



Frugal empowerment: A conceptual framework for maximizing sustainable social impact through minimal resource investment

 Zora A. Sukabdi

Graduate School of Sustainable Development, Universitas Indonesia.

Email: zora.arfina@ui.ac.id



ABSTRACT

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This paper introduces Frugal Social Empowerment (FSE), a conceptual framework for maximizing durable and multiplying social impact under conditions of resource constraint. FSE challenges the assumption that program magnitude, expenditure, or immediate beneficiary reach is equivalent to empowerment effectiveness. Drawing on frugal innovation, the capability approach, resource bricolage, social investment, social innovation, and social-impact scaling, the framework explains how scarce, existing, and underutilized financial and non-financial resources can be creatively and efficiently mobilized to strengthen agency, build capability, and generate sustained social value. FSE comprises six dimensions: Focused Investment, Resource Efficiency, Upstream Intervention, Generative Capacity, Amplification, and Long-Term Regeneration (FRUGAL), and proposes two complementary heuristic measures: A Frugal Social Empowerment Impact (FSEI) function and a Frugal Social Empowerment Efficiency (FSEE) ratio. The framework is illustrated through six Indonesian civil-society cases: Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian, the Indonesian Institute for Society Empowerment, Global Center of Wellbeing, Jiwa Movement, SeRVE Indonesia, and Empatiku. The cases combine reflective practitioner knowledge with publicly available documentation and are used to illuminate mechanisms rather than estimate causal effects or rank organizational effectiveness. Cross-case interpretation suggests that empowerment resources may be financial, relational, attentional, cognitive, or legitimacy-based; low financial intensity can coexist with high human-interaction intensity; and multiplication may occur through individuals, households, organizations, communities, or transferable intervention models. FSE is therefore not an argument for austerity, but a theory of strategic resource mobilization for durable, regenerative social impact.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by introducing Frugal Social Empowerment (FSE), a six-dimensional framework linking resource mobilization under constraint with agency, capability formation, impact multiplication, and long-term regeneration. It shifts the unit of analysis from frugal innovation to the empowerment pathway through which social value is reproduced.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary development and social empowerment initiatives frequently operate under an implicit assumption that greater social impact requires greater investment. Large-scale interventions, extensive infrastructure, broad beneficiary coverage, and substantial financial commitments are often treated as signals of institutional capacity and social responsibility. Yet expenditure, visibility, and initial reach are inputs or outputs of program delivery; they are not, by themselves, evidence of durable empowerment. Substantial resources can be indispensable when a problem requires universal coverage, redistribution, or major infrastructure, but the magnitude of expenditure does not automatically correspond to the magnitude, quality, or durability of social value created.

This distinction is especially relevant in Indonesia, where current development policy includes highly visible national programs operating at very large scale. The Free Nutritious Meal program (Makan Bergizi Gratis, MBG), for example, was designed as a mass intervention in nutrition and human development. Early policy analysis has recognized its potential while also emphasizing implementation, governance, targeting, food safety, monitoring, and sustainability challenges (Suprpto, Praditya, Dewi, & Adiyoso, 2025). A 2026 case study from Sumba further illustrates a scale-localization tension: the program may improve short-term attendance and learning readiness while its longer-term contribution to local food systems depends on greater local decision-making, recognition of locally adaptive food systems, and integration of local producers (Makambombu, 2026). These findings do not establish that large programs are inherently ineffective; they demonstrate why scale and spending should be analytically separated from sustained impact.

A similar distinction is useful when considering the Koperasi Desa/Kelurahan Merah Putih initiative. Presidential Instruction No. 9/2025 called for the accelerated establishment, development, or revitalization of 80,000 village and urban-village cooperatives and allowed financing from national, regional, and village budgets as well as other lawful sources (Government of Indonesia, 2025). Because the program is recent, robust evidence about long-term effectiveness is necessarily still developing. Its relevance here is therefore illustrative rather than evaluative: ambitious scale creates a particularly strong need to ask not only how many organizational units are created or how much is spent, but whether local capability, ownership, productive agency, and regenerative value are produced over time.

The same question applies at the opposite end of the scale. Across civil society, small NGOs and community organizations frequently work with scarce budgets, limited staff, informal networks, and uncertain funding. Some nevertheless sustain services, build local capability, generate volunteer or peer-to-peer effects, and create benefits that continue after the original grant has ended. Resource scarcity can stimulate creative mobilization, recombination, and locally embedded forms of action (Hossain, 2022). Recent frugal innovation research likewise emphasizes affordability, resource efficiency, inclusion, and sustainability in constrained environments (Escudero-Cipriani, García-del Junco, Chafloque-Céspedes, & Alvarez-Risco, 2024; Liu, Fransen, de Jong, & Reins, 2025).

Frugal Social Empowerment (FSE) is proposed to explain this human and social process. It focuses on how scarce, existing, and underutilized resources can be creatively and efficiently mobilized to strengthen individual or collective agency and generate durable social impact. The framework therefore asks a different question from conventional reach metrics: not only “How many people did the program help?” but also “What capabilities did the intervention create, how long did they endure, and what subsequent opportunities or social value were generated?”

The framework is informed by, but distinct from, frugal innovation and frugal social innovation. Weyrauch and Herstatt (2017) identify substantial cost reduction, concentration on core functionality, and optimized performance as defining criteria of frugal innovation. Frugal social innovation, in turn, extends resource-constrained innovation toward socially transformative and participatory processes within underserved communities (Lorini, Ngwenyama, & Chigona, 2022). FSE differs from both by shifting the primary unit of analysis from the innovation, solution, or organizational process to the empowerment pathway itself: how constrained resources are converted into agency, capability, contribution, multiplication, and regeneration.

The paper therefore develops three linked contributions. First, it defines FSE as a distinct construct and locates it relative to frugal innovation, frugal social innovation, empowerment, social investment, charity, and social entrepreneurship. Second, it proposes the six-dimensional FRUGAL framework and an associated beneficiary-to-multiplier mechanism. Third, it establishes a case-informed design through which the framework can be illustrated and later refined using Indonesian NGO cases characterized by low resource intensity, demonstrable continuity, and sustained or multiplying benefit.

