



Procedure

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCEDURE

FSC PRO 30-011 V1-2 EN



Title:	Continuous Improvement Procedure	
Dates:	Approval date:	27 February 2025
	Effective date:	1 October 2025
Timeframes:	Transition end date:	31 March 2027
	Period of validity:	until replaced or withdrawn
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Version control

Publication date: 1 April 2025

Version	Description	Date
V1-0	<p>The initial version was approved by the FSC Board of Directors at its 91st meeting on 15 March 2022.</p> <p>This procedure was developed to provide a flexible approach for The Organization managing SLIMF or Community Forests, to access FSC certification, by progressively conforming to the applicable FSC standard throughout the first certification cycle.</p>	15.03.2022
V1-1	<p>This version includes minor revisions to align with updates made to the FSC normative framework, including <FSC-STD-01-003 V2-0>, <FSC-STD-01-001 V5-3>, and <FSC-STD-20-007 V2-0>.</p> <p>In addition, questions and proposed actions in Annex 1 have been improved, and the functionality of all Annexes has been optimized for better usability.</p>	23.08.2024
V1-2	<p>Minor revision, removing the certification body requirements from the procedure and small amendments to align with ISO/IEC 17065:2012.</p>	27.02.2025

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INTRODUCTION

FSC seeks to improve access to, and uptake of, the FSC system by communities and owners of small forests. The FSC system consists of common Principles and Criteria (P&C) for the certification of all management units globally, regardless of their size, ownership, socioeconomic conditions, or types of forest systems.

Despite the application of the concepts of scale, intensity, and risk (SIR) and small or low intensity managed forest (SLIMF) in the FSC normative framework, for small-scale and community forests (CF), particularly in tropical countries, conformity with FSC requirements is still a big challenge and involves a large investment compared to the economic benefit that FSC certification may offer to them.

To overcome some of these challenges, FSC has developed this *Continuous Improvement Procedure* (CIP). The development of the CIP responds to an FSC members mandate from motion 46 passed on the General Assembly held in 2017 in Vancouver, Canada, and it aims to contribute to the FSC goals described in the FSC Global Strategy (2021-2026).

The CIP follows a risk-based approach, including an international assessment of risk (the categorization of Core Criteria (CC) and Continuous Improvement Criteria (CIC) and low-risk designation to certain criteria and local considerations (active and inactive forest management units)).

In order to obtain FSC certification at the initial stage of the process The Organization shall conform with the Core Criteria and have an Action Plan according to the requirements of this procedure. To maintain certification, The Organization shall conform with the Core Criteria and the Continuous Improvement Criteria in accordance with the path established in the Action Plan during the first certification cycle comprised of 5 years or, in case of group members, during the first 5 years of the group membership.

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A OBJECTIVE

The objective of this procedure is to provide a tailored way for The Organization managing small or low intensity managed forest (SLIMF) or community forests (CF), within or outside a group, to access FSC forest management certification.

B SCOPE

This procedure is for use by The Organization managing SLIMF or CF throughout the first certification cycle comprised of five (5) years or, in the case of group members, the first 5 years of the group membership.

All aspects of this procedure from section A onward are considered normative, including the scope, effective and validity dates, references, terms and definitions, tables, and annexes, unless otherwise stated. The content of notes and information boxes is NOT normative.

NOTE: Any part of the process to obtain FSC forest management certification that is not explicitly mentioned in this procedure will follow the regular process for FSC forest management certification.

C REFERENCES

The following referenced documents are indispensable for the application of this document. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

FSC-STD-01-001 FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship

FSC-STD-01-003 SLIMF and Community Forest Eligibility Criteria

FSC-STD-30-005 Forest Management Groups Standard

D TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this procedure, the terms and definitions provided in <FSC-STD-01-002 FSC Glossary of Terms>, and the following apply:

Action Plan: A written document that specifies by when the different criteria from the applicable FSC standard will be implemented. The Action Plan is prepared by The Organization and is subject to approval by the certification body.

Action Plan cycle: Five (5) year timeframe for Action Plan implementation.

Active management unit: A management unit in which site-disturbing activities are planned to take place prior to the next evaluation to be conducted by the certification body. *Source: Adapted from FSC-STD-30-005 V2-0.*

Audit team: Is made up of one or more auditors, one of whom is appointed to be the audit team leader. When necessary, audit teams are also supported by technical experts, and/or further personnel (e.g., interpreter), who assist auditors but do not themselves act as auditors. *Source: Adapted from FSC-STD-01-002*

Applicable FSC standard: In the context of this procedure, this term is used to refer to the approved forest stewardship standard(s) of a country or region. These can be Interim National/Regional Standard(s) or National/Regional Forest Stewardship Standard(s). *Adapted from FSC-STD-30-005 V2-0.*

Certification cycle: The period of validity of FSC certification (usually five years).

