

# Our Work Has Value & No One Works for Free



## A Statement by Members of the DISE Collective

We are Black, Indigenous, minorities in the Global South and Women of Color advancing knowledge and understanding of our ancestors' and community's experience surviving and thriving within a capitalist system that undervalues our labour. As the descendants of workers, colonized peoples, mummies, nannies, wet nurses, domestics, and cleaners, we are acutely aware of the ways that our communities' labour has been taken for granted and devalued throughout history.[1] At one time, these essential yet historically devalued occupations were among the few available for women like us. Yet even as we have moved into new occupations the assumptions about our work often remains.[2]

In the face of oppression, economic exclusion, violence, and disaster, we have developed traditions and collective practices that help us meet the challenges of the 21st century.[3] Because we are motivated by our commitment to political and economic equity, as well as a commitment to social justice, we are happy to share our time, our experiences, and our skills with others in the spirit of solidarity and the collective good. [4]

Our intellectual and our community work involves costs that should not be taken for granted. For every Susu, Ajo, Chit, Hua, Meeting Turn, Pardna, Equub, Chama, Tanda or Boxhand, co-operative, caregiving and community building practice we organize, we offer our time, our minds, our expertise our bodies, and our energies, in the spirit of Ubuntu and for the collective good, known as Ujama.

It is not wrong to want to help others. It is not even wrong to help others in exchange for nothing, as we routinely do through mutual aid. There are instances when we might choose to share our knowledge and give our expertise without compensation, but those will be made as an individual member's conscious choice, and do not undermine the broader principle of this collective that all individuals deserve fair compensation for their labour.

We come from traditions of shared knowledge and we enact our sense of duty through service to others in our community. However, when those with resources to pay for our labour constantly ask for free advice, ideas, and training without offering compensation, or very little, the request for free labour becomes a burden, an expectation and an imposition.

Our knowledge and our expertise hold value. We would like those seeking our ideas and talents, to demonstrate an appreciation for our labour's value by acknowledging the level of contribution we are making to the field and compensating us accordingly.

Upholding the principle "No One Works for Free" will foster a society that values fairness, dignity, and the well-being of its members. It is through this acknowledgment that we can create an equitable, just and prosperous world for all.

*The DISE Collective, August 2023*

[1] Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race & Class*. Vintage, 1983.

[2] Glenn, Evelyn Nakano, "Racial ethnic women's labor: The intersection of race, gender, and class oppression. *Review of Radical Political Economy*, 1985;

[3] Gordon Nembhard, Jessica, *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Thought and Practice*, Penn State U Press, 2014; and Banks, Nina, "Black Women in the United States and Unpaid Collective Work: Theorizing the Community as Site of Production," *Review of Black Political Economy*, 2020.

[4] *The Banker Ladies*, DISE Collective production. <https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/the-banker-ladies/> Dir. by Eserly Mondesir