2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. *Frugal Innovation and Resource Constraint*

Frugal innovation is commonly associated with creating adequate or high-value solutions while using fewer resources. Importantly, frugality is not equivalent to cheapness or low quality. The defining logic is disciplined resource use around essential functionality and adequate performance (Weyrauch & Herstatt, 2017). Recent reviews show that the field has expanded from affordability toward sustainability, inclusion, entrepreneurial capability, and the social consequences of innovation (Escudero-Cipriani et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2025).

Empirical and review-based research also suggests that frugal strategies can support inclusion and sustainability when solutions are adapted to constrained and marginalized contexts (Girija, Banerji, Batra, Paruchuru, & Yeediballi, 2024; Upadhyay & Puneekar, 2023). These findings support a broader proposition: scarcity does not necessarily eliminate agency; under some conditions, it can intensify strategic attention to resource combinations, stakeholder relationships, and core value creation.

2.2. *Empowerment, Capability, and Agency*

FSE differs from a simple low-cost service model because its outcome is capability rather than consumption. In the capability approach, development concerns the expansion of substantive freedoms and real opportunities to pursue valued ways of living (Sen, 1999). Resources matter because they can be converted into capabilities, agency, and meaningful choice, but identical resources can produce different outcomes depending on personal, social, and institutional conversion factors.

This emphasis is reinforced by contemporary social-innovation research. von Jacobi, Chiappero-Martinetti, Maestripietri, and Giroletti (2024) conceptualize social value creation through empowerment as a process that expands capabilities and participation rather than merely providing benefits to passive recipients. The implication for FSE is central: a modest intervention becomes developmentally significant when it changes what people are able to do, what roles they can occupy, and what opportunities they can subsequently create for themselves and others.

2.3. *Bricolage, Social Embeddedness, and Resource Mobilization*

Resource bricolage describes the creation of value by recombining resources already at hand (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Frugal entrepreneurship similarly emphasizes mobilizing accessible financial, material, social, and relational resources under constraint (Hossain, 2022). Together, these perspectives show how constrained actors create value by recombining resources already available to them and using locally embedded relationships rather than relying solely on new formal inputs. FSE draws from this logic while shifting the question from how an organization improvises with scarce inputs to where limited empowerment resources should be placed and what regenerative capacity those resources activate. Scarcity is therefore not romanticized. It is treated as a boundary condition that makes allocation quality, local relationships, and conversion into durable capability more consequential.

2.4. *Social Investment, Social Impact, and Multiplication*

Social investment approaches emphasize that investments in skills, education, employment, and inclusion can generate returns over the life course and across society (Hemerijck, 2017). Social-enterprise research likewise treats the scaling of social impact as a central performance problem and distinguishes organizational growth from ecosystem-based strategies that spread impact through other actors and networks (Islam, 2022).

FSE combines these insights with a specific regenerative mechanism. The relevant return is not merely the direct outcome for the initial beneficiary but the downstream social value generated when knowledge, opportunity, networks, income, mentoring, leadership, or institutional capacity are subsequently transferred to others. This makes multiplication conceptually different from simple program expansion: impact can grow even when the original organization does not become larger.

2.5. Distinguishing Frugal Social Empowerment from Adjacent Concepts

FSE overlaps with several established approaches but differs in its primary analytical focus. Whereas charity emphasizes immediate welfare, conventional empowerment emphasizes agency, social investment emphasizes future returns, frugal innovation emphasizes resource-efficient solutions, and social entrepreneurship emphasizes mission-driven organizational viability, FSE focuses on the regenerative pathway through which capability becomes sustained and multiplies social value.

Table 1 presents the conceptual distinctions between FSE and adjacent approaches by comparing their primary objectives, units of analysis, recipient roles, and distinctive logics.

Table 1. Conceptual distinction between Frugal Social Empowerment and adjacent approaches.

Concept	Primary objective	Primary unit of analysis	Recipient role	Distinctive logic
Charity / Relief	Meet immediate need	Transfer or service	Primarily recipient	Immediate welfare; continuation may require repeated support
Conventional empowerment	Increase agency/Capability	Individual or community	Active participant	Capability and participation are central outcomes
Social investment	Generate future social/Economic returns	Policy investment	Human-capital bearer	Present investment produces future returns
Frugal innovation	Create adequate value with fewer resources	Product/Service/Process	User/co-creator	Resource efficiency + core functionality + affordability
Social entrepreneurship	Pursue social mission through enterprise	Organization/Business model	Customer/Stakeholder	Social value combined with organizational viability
Frugal social innovation	Create socially transformative solutions under resource constraints	Social innovation process/Solution	Community member/co-innovator	Scarcity + creativity + participation + inclusion + social transformation
Frugal Social Empowerment	Maximize social impact and individual or collective agency under resource constraints	Empowerment pathway	Beneficiary/participant → capability holder → contributor/multiplier	Creative resource mobilization + agency + capability + multiplication + regeneration

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Overall Research Design

This study uses a two-stage theory-building design. Stage 1 is a conceptual synthesis that integrates previously separate literatures to construct the FSE framework. Conceptual articles are appropriate when the goal is to clarify a construct, integrate theoretical domains, propose new relationships, and establish propositions for subsequent empirical examination (Jaakkola, 2020). The synthesis is integrative rather than merely descriptive: representative literatures are compared and recombined to generate a new explanatory framework (Torraco, 2005).

Stage 2 is an illustrative case-informed extension using six Indonesian NGOs and community-based initiatives: Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP), the Indonesian Institute for Society Empowerment (INSEP), Global Center of Wellbeing (GWB), Jiwa Movement, SeRVE Indonesia, and Empatiku. The cases function as theory-building vignettes for mechanism illustration, pattern comparison, boundary identification, and refinement of the proposed framework; they are not presented as a statistical sample, a causal impact evaluation, or a comparative effectiveness study. This use is compatible with case-informed theory development where the phenomenon is context-dependent and the boundaries among intervention, organization, community, and outcome are not easily separated (Yin, 2018).