Community forest: A management unit may qualify as a 'community forest' when the following tenure AND management criteria are met:

Tenure: The legal and/or customary right to manage a management unit (e.g., title, long-term lease, concession) is held at communal level, either located in a communal forest and/or on individually assigned plots

Management: The community actively manages the management unit (e.g., under a communal forest management plan) OR the community authorizes management of the forest by others (e.g., resource manager, forestry contractors, forest products company). If the community authorizes the management of the forest by others, the following shall be met:

- i. The community has legal responsibility for the forest operations, AND
- ii. has control over the forest management decisions and monitors the forest operations.

(Source: SLIMF and Community Forest eligibility Criteria FSC-STD-01-003-V2-0)

NOTE: This is the internationally valid FSC definition for Community Forest. However, according to the Eligibility Criteria for SLIMFs and Community Forest (FSC-STD-01-003-V2-0), the eligibility criteria may be adapted to national or regional conditions. In such a case, the definition adapted and approved by the FSC for the country or region in question shall be valid.

Continuous Improvement Criteria (CIC): Criteria from the FSC Principles and Criteria (P&C) with which conformity according to the Action Plan is required to maintain FSC forest management is required to maintain FSC forest management certification. CIC designated as low-risk are not applicable in case of inactive management units.

Core Criteria (CC): Criteria from the FSC P&C with which conformity is required to obtain FSC forest management certification. CC designated as low-risk are not applicable in case of inactive management units.

Inactive management unit: A management unit in which no site-disturbing activities are planned to take place prior to the next evaluation to be conducted by the certification body.

Initial Conformity Self-Check: A self-assessment of the initial situation (baseline) and the level of conformity with the indicators of the applicable FSC standard performed by The Organization. The initial conformity self-check is voluntary but highly recommended.

Indigenous Peoples: People and groups of people that can be identified or characterized as:

- The key characteristic or criterion is self-identification as Indigenous Peoples at the individual level and acceptance by the community as their member.
- Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies.
- Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources.
- Distinct social, economic, or political systems.
- Distinct language, culture, and beliefs.
- Form non-dominant groups of society.
- Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

(Source: Adapted from United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Factsheet 'Who are Indigenous Peoples' October 2007; United Nations Development Group, 'Guidelines on Indigenous Peoples' Issues' United Nations 2009, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 13 September 2007) Source: FSC-STD-01-001 V5-2.

Local expert: A person with proven knowledge and practical experiences of the specific local context, culture, language and living conditions of Indigenous or Traditional Peoples or smallholders who supports the audit team but does not act as auditor. This person participates in on-site and hybrid audits and their role is to collect information and evidence on behalf of the auditor and to contribute to the use of culturally adapted audit techniques and appropriate communication between, and the learning process of, the audit

team and the auditee. The local expert may inform and advise The Organization about the content required to conform with the applicable FSC standard but is not allowed to provide consultancy and directly support activities to conform with the FSC standard requirements.

Self-Monitoring: A monitoring of the Action Plan implementation conducted by The Organization. In the case of forest management groups, it can be conducted by the group entity.

Site-disturbing activities: Forest management activities with a risk of adversely impacting any value of the forest, including economic, environmental and/or social values. *Source: FSC-STD-30-005 V2-0.*

Information Box 1

Examples of active management:

- Timber, energy wood and some non-timber forest products harvesting, including commercial logging/extraction methods;
- In case of non-timber forest products, harvesting might imply a negative impact to the forest depending on the type of product, harvest method and scale, or only on specific years when the product is harvested;
- Soil preparation;
- Planting or seeding;
- Seedling stand management;
- Fertilization; thinning; ditching; pruning;
- Post-harvest remediation activities;
- Infrastructure development (e.g. forestry road construction or road decommission (closure));
- Fuel management (e.g. manual clearing); quarrying; chemical pesticides use;
- Prescribed burning; pruning; harvest layout activities (e.g. tree marking, riparian buffer demarcation, identification of environmentally sensitive areas and cultural values).

Examples of in active management:

- Forest protection monitoring activities (e.g. fire patrols, surveillance for unauthorized activities);
- Permanent sample plots establishment and/or monitoring; fire break maintenance; roadside mowing; road grading (shaping);
- Low-scale and low-impact (e.g., non-destructive) collection of NTFP, (e.g. Brazil nut, açai, wild coffee and cocoa as well as other fruits and nuts is not considered to be site disturbing);
- Boundary line demarcation and maintenance;
- Forest resource surveys/inventory;
- Non-chemical invasive species management;
- Developing/updating forest management plan; passive operational planning of a forest management activity (e.g. GIS activity).

SLIMF (Small or low intensity managed forest): A management unit may qualify as 'SLIMF' if it is a 'small' management unit AND/OR managed as a 'low intensity' management unit.

