTRO

Meet Wilington and Edwin, two young men from the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. Growing up, they dreamt of a better life, one where they could escape poverty and build a future for themselves and their families. However, high unemployment meant those dreams were difficult to achieve. As the tech industry began to grow in Kenya, Wilington and Edwin saw an opportunity and took it. They believed that working as data annotators for outsourcing companies like Cloud Factory and Sama would be their ticket to a brighter tomorrow. Little did they know, their dreams would soon collide with a harsh reality - one filled with long hours, low pay, and constant uncertainty. This is their story, a tale of exploitation, resilience, and the realities of being a data worker in the global supply chain of the AI industry.



Wilington and Edwin meet at a local Checkers place

Hey bro, Habari yako, it's been a while. How have you been since we last worked together at Sama?

Mzuri sana bro. Honestly, I'm still trying to process everything we went through. The long hours, low pay, and constant fear of losing our jobs.

You know, Edwin, sometimes I feel like I know the streets of Hamburg better than the people who actually live there.

Right? We spent so many hours labeling those German streets for that one project. It's surreal.

That's what data annotation is all about. Labeling countless images, drawing bounding boxes, and identifying objects for hours on end.

I remember when we first started at Cloud Factory. We were so full of hope, thinking this would be our ticket out of the slums.



The company representative made it sound so promising. High salaries, career growth, and being part of the tech revolution.

Cloud Factory



The long hours were brutal. We worked 9 hours a day, and when deadlines were tight, it could stretch to 11 hours or more.



And the worst part? We never got paid for those extra hours. It was like our time and effort meant nothing to them.

I was constantly exhausted, both physically and mentally. It took a toll on my health and personal life.



The short contracts were a nightmare. I once got a 4-day contract, and the uncertainty of not knowing if it would be renewed was unbearable.



It was like living in constant fear of losing our jobs. We couldn't plan for the future or make any long-term commitments.



I felt trapped. Despite the terrible conditions, I kept working because I had no other job options. It was a choice between exploitation and poverty.

We were at the mercy of these companies. They knew we needed the work, and they used that power to keep us in line, no matter how bad it got.



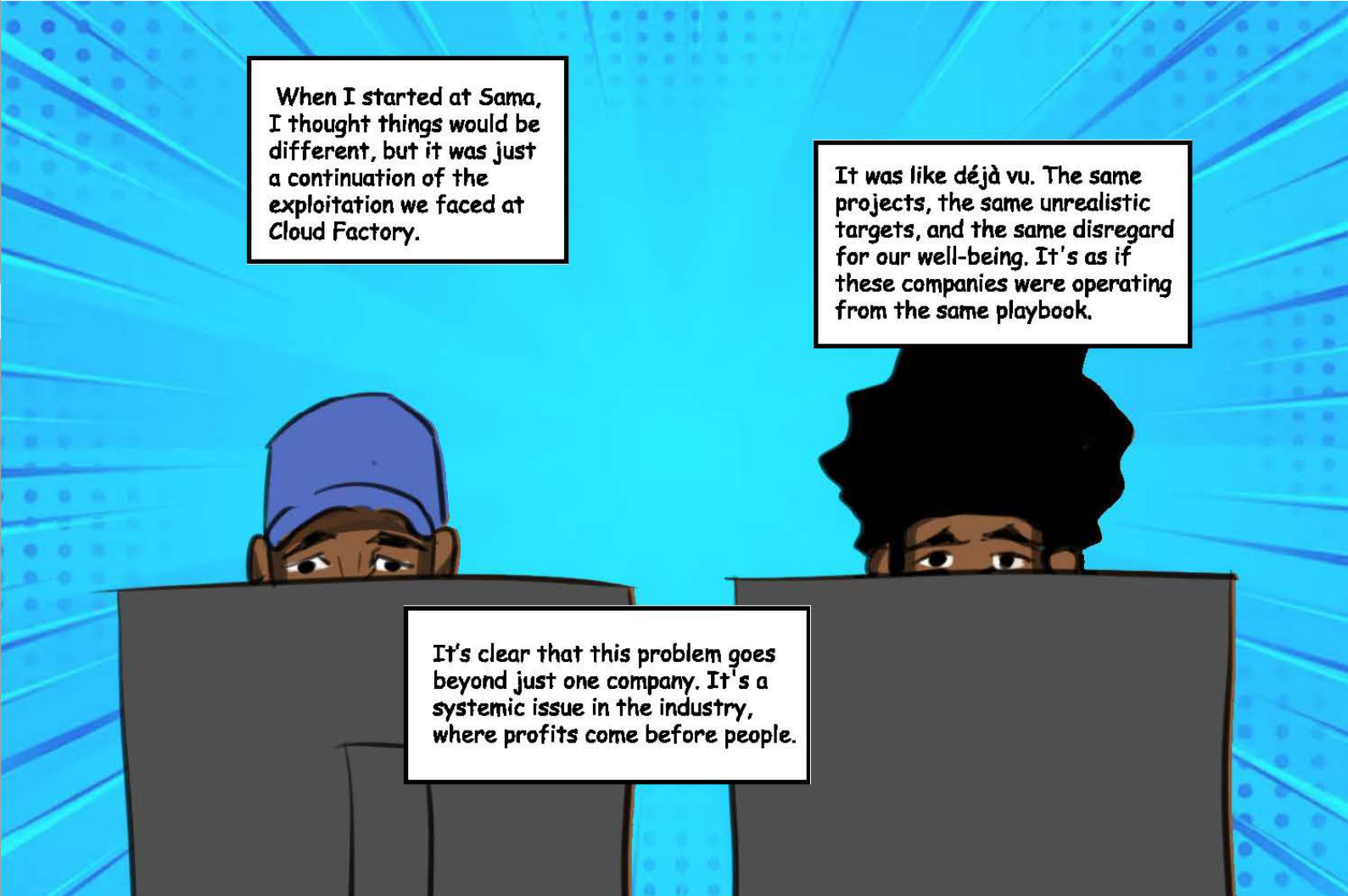
It's a sense of powerlessness that eats away at your dignity and self-worth. No one should have to go through that just to make ends meet.