3.2. Conceptual Synthesis

The conceptual synthesis draws on seven overlapping domains: (1) frugal innovation and frugal entrepreneurship; (2) empowerment and the capability approach; (3) resource bricolage and resource mobilization; (4) social investment; (5) social innovation and social value creation; (6) social-enterprise resilience and impact scaling; and (7) community sustainability and regeneration. The analysis proceeds through conceptual identification, comparison, abstraction, mechanism specification, and proposition development. The FRUGAL dimensions are the author's theoretical synthesis rather than a direct reproduction of any single prior model.

3.3. Indonesian NGO Case Component and Evidence Use

Cases were selected purposively because they were known to the author through sustained professional or organizational engagement and appeared to illuminate one or more FRUGAL mechanisms. Inclusion favored cases in which: (a) direct financial or material inputs were modest relative to the observed or intended benefit; (b) capability development rather than one-off consumption was central; (c) local networks, knowledge, in-kind resources, or relationships were important inputs; (d) downstream contribution or multiplication was observable or plausibly traceable; and/or (e) the case provided a useful boundary condition, including an early-stage initiative for which long-term regeneration cannot yet be claimed.

The case component combines two evidence layers. First, reflective practitioner observations provide contextual knowledge of organizational activities and selected beneficiary or community trajectories. Second, publicly available organizational, policy, and research documentation is used where available to corroborate organizational history, target populations, or program characteristics (Kusumarini, 2025; Nemr, Nonninger, Entenmann, van Deventer, & van Ginkel, 2018; Nemr & Tobin, 2022; Prasasti Perdamaian Foundation, 2012; Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2023). Approximate cost figures drawn from practice are presented only as illustrative estimates, not as audited expenditure or effect-size measures. Where independent documentation is limited, particularly for GWB and Jiwa Movement, the narrative is explicitly treated as a practitioner-informed illustration rather than an independently verified outcome evaluation.

3.4. Case Analysis and Integration

Each case was mapped deductively against the six FRUGAL dimensions and then examined inductively for mechanisms not fully specified by the original framework. Cross-case comparison focused on resource type, leverage point, capability created, multiplier pathway, durability, and interpretive boundary. The analysis therefore distinguishes between (a) the FRUGAL dimensions generated conceptually and (b) case-informed refinements, such as attentional resources, aspirational spillover, community-capacity multiplication, and the possibility that a low-cost program can remain highly intensive in human interaction. These refinements are advanced as theory-building propositions rather than validated causal effects.

4. CONCEPTUAL RESULTS: THE FRUGAL SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

4.1. Definition and Central Mechanism

Frugal Social Empowerment (FSE) is the strategic process of strengthening individual or collective agency and generating durable social impact through the creative and efficient mobilization of scarce, existing, or underutilized financial and non-financial resources. Its defining feature is not low expenditure itself, but the conversion of constrained resources into durable capabilities that can generate, multiply, and regenerate social value beyond the original recipient or funding cycle.

The concept extends frugality from the design of innovations to the design of empowerment pathways. Its central mechanism is regenerative rather than merely distributive: resources are converted into capability; capability supports agency and contribution; contribution creates additional value; and a proportion of that value is transferred, reproduced, or reinvested. The beneficiary is therefore conceptualized not as the terminal point of assistance but as a possible multiplier.

4.2. The Six FRUGAL Dimensions

Across the FRUGAL dimensions, resources are understood broadly as financial and non-financial assets that may be scarce, already available, or underutilized; the case analysis later refines the specific forms these resources can take.

4.2.1. F — Focused Investment

Focused Investment is the strategic concentration of scarce resources on leverage points where capability development and subsequent social value are plausible. Focus does not mean selecting only already-privileged or high-performing individuals. It means matching resources to intervention points where the resource can be converted into meaningful capability, while using transparent and ethically defensible selection criteria.

4.2.2. R — Resource Efficiency

Resource Efficiency is the disciplined reduction of unnecessary financial, material, administrative, and institutional expenditure while preserving the essential quality of the intervention. This follows the core frugal principle that lower resource use is valuable only when essential functionality and performance remain adequate (Weyrauch & Herstatt, 2017). Frugal does not mean cheap; frugal means purposeful.

4.2.3. U — Upstream Intervention

Upstream Intervention targets an earlier leverage point in a developmental pathway so that a modest intervention can alter later trajectories. Examples include education at a critical transition, seed capability for a community organizer, training that allows a service to be locally reproduced, or tools that remove a bottleneck preventing productive participation.

4.2.4. G — Generative Capacity

Generative Capacity is the recipient's ability to convert initial support into new skills, resources, opportunities, organizations, relationships, or knowledge. It differentiates productive empowerment from assistance that is exhausted at the point of consumption. The key question is whether the intervention increases the recipient's capacity to produce future value.

4.2.5. A — Amplification

Amplification occurs when benefits extend beyond the original recipient through mentoring, employment creation, volunteering, knowledge transfer, replication, institution building, peer support, or reinvestment. Social

impact may therefore scale through networks and ecosystems without requiring proportional growth in the originating organization (Islam, 2022).

4.2.6. L — Long-Term Regeneration

Long-Term Regeneration is the persistence and reproduction of empowerment after the initial intervention ends. Regeneration may be financial, but it may also occur through social capital, knowledge, locally maintained institutions, reciprocal support, or repeated opportunities. Sustainability is thus treated as an active process of benefit reproduction rather than simple organizational survival. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed regenerative process of FSE, in which scarce, existing, or underutilized resources are strategically mobilized through focused investment, capability and agency development, generative capacity, contribution, impact amplification, and long-term regeneration, with regenerated benefits feeding back into future focused investment.