Small management units:

Management units may qualify as 'small' when they are 100 hectares or smaller in total area.

Low intensity managed management units:

Management units may qualify as 'low intensity' when either:

- a) the rate of harvesting is less than 20% of the mean annual increment (MAI) within the total production forest area of the management unit, AND
- b) the annual harvest from the total production forest area is less than 5,000 m³, OR
- c) the average annual harvest from the total production forest is less than 5,000 m³/year during the certification cycle.

Management units may also be considered 'low intensity managed' when:

- a) only non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are collected or harvested, OR
- b) NTFPs are collected or harvested AND timber is harvested AND the management unit meets the eligibility criteria for 'low intensity' as outlined in clause above.

(Source: SLIMF and Community Forest eligibility Criteria FSC-STD-01-003-V2-0)

NOTE: This is the internationally valid FSC definition for small and low-intensity managed forests. However, according to the <FSC-STD-01-003 V2-0 EN SLIMF and Community Forest Eligibility Criteria>, the eligibility criteria may be adapted to national or regional conditions. In such a case, the definition adapted and approved by FSC for a given country or region will be valid.

Traditional Peoples: Traditional Peoples are social groups or peoples who do not self-identify as Indigenous and who affirm rights to their lands, forests and other resources based on long established custom or traditional occupation and use (Source: Forest Peoples Program - Marcus Colchester, 7 October 2009). Source: FSC-STD 01-001 V5-2.

Verbal forms for the expression of provisions:

[Adapted from *ISO/IEC Directives Part 2 Principles and Rules for the structure and drafting of ISO and IEC documents*]

“shall”: indicates requirements strictly to be followed in order to conform with the standard.

“should”: indicates that among several possibilities one is recommended as particularly suitable, without mentioning or excluding others, or that a certain course of action is preferred but not necessarily required. A 'should requirement' can be met in an equivalent way provided this can be demonstrated and justified.

“may”: indicates a course of action permissible within the limits of the document.

“can”: is used for statements of possibility and capability, whether material, physical or causal.

1. Application to use the CIP

- 1.1. The Organization shall request the use of this procedure during its application for FSC forest management certification to a certification body
- 1.2. The request to apply this procedure is subject to approval by the certification body.

2. Initial Conformity Self Check

- 2.1. The Organization should carry out an initial conformity self-check to analyse their situation (baseline) and level of conformity with the indicators of the applicable FSC standard.
- 2.2. The initial conformity self-check should be carried out by following the corresponding template in Annex 1.
- 2.3. If The Organization wants the results of the initial conformity self-check to be used by the certification body for the preparation of the main evaluation, the results shall be sent to the certification body at least thirty (30) days prior to the main evaluation.

NOTE 1: Although voluntary, it is strongly recommended to carry out an initial conformity self-check, as it can serve to gain a detailed understanding of the requirements of the FSC standard and to prepare for the certification process, as well as contribute to the development of the mandatory Action Plan. In addition, the conformity self-check could fasten the work of the certification body and thus could reduce the evaluation costs.

NOTE 2: The conformity self-check template is an example drawn up based on the FSC P&C. For greater accuracy of the assessment, it can be adapted to the applicable FSC standard. Also, any other template can be used.

3. Action Plan development

- 3.1. The Organization shall develop an Action Plan by taking into consideration the criteria classification as prescribed in Table 1 where the applicable FSC standard is based on the P&C V5-3, or as prescribed in Table 2 where the applicable FSC standard is based on the P&C V4.

Table 1: Categorization of criteria of the FSC P&C V5 (*FSC-STD-01-001 V5-3*)

Principle	Core Criteria	Continuous Improvement Criteria	Low-risk Criteria
1	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8	1, 4	
2	1, 3, 4, 6	2, 5	3
3	1, 2, 3, 4	5, 6	
4	1, 2, X, 6	3, 4, 5, 7, 8	
5	2	1, 3, 4, 5	
6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11	6, 8	2, 3, 5
7	1	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	
8	5	1, 2, 3, 4	
9	1	2, 3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4
10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11	6, 9, 12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11
TOTAL	38	32	17

Table 2: Categorization of criteria of the FSC P&C V4 (*FSC-STD-01-001 V4-0*)

Principle	Core Criteria	Continuous Improvement Criteria	Low-risk Criteria
1	1, 2, 3, 4, 6	5	
2	1, 2, 3		
3	1, 2	3, 4	
4	2, 3, 5	1, 4	2
5	3, 6	1, 2, 4, 5	3
6	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10	3, 7	1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
7		1, 2, 3, 4	
8	3	1, 2, 4, 5	
9	1	2, 3, 4	1, 2, 3, 4
10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9		1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
TOTAL	34	22	20

3.2. The Organization shall develop the Action Plan by following the corresponding template in Annex 2.

NOTE: In case of groups, the group entity is responsible for developing one or more Action Plan(s) and monitoring the Action Plan implementation in its group.