A cartoon illustration of two men at a bar. The man on the left is seen from the back, wearing a blue baseball cap and a red t-shirt. The man on the right has dark curly hair and a beard, wearing a grey t-shirt. They are both holding orange bottles and clinking them together in a toast. The bar counter is dark brown, and the background is a warm reddish-brown with shelves holding several bottles of varying shapes and sizes.

We ended up at the bar so often,
just trying to cope with the stress
of the job.

That's when we heard about
Sama. We thought maybe
things would be different there.

A cartoon illustration of two men looking at computer monitors. The man on the left is wearing a blue baseball cap and a grey shirt. The man on the right has dark curly hair and a beard, wearing a grey shirt. They are both looking at their respective computer monitors, which are dark grey. The background is a bright blue with white diagonal lines and a pattern of small white dots, suggesting a digital or office environment.

When I started at Sama,
I thought things would be
different, but it was just
a continuation of the
exploitation we faced at
Cloud Factory.

It was like déjà vu. The same
projects, the same unrealistic
targets, and the same disregard
for our well-being. It's as if
these companies were operating
from the same playbook.

It's clear that this problem goes
beyond just one company. It's a
systemic issue in the industry,
where profits come before people.



Looking back, I wish we had known our rights. That we deserved fair pay, reasonable hours, and job security.

I hope our story can help shed light on the reality of data annotation work in Kenya. Maybe it can lead to some real change in the industry.

It's time for these companies to be held accountable for their actions and for the well-being of their workers to be prioritized.

CONCLUSION

The experiences of Wilington, Edwin, and countless other data annotators in Kenya's outsourcing industry highlight the urgent need for change. In the rapidly growing AI industry - where data annotation plays a critical role - fair labour practices, ethical standards, and the prioritization of workers' rights are essential. By sharing their stories, we can raise awareness and push for a future where no data worker has to endure exploitation for the sake of corporate profits. It's time to ensure that the advancement of AI technology goes hand in hand with the dignity and fair treatment of its human contributors.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WILINGTON SHITAWA IS A FORMER DATA ANNOTATOR AND QUALITY ANALYST WHO HAS WORKED AT BOTH CLOUD FACTORY AND SAMA IN NAIROBI, KENYA. HE IS ALSO A STUDENT OF COMPUTER NETWORKING TECHNOLOGY AT HOLLAND COLLEGE IN CANADA. DRIVEN BY A DESIRE TO EXPOSE THE EXPLOITATION OF WORKERS IN THE INDUSTRY, HE COLLABORATED WITH A TEAM OF RESEARCHERS, INCLUDING DR. MILAGROS MICELI, DR. ADIO DINIKA, KRYSTAL KAUFFMAN, LAURENZ SACHENBACHER, AND CAMILLA WAGNER, TO CREATE THIS POWERFUL COMIC STRIP. BY DRAWING FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCES AND INTERVIEWS WITH COLLEAGUES, WILINGTON AIMS TO SHED LIGHT ON THE HARSH REALITIES FACED BY DATA ANNOTATORS AND ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE IN THE INDUSTRY.