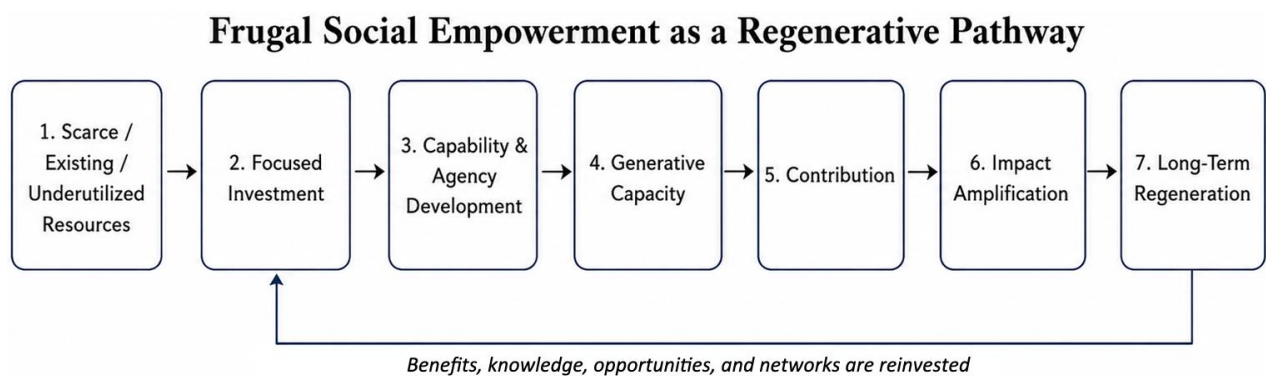


Figure 1. Proposed regenerative process of Frugal Social Empowerment.

4.3. Heuristic Equations

Two heuristic expressions are proposed to make the logic of the framework explicit. They are not presented as validated mathematical laws. Their purpose is to clarify what would need to be measured if the framework were later operationalized. Figure 2 illustrates the FRUGAL heuristic impact function, in which the six dimensions are represented multiplicatively to indicate that a severe weakness in one dimension may constrain the overall regenerative impact of the intervention.

$$FSEI = F \times R \times U \times G \times A \times L$$

F = Focused Investment
 R = Resource Efficiency
 U = Upstream Intervention
 G = Generative Capacity
 A = Amplification
 L = Long-Term Regeneration

Figure 2. Frugal Social Empowerment Impact (FSEI).

Note: The dimensions can later be operationalized as standardized indicators; the multiplicative form signals that a severe weakness in one dimension can constrain the overall regenerative impact.

Figure 3 illustrates the Frugal Social Empowerment Efficiency (FSEE) ratio, which relates direct, multiplied, and regenerated impact to the total resources invested, including financial, material, human, administrative, and opportunity costs.

$$\text{FSEE} = \frac{\text{Direct Impact} + \text{Multiplied Impact} + \text{Regenerated Impact}}{\text{Total Resources Invested}}$$

A heuristic efficiency ratio: Higher sustained social value per unit of resource indicates stronger Frugal Social Empowerment

Figure 3. Frugal Social Empowerment Efficiency (FSEE).

Note: Total Resources Invested includes financial, material, human, administrative, and opportunity costs, where these can be credibly estimated.

The first expression represents the internal quality of the FRUGAL mechanism. The second represents efficiency relative to the resources consumed. Keeping the two measures separate is important. A program can be inexpensive but ineffective; conversely, an expensive program can be justified where the problem requires universal coverage or high fixed costs. FSE is therefore not defined by a low absolute budget but by the relationship among resource discipline, capability formation, multiplication, and durability.

4.4. Beneficiary-to-Multiplier Mechanism

The proposed transition is: Beneficiary → Capability Holder → Contributor → Multiplier → Regenerator. Not every beneficiary must become a multiplier, and multiplication should not be treated as a moral obligation imposed on recipients. Rather, the framework asks whether program design creates the conditions under which some recipients can voluntarily extend benefits to others. This distinction protects the concept from converting empowerment into a demand that disadvantaged people must “repay” assistance.

4.5. Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1: Greater resource expenditure will not necessarily produce greater empowerment impact when additional resources do not improve capability formation, targeting quality, or durability.

Proposition 2: Under resource constraint, empowerment efficiency will be higher when resources are concentrated on credible leverage points rather than dispersed in ways that dilute essential intervention quality.

Proposition 3: Empowerment interventions will generate greater long-term social value when recipients acquire generative capabilities that enable contribution beyond their own immediate benefit.

Proposition 4: Social impact can scale without proportional organizational growth when empowered recipients and local partners reproduce knowledge, opportunities, services, or institutions through networks.

Proposition 5: Long-term regeneration will be stronger where local ownership, social embeddedness, and co-creation reduce dependence on continuous external inputs.

Proposition 6: FSE will be ethically and socially stronger when strategic selection is transparent, context-sensitive, and balanced with principles of inclusion and basic universal entitlements.

5. ILLUSTRATIVE CASES AND FRAMEWORK REFINEMENT

5.1. Case Selection and Overview

Six cases were selected to provide variation in mechanism rather than to represent the Indonesian NGO sector statistically. YPP, INSEP, SeRVE, and Empatiku have public documentation that supports major elements of their organizational roles, while GWB and Jiwa Movement are used primarily as practitioner-informed illustrations. Across all six cases, the purpose is analytical rather than evaluative: to examine how different combinations of modest financial inputs, relationships, knowledge, attention, opportunity, and community capacity illuminate or challenge the FRUGAL mechanism. The cases are therefore not ranked for effectiveness and should not be read as audited impact assessments.

The cases also differ in maturity. YPP and INSEP provide longer trajectories in which regeneration and downstream role change can be considered; SeRVE and Empatiku provide sustained organizational examples of relational and community-based rehabilitation/reintegration; GWB illustrates educational mobility and household spillover; and Jiwa Movement is deliberately retained as an early-stage case in which relational value is visible but Long-Term Regeneration cannot yet be inferred. This variation reduces the temptation to force every case to satisfy all six FRUGAL dimensions. Table 2 presents a cross-case comparison of the six Indonesian civil-society cases, showing the main resource or intervention, leverage point, capability generated, multiplier pathway, and interpretive boundary for each case.

Table 2. Cross-case illustrative mechanism matrix for the six Indonesian civil-society cases.

