

Fiji returns to barter system as Covid-19 hits economy

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

Read paragraph 1 of the article.

- Are they fair exchanges, do you think?
- Which of the things listed would you want?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

superannuation	groceries	wreath	avenue	stimulus	reciprocity
resurgence	be spared	advocate	stretch out	utilities	barter

1. exchange goods or services for other goods or services instead of using money

2. make something, such as money, last for as long as possible _____
3. one of the methods you can use to achieve something _____
4. public services such as gas, water or electricity that are used by everyone _____
5. the restarting of something that quickly increases in influence, effect etc _____
6. not suffer from an unpleasant, painful or otherwise bad situation _____
7. something that encourages something to happen, develop or improve _____
8. money that you pay regularly into a special plan offered by some employers, which you then receive as a monthly income when you retire _____
9. food and other goods for the home that you buy regularly _____
10. a circle of flowers or leaves that you put on a grave to show that you are remembering the dead person

11. someone who strongly and publicly supports someone or something _____
12. a feeling of wanting to do the same thing for someone that they have done for you

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Level 3 • Advanced

Two piglets for a kayak: Fiji returns to barter system as Covid-19 hits economy

Resurgence of bartering across the Pacific with similar Facebook pages in Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu, as people lose jobs

Talei Tora

8 May, 2020

- Two piglets for a pre-loved kayak, a taxi ride in exchange for fresh produce, hot cross buns for online tutoring, an old carpet for a professional photography session, vegetable seedlings for homemade pies and offers to have backyards cleaned for prayers.
- These are just a few examples of the hundreds of barter trades that are taking place across Fiji since a Facebook page, Barter for Better Fiji, was created in response to sharp falls in employment due to coronavirus. The page now has more than 100,000 members, in a country of just under 900,000 people.
- “The primary reason for setting up the Facebook group was to help offer a solution to the current economic situation,” said Marlene Dutta, a business skills development consultant.
- “For many people across the world and Fiji, money will be harder to come by and even harder to stretch out. The idea is to have an avenue where people get some things they need or want without spending money, and that will help a lot and save their limited cash for bills, utilities, transport and other things.”
- The barter system is experiencing a resurgence across the Pacific with similar Facebook pages in Tonga (Barter for Change), two in Samoa (Barter for Better Samoa and Le Barter Samoa) with just over 1,000 members, and one in Vanuatu (Barter for Nambawan Life Vanuatu) as the island nations are beginning to face economic difficulties due to Covid-19.
- The Pacific region has largely been spared the Covid-19 outbreak. According to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, as at the end of April, 2020, there had only been recorded cases in six Pacific countries and territories – Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam and New Caledonia – which between them have reported 260 cases and seven deaths.
- However, most Pacific nations closed their borders due to coronavirus fears and are feeling the impact of the suspension of international travel. The International Monetary Fund has forecast a 2.7% decline in growth for the Pacific Island Countries with a 40% decline in tourism across the region.
- In Fiji, more than 40,000 people – nearly 5% of the country – have lost their jobs, predominantly in the tourism industry, since the outbreak began. Tourism, particularly from Australia and New Zealand, makes up 34% of the country’s GDP. Whilst the Fijian government announced a stimulus package that allows affected workers to make a one-time withdrawal of between 500–1000 Fijian dollars (US\$228–\$456) from their superannuation funds, many families are feeling the pinch.
- Maca T Tabuya, a church pastor in Nadi, Fiji, has conducted her ninth barter trade to help families that are struggling due to the Covid-19 crisis.
- “Initially, I bartered out of interest, but I now barter to help other people as I noticed that there are many families that need groceries because they have lost their jobs, and they don’t have much to trade. I offer them groceries for whatever they are able to trade because I would love to help them.”
- She has also used the barter system to obtain groceries for communities in Kadavu, in the south of the country, one of the areas that was hit by category-4 Tropical Cyclone Harold on 10 April, 2020, which left 6,240 people staying in 197 evacuation centres around the country.
- “I even traded yard-cleaning services by my boys for groceries that they will take back to the farm in Kadavu,” says Tabuya.
- Vasiti Masi lost her job as a waitress due to coronavirus, but she has been able to use the Barter for Better Fiji page to keep her start-up flower business afloat, trading brownies and other baked goods for equipment for her business.
- “I lost my job during Covid-19, and Barter for Better Fiji has helped me trade cakes for flowers and wreath bases to help with my business,” Vasiti said. “This page has given me hope to think about what I can do differently to keep my business alive, and I know that what I have to trade, other people need. So it’s like a big community of sharing, and I love it,” Vasiti added.

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Level 3 • Advanced

- 15 The Facebook page is a modern version of a centuries-old traditional practice, says Alisi Daurewa, an advocate and consultant for people-centred development.
- 16 “Indigenous Fijians practised *veisa* (a kind of traditional barter system in the Pacific communities) in various situations, which was birthed out of the value of reciprocity. For example, the coastal people of Nadroga (in the

Western part of Viti Levu, Fiji’s main island) could make salt, so they would take it to their relatives up in the highlands of Nadroga/Navosa, and those people, they have lovely wild pigs – the pork is tasty – so they would exchange salt from the sea for wild pigs from the highlands,” she said.

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3 Comprehension check

Are the statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. The Barter for Better Fiji page was set up in response to the devaluation of the Fijian currency.
2. More than 10% of the population of Fiji have already signed up to the bartering page.
3. The bartering page allows the people of Fiji to save the cash they would usually spend on utilities for groceries instead.
4. The two bartering pages in Samoa have more members than the one in Fiji.
5. Many of the Pacific islands named in the article have had a disproportionately large number of Covid-19 cases.
6. The majority of overseas visitors to the Pacific islands arrive on long haul flights from the USA and Europe.
7. Many Pacific nations rely heavily on income from tourism.
8. The Fijian government is allowing workers to take money out of their retirement funds earlier than usual.
9. The barter systems have helped not only individuals but also small businesses, which may otherwise have gone under.
10. The process of bartering is relatively new to the Pacific islands.

4 Phrases

Find the following phrases in the article. Then use them in sentences of your own.

1. more difficult to get or obtain (four words, para 4)
2. have less money than you need (three words, para 8)
3. continue running a business and not have to close it (two words, para 13)

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5 Discussion

- Have you ever tried exchanging items or services with someone?
 - o What items did you exchange?
 - o Who did you exchange with?
 - o Did both you and the other person feel it was a fair exchange?
- Would you prefer to barter with a stranger via an online platform or in person with someone you know? Give reasons.

6 Bartering

- a. Make notes in the boxes.

skills or items that you have and would be willing to exchange for something else

e.g. a children's paddling pool / mowing someone's lawn

items you need and things you would like help with

e.g. a chainsaw / walking the dog

- b. Write an advertisement stating what you are looking for and what you can offer in return. Remember to include your name. Pin your advertisement up on the wall.
- c. Read your classmates' advertisements. Try to agree on an exchange with someone. Ask questions and discuss their offer to make sure you get a good deal.
- d. As a group, reflect on the process.
- Were any trades made?
 - Which of the things on offer were the most popular?
 - Is bartering something you'd like to integrate into your lives? Why? Why not?