Case	Resource Intervention /	Leverage point	Capability generated	Multiplier pathway	Interpretive boundary
YPP	Small-capital enterprise support; training, trust, networks	Economic and social re-entry after extremist involvement or imprisonment	Work and business skills; self-reliance	Worker -> entrepreneur/Peer opportunity -> wider reintegration	Publicly documented organizational history; downstream trajectory used illustratively.
INSEP	Research; religious/Educational dialogue; credible former-member voices; network/Work facilitation	Worldview, religious interpretation, identity, trust, and post-exit social role	Cognitive reframing; religious dialogue; credible voice; knowledge production	Participant -> change agent/Trainer/Organizational actor -> new audiences	Public documentation + practitioner observation; organizational multiplier interpreted cautiously.
GWB	Approx. IDR 1.4 million/6 months scholarship in illustrative case, plus mentoring and opportunity access	Small tertiary-education financing gap	Bachelor-level education; employability; occupational mobility	Graduate success -> spouse/Siblings pursue education -> professional contribution	Practitioner-informed; cost and beneficiary trajectory are illustrative estimates.
Jiwa Movement	Approx. IDR 1 million support in illustrative case, plus regular communication and listening	Geographic and relational distance affecting a teacher in Papua	Recognition; connection; willingness to share experience; morale/Trust	Potential teacher/Community relational spillover	Early-stage (2026); no claim of established Amplification or Long-Term Regeneration.
SeERVE	Low-budget training, advocacy, accompaniment, and trust-building	Women, families, deportees/Returnees, and people connected to violent-extremist networks	Openness; disengagement support; family agency; reintegration capacity	Individual/Family change -> relational/Network effects	Public documentation + practitioner estimate; no audited cost comparison.
Empatiku	Case management; community engagement; early-warning/Early-action capacity building	Receiving communities and local response systems for returnees/Deportees/Families	Community readiness; local problem-solving; reintegration capacity	Stronger community -> reusable capacity for future cases	Publicly documented community mechanism; no quantified effect-size claim.

5.2. Case 1: Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP) — Social Enterprise and Economic Reintegration

Yayasan Prasasti Perdamaian (YPP), established in January 2008, works on peacebuilding, rehabilitation, and reintegration of people affected by violent extremism. Its public materials describe community-based assistance to former terrorist prisoners and their families and explicitly frame local initiatives and social intervention as alternatives to purely coercive approaches (Prasasti Perdamaian Foundation, n.d). An early YPP account of economic empowerment described small business capital as a trigger rather than the main intervention and emphasized management, innovation, accounting, and the ability to recruit other former prisoners; the organization summarized the logic as using modest capital with greater innovation rather than treating money itself as the solution (Prasasti Perdamaian Foundation, 2012).

The author's case notes identify Dapoer Bistik as an illustrative social-enterprise pathway in which former extremist-linked individuals were given employment and a legitimate social role through a modest restaurant operation. The intervention combined material opportunity with non-financial resources: trust, recommendation, access to customers and networks, social acceptance, and practical learning. In the illustrative trajectory described by the author, one former participant later developed independent economic activity, including vehicle-rental/business activity. This trajectory is used here to illuminate the proposed beneficiary-to-multiplier mechanism rather than as an independently audited impact claim.

The FRUGAL mechanism is therefore not simply 'cheap employment.' The leverage point is post-exit economic and social re-entry; the capability created is the ability to earn, manage, interact, and occupy a non-violent social role; and the multiplier potential appears when a former beneficiary becomes an employer, entrepreneur, mentor, or credible peer. YPP is also a useful boundary case because public evidence shows that some beneficial small-business programs can end when organizational priorities or funding change (Nemr & Tobin, 2022). FSE should therefore assess whether capability survives a program's closure, not merely whether the program itself survives.

5.3. Case 2: Indonesian Institute for Society Empowerment (INSEP) — Meaning, Credible Voices, and Change-Agent Formation

INSEP provides a different pathway in which the scarce resource is not primarily money but knowledge, interpretation, trusted relationships, and access to alternative social roles. Public records identify Ahmad Syafii Mufid as a central INSEP figure and document INSEP's involvement in research on terrorism, religious counseling, deradicalization, and economic/*dakwah* empowerment of former terrorism prisoners (Jakarta Islamic Centre, 2022). Global Center case documentation further describes INSEP as a research and program organization that brought former violent-extremist prisoners into prevention and counter-radicalization activities as credible voices, produced educational materials, and worked with openly acknowledged resource limitations (Nemr & Tobin, 2022).

The author's case narrative adds a developmental interpretation: former militants were exposed to anthropology-of-religion perspectives, encounters with victims and wider social networks, practical work opportunities, and spiritual or reflective processes. Some later became positive change agents and, according to the author's longitudinal professional observation, helped create or lead new civil-society initiatives. These trajectories are used illustratively to explore how cognitive, relational, and meaning-based resources may contribute to generative capacity and institutional multiplication.

INSEP therefore expands the meaning of 'resource' within Frugal Social Empowerment. Cognitive and meaning resources—alternative interpretation, credible testimony, spiritual reflection, and knowledge—can function as capability inputs. Its multiplier pathway is potentially Beneficiary/participant → credible voice → change agent → trainer or organization builder → new beneficiaries. This case also suggests that Long-Term Regeneration may be visible when the original mentor or founder is no longer present, but the ideas, relationships, and institutions generated through the earlier intervention continue to operate.

5.4. Case 3: Global Center of Wellbeing (GWB) — Small Educational Gaps and Aspirational Spillover

GWB is a collaboratively established initiative included as a practitioner-informed case illustration. In the illustrative scholarship trajectory reported by the author, a beneficiary from a low-income farming/gardening household received approximately IDR 1.4 million for six months of study at Universitas Terbuka. The amount was modest in absolute terms, but it addressed a specific financing barrier at a consequential educational transition. The beneficiary subsequently completed higher education and moved into technical/Civil-engineering work. The figure and trajectory are presented as practitioner-reported contextual evidence rather than as audited expenditure or an independently verified effect estimate.

The case is theoretically important because the impact did not appear to stop with the original student. The author's observation is that the beneficiary's visible upward mobility contributed to greater educational aspiration within the household: the spouse and younger family members also pursued further education. The result is an aspirational spillover in which the first beneficiary becomes a demonstration that tertiary education is attainable. This is an amplification mechanism even when later family members do not receive the same initial subsidy from the organization.

GWB therefore suggests a 'small-gap/large-trajectory' principle: FSE may be especially powerful where a relatively small and identifiable resource gap is the main barrier preventing a much larger capability trajectory. Strategically focused investment should not mean selecting already-privileged 'high performers'; it can mean identifying latent capability that is constrained by a small but consequential bottleneck.

5.5. Case 4: Jiwa Movement — Attentional Resources and Relational Frugality

Jiwa Movement is a new 2026 initiative and is retained deliberately as an early-stage boundary illustration rather than as proof of long-term success. In the author's account, the initiative provided approximately IDR 1 million in direct support to a teacher in Papua and maintained communication across geographic distance. The material contribution is small; the distinctive element is the accompanying human resource of time, listening, interest, and willingness to hear everyday experiences and concerns. Because the initiative is recent and public documentation is limited, the case is used to illuminate attentional and relational resources, not to claim established Amplification or Long-Term Regeneration.

This case makes visible an overlooked category of empowerment resource: attention. Listening is financially inexpensive but not costless. It requires time, emotional availability, consistency, and willingness to remain in relationship. In the author's observation, the combination of modest support and ongoing communication produced a sense of being noticed and supported and increased willingness to communicate openly. The appropriate inference is micro-relational rather than geopolitical: the case suggests greater interpersonal trust and connectedness across distance, not that a small transfer can be said to change Papua-Jakarta relations in general.

Jiwa Movement thus contributes the concept of relational frugality: modest material input combined with meaningful relational input may create psychosocial value disproportionate to financial cost. However, the case does not yet provide evidence for Amplification or Long-Term Regeneration. Its inclusion is analytically useful precisely because it shows that a promising low-resource intervention should not be labeled fully 'FRUGAL' before durability and downstream effects are observed.

5.6. Case 5: SeRVE Indonesia — Accompaniment, Advocacy, and High Human Intensity

SeRVE (Society against Radicalism and Violent Extremism) Indonesia was founded and is directed by Siti Darojatul Aliah (Dete Aliah). Public documentation describes her work with former and current violent-extremist offenders, wives and families, Indonesian deportees, and returnees from Syria, including accompaniment intended to support disengagement and family-level change (Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2023). This independently supports the core population and relational approach described in the author's case narrative.

The author's account emphasizes that some SeRVE activities can be run with very modest direct budgets—approximately IDR 3 million in the illustrative examples, while relying heavily on training, advocacy, follow-up, conversation, and sustained accompaniment. The figure is presented as a practitioner estimate rather than an audited program cost. The illustrative value of the case lies in the reported openness and willingness among women connected to FTF or extremist networks to engage in a positive change process, highlighting the distinction between low financial intensity and potentially high human-interaction intensity.

SeRVE therefore clarifies an important distinction: low financial intensity is not the same as low intervention intensity. A program can be inexpensive in cash terms while being intensive in repeated contact, trust-building, professional judgment, advocacy, and relational labor. FSE should therefore minimize unnecessary material expenditure without minimizing the human processes that generate change. This is consistent with broader rehabilitation and reintegration literature emphasizing coordinated, community-level and family-sensitive supports rather than a single standardized input (Bunn et al., 2024).

5.7. Case 6: Empatiku — Reintegration Through Receiving-Community Capacity

Empatiku, founded and directed by Kusumarini (2025), has worked in Indonesia since 2015 on violent-extremism prevention and civil-society engagement. Public documentation describes community-based early-warning/early-action mechanisms that shift agency to local communities and strengthen their capacity to identify, discuss, and respond to risks before escalation (Kusumarini, 2025). The Global Center has also documented Indonesian rehabilitation and reintegration practice as requiring community preparation, reduced stigma, and local ownership rather than focusing only on the returning individual (Nemr et al., 2018; Nemr & Tobin, 2022).

The author's case notes emphasize Empatiku's accompaniment of wives, deportees, returnees, and former extremist-linked individuals as they re-enter villages and local social environments. The frugal leverage point is therefore the receiving system as much as the individual beneficiary. Relatively modest resources are used to connect returnees, families, village actors, and local institutions, reducing the risk that social rejection undermines an otherwise successful individual intervention.

Empatiku extends the multiplier concept from persons to communities. The pathway becomes Intervention → stronger receiving community → reusable local capability → future beneficiaries. A community that learns how to manage one difficult reintegration case can potentially reuse that competence, relationships, and local response infrastructure in later cases. The multiplier is therefore institutional and communal, not only individual.

5.8. Cross-Case Synthesis: What the Cases Add to the Original Framework

Across the six cases, the FRUGAL dimensions remained analytically useful, but the case material expanded the original model in several ways. First, resource efficiency cannot be understood only as financial efficiency. The cases repeatedly mobilize non-financial assets: trust, listening, networks, recommendation, knowledge, religious interpretation, credibility, social acceptance, and access. Second, the 'multiplier' is not always the original beneficiary. Multiplication can occur through a household, a peer network, a new NGO, a receiving community, or a transferable intervention model. Third, low financial intensity can coexist with high human intensity; small budgets often depend on substantial relational labor. Fourth, a small intervention is most consequential when it removes a critical capability bottleneck rather than simply distributing a small amount of aid. Table 3 presents the theoretical refinements derived from the cross-case analysis, including the expanded resource portfolio, the distinction between financial and human intensity, the small-gap/large-trajectory principle, multiple forms of multiplication, autonomous regeneration, and the temporal boundary of long-term claims.

Table 3. Case-derived theoretical refinements to Frugal Social Empowerment.

Case-derived refinement	Meaning for the framework	Illustrative cases
Expanded resource portfolio	Resources include financial/material, relational, attentional, cognitive/Meaning, network/Access, and legitimacy resources.	YPP, INSEP, Jiwa, SeRVE
Low financial intensity ≠ low human intensity	A small cash budget may coexist with intensive listening, mentoring, advocacy, trust-building, and follow-up.	Jiwa Movement, SeRVE, Empatiku
Small-gap / Large-trajectory principle	A modest input can matter greatly when it removes the principal bottleneck blocking a larger capability pathway.	GWB; also YPP at reintegration points
Multiple multiplier forms	Multiplication may be human, household, peer/Network, organizational, community/Institutional, or model-based.	All six cases in different forms
Regeneration can outlive the original actor	The strongest form of durability is autonomous continuation through people or institutions rather than permanent dependence on the original founder/Funder.	INSEP, YPP; potentially Empatiku
Temporal boundary	Early positive effects should not be equated with long-term regeneration before enough time has elapsed.	Jiwa Movement

These findings support a refined beneficiary pathway: Resource Portfolio → Critical Leverage Point → Capability/Agency → Contribution → Human, Household, Organizational, or Community Multiplier → Regeneration. The case analysis therefore broadens the original 'beneficiary-to-multiplier' mechanism into an ecosystem view of multiplication while preserving the central proposition that durable impact depends on what the initial resource enables rather than on the size of the resource alone.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. From Program Size to Regenerative Value

The central theoretical claim of FSE is that the scale of an intervention and the scale of its social impact are related but not identical. Conventional program reporting often privileges visible inputs and outputs—budget size, infrastructure, participant counts, or geographic coverage. These indicators are important for accountability, yet they cannot establish whether recipients acquired durable capabilities or whether benefits continued after external support ended. Social-impact scaling research similarly shows that impact may expand through organizational growth or through ecosystems and other actors (Islam, 2022). FSE emphasizes the latter possibility at the micro-to-meso level: the recipient and local network may themselves become part of the scaling mechanism.

This distinction is particularly useful in Indonesia because large national programs and small civil-society interventions coexist. The comparison should not be framed as “small is good, large is bad.” Universal nutrition, social protection, or village economic infrastructure may require large public expenditure. The relevant question is whether program architecture converts that expenditure into local capability, ownership, adaptation, and durable social value. Early MBG literature illustrates precisely this need to evaluate governance, local integration, implementation quality, and longer-term sustainability in addition to coverage (Makambombu, 2026; Suprpto et al., 2025).

6.2. Frugality is Not Austerity

A major conceptual risk is that “frugal” could be misread as a justification for underfunding. The framework rejects that interpretation. Frugal innovation scholarship consistently distinguishes resource efficiency from indiscriminate cost cutting: core functionality and adequate performance must be preserved (Weyrauch & Herstatt, 2017). Recent studies also show that inclusion and sustainability are not automatic consequences of low-cost design;

they require deliberate attention to social context and marginalized users (Girija et al., 2024; Upadhyay & Puneekar, 2023).

For empowerment, this means the appropriate resource level is the minimum sufficient to generate high-quality capability development, not the lowest possible expenditure. If an intervention is so under-resourced that it produces weak training, unsafe delivery, inaccessible services, or dependence on unpaid labor that cannot be sustained, it would fail the Resource Efficiency and Long-Term Regeneration dimensions even if its financial cost were low.

6.3. Capability, Relational Resources, and Generativity as the Missing Link

The proposed framework also sharpens the relationship between frugal innovation and empowerment. Frugal innovation explains how constrained actors create value with fewer resources; the capability approach explains why resources matter only insofar as they expand substantive freedoms and agency. The six cases add a third insight: the resource converted into capability is often not money alone. Trust, attention, knowledge, credible interpretation, social acceptance, and access can become consequential inputs when they remove a barrier to agency. FSE links these resource forms through generativity: resources are valuable when they increase what recipients or communities can subsequently create, choose, organize, teach, earn, or contribute.

This linkage is consistent with research that positions empowerment as a form of social value creation (von Jacobi et al., 2024) and with evidence that frugal innovation can contribute to broader social and sustainability outcomes (Liu et al., 2025). It is also compatible with rehabilitation and reintegration research showing that effective support for returnees, women, and children commonly involves community programs, education or vocational pathways, mental-health and family supports, and coordinated local actors rather than a single material input (Bunn et al., 2024). The novelty of FSE lies in treating the downstream capacity to reproduce benefit as part of the empowerment construct itself rather than as an optional after-effect.

6.4. What the Indonesian NGO Cases Reveal

The Indonesian cases show why small civil-society organizations are theoretically useful: resource constraints make allocation choices visible. YPP emphasizes economic opportunity and social enterprise; INSEP emphasizes knowledge, religious interpretation, credible voices, and change-agent formation; GWB illustrates educational mobility and aspirational spillover; Jiwa Movement foregrounds listening and relational presence; SeRVE illustrates intensive accompaniment and advocacy with modest cash inputs; and Empatiku shows how the receiving community itself can become the unit of capability development. The commonality is not program type but regenerative logic: a modest, strategically meaningful input is converted into capability or relational value that may extend beyond the immediate transaction.

At the same time, the cases should not romanticize scarcity. Low-visible budgets may conceal founder sacrifice, unpaid labor, donated professional expertise, informal borrowing, or emotional labor. Jiwa Movement and SeRVE make this especially clear: listening, accompaniment, and trust-building are financially inexpensive but consume scarce human attention. These hidden costs should be identified whenever possible. Otherwise, an apparently frugal model may simply shift costs from the organization to workers, volunteers, families, or founders. Credible FSE therefore requires a broad accounting of financial, material, human, attentional, and opportunity costs.

6.5. From Beneficiary Multiplier to Ecosystem Multiplier

The original framework conceptualized the beneficiary as a potential multiplier. The case synthesis suggests that this is too narrow. GWB shows household-level aspirational spillover; INSEP suggests multiplier effects through credible former members and later organizational roles; Empatiku illustrates reusable community capacity; and YPP shows how work and enterprise can create peer opportunities. The multiplier can therefore be a person, household, organization, community, or intervention model. This extension aligns with social-impact scaling research in which

impact may spread through ecosystems and other actors without proportional expansion of the originating organization (Islam, 2022).

This ecosystem view also strengthens the meaning of Long-Term Regeneration. Organizational survival is neither necessary nor sufficient. A specific project can close while capabilities created through it persist, and an organization can survive while recipients remain dependent. Regeneration should therefore be assessed by the continued reproduction of capability, opportunity, knowledge, social connection, or local response capacity after the original input declines.

6.6. Selection, Equity, and the Ethics of “High-Potential” Beneficiaries

Strategic beneficiary selection creates another tension. Directing scarce resources toward people or groups with a strong likelihood of converting support into further value can increase efficiency, but poorly designed selection can reproduce privilege by favoring those who already possess education, networks, social confidence, or institutional visibility. Recent research on inclusive frugal innovation reinforces the need to examine whose needs are recognized and who participates in design and benefit (Girija et al., 2024).

FSE therefore requires an ethical distinction between leverage and deservingness. A person need not be judged “more deserving” because they are likely to become a multiplier. Programs can reserve universal or need-based entitlements while using additional capability-building resources strategically. Selection criteria should be transparent, contextually justified, and attentive to structural barriers. In this sense, FSE is better understood as a complement to rights-based and universal provision than as a replacement for it.

6.7. Implications for Policy and Practice

For NGOs, the framework suggests designing exit and regeneration pathways at the start of a program rather than treating sustainability as a final reporting requirement. Program plans should specify which capabilities are expected to remain, who can reproduce them, what local resources will sustain them, and whether the likely multiplier is an individual, household, peer network, institution, or community. The cases also suggest documenting non-financial inputs—time, mentoring, listening, trust-building, professional credibility, and network access—because these may be the intervention's most consequential resources.

For funders, the framework suggests complementing reach and expenditure indicators with measures of capability persistence, downstream beneficiaries, local resource mobilization, post-grant continuation, and multiplier type. Small-grant programs in rehabilitation and reintegration already demonstrate that focused civil-society interventions can use modest funding to convene local actors, support religious counseling, or build reusable community capacity (Nemr et al., 2018). A small intervention with strong regenerative effects may therefore merit continuation even when its immediate beneficiary count is modest.

For government, the framework is most useful as an evaluative lens rather than an argument for shrinking social programs. Large programs can incorporate Frugal Social Empowerment principles through local procurement, decentralized adaptation, capability transfer, community co-ownership, and mechanisms that leave durable assets or competencies after the initial expenditure. The MBG localization literature indicates why local integration can matter for longer-term system effects (Makambombu, 2026).

For researchers, the framework creates a testable agenda. The FRUGAL dimensions can be operationalized, inter-rater coding can be developed for qualitative cases, and later studies can compare resource-to-impact ratios across intervention types. Recent research has already begun developing measurable frugal-innovation capabilities and sustainability typologies, providing methodological precedents for future operationalization (Liu et al., 2025; Rossetto, Borini, Bernardes, & Frankwick, 2023).

6.8. Boundary Conditions

FSE is most applicable where at least part of the desired outcome depends on human capability, local agency, social learning, or networked reproduction. It is less suitable as a primary logic for problems where benefits are inherently non-replicable by recipients, where universal rights require uniform provision, where high fixed-cost infrastructure is unavoidable, or where safety and technical standards prohibit substantial resource reduction.

The framework also assumes that multiplication is desirable and socially aligned. A capability can be generative without being beneficial; networks can reproduce harmful practices as well as constructive ones. Empirical application must therefore evaluate the direction and quality of multiplied value, not simply whether activity spreads.

7. CONCLUSION

FSE proposes a shift in the unit of evaluation from resources spent to agency and capabilities generated, and from beneficiaries reached to social value that endures and multiplies. Its core claim is not that small programs are superior to large ones, nor that governments and NGOs should simply spend less, but that resource magnitude should not be confused with empowerment effectiveness.

The FRUGAL framework—Focused Investment, Resource Efficiency, Upstream Intervention, Generative Capacity, Amplification, and Long-Term Regeneration—offers a structured way to examine how limited resources can become durable capability and how social value can be reproduced through people, households, organizations, and communities. The six Indonesian case illustrations suggest that the most consequential resource is not always financial: opportunity, trust, attention, knowledge, interpretation, access, and local legitimacy can also alter trajectories. They also suggest that low financial intensity should not be confused with low human intensity, and that the strongest form of frugality may occur when a modest input removes a critical barrier and leaves behind autonomous capability. Future empirical testing should assess these propositions using documented inputs, longitudinal outcomes, and contrast cases. If supported, FSE may provide a practical bridge between frugal innovation, human capability, social investment, and the everyday realities of organizations attempting to create lasting social impact with limited means.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present framework is conceptual and should not be interpreted as a validated causal model. The proposed equations are heuristic representations, not established measurement formulas. The relationships among the six dimensions may be non-linear, context-dependent, and partly substitutable rather than strictly multiplicative.

The six NGO cases strengthen the contextual grounding of the framework while remaining deliberately illustrative rather than causal. YPP, INSEP, SeRVE, and Empatiku can be partially supported through public documentation, whereas GWB and Jiwa Movement rely more heavily on practitioner knowledge. Several cost figures are approximate and are not presented as audited comparisons. These evidentiary differences are not treated as defects in the conceptual argument; rather, they define the boundary of what the present paper claims. The cases are used to refine mechanisms and propositions, while future empirical studies should test them with systematic case records, longitudinal designs, independent outcome verification, and where appropriate, ethics-approved interviews or consented testimonies.

Future studies should develop operational indicators for each FRUGAL dimension, test inter-rater reliability, and examine whether the proposed FSEE ratio can be estimated without reducing complex social value to a misleading single number. Longitudinal designs are especially important because regeneration, dependency reduction, aspirational spillover, and downstream multiplication can only be observed over time. Future research should also distinguish financial intensity from human-interaction intensity and test whether different resource portfolios—financial, relational, attentional, cognitive, and legitimacy-based—produce different forms of multiplier effect.

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Transparency: The author states that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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