3.3. In the Action Plan The Organization:

- a) Shall specify what constitutes active and inactive management units in its context, with justification;
- b) Shall specify, as much as possible, when site-disturbing activities will be carried out during the Action Plan cycle;
- c) May suggest the non-applicability of criteria to its management unit;
- d) Shall specify in which year which criteria of the applicable FSC standard shall be implemented , by applying the following rules:

Core Criteria (CC)

- i. If the management unit is planned to be active during any of the first three (3) years of the Action Plan cycle, conformity with all CC shall be demonstrated in the main evaluation.
- ii. If the management unit is planned to be -inactive throughout the first three (3) years of the Action Plan cycle, CC designated as low-risk are not applicable during the main evaluation.

Continuous Improvement Criteria (CIC)

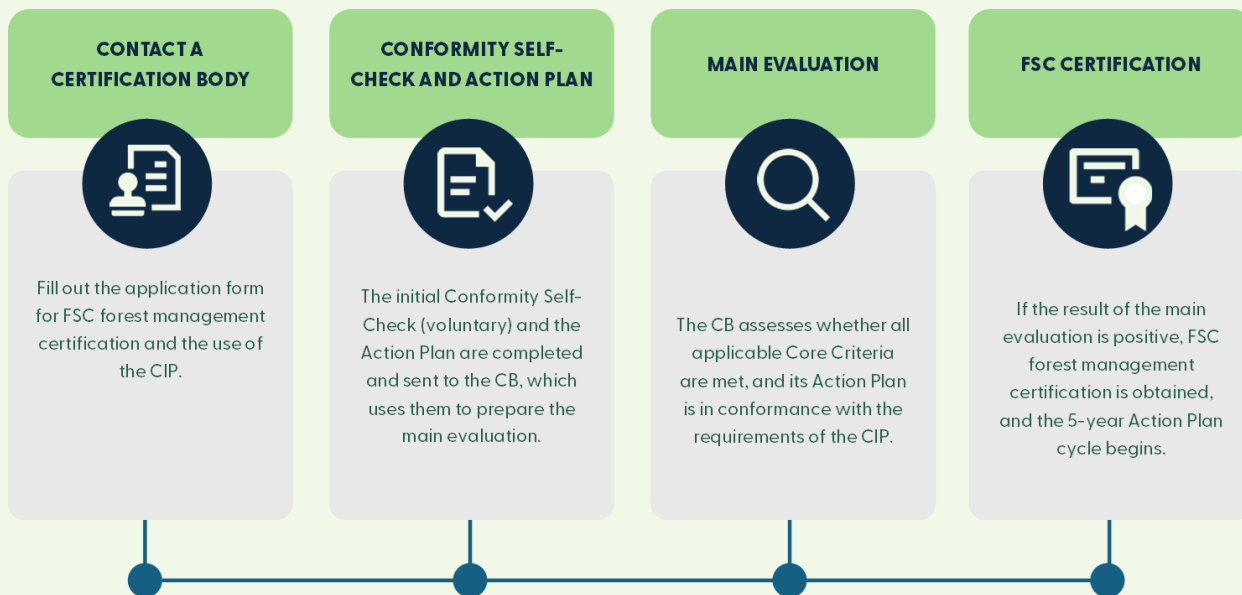
- iii. 50% of the CIC shall be implemented from year one (1) to year three (3) of the Action Plan cycle; the remaining 50% of the CIC shall be implemented in year four (4) and (5) of the Action Plan cycle.
- iv. In inactive management units, CIC designated as low-risk are not applicable.

3.4. The Organization shall share the Action Plan with the certification body at least thirty (30) days before the main evaluation.

3.5. The Action Plan is subject to approval by the certification body during the main evaluation.

NOTE: Once certification has been achieved, The Organization has full access to the labels, trademarks, and marketing options as any other organization that has achieved FSC forest management certification.

Information Box 2



4. Action Plan implementation

- 4.1. The Organization shall conform with all CC and CIC according to the timeline established in the approved Action Plan.
- 4.2. If The Organization for any reason is unable to implement the approved Action Plan , it shall be adapted and the delay shall be communicated together with the justification as early as possible to the certification body.
- 4.3. If The Organization is to undertake site-disturbing activities not considered in the initial planning, the certification body shall be informed of the changes as early as possible; the Action Plan shall be adapted in the way that The Organization conforms with the low-risk criteria prior o conducting site-disturbing activities.
- 4.4. All changes to the Action Plan are subject to approval by the certification body.

Information Box 3

In inactive management units criteria with low-risk designation are not applicable

Main evaluation

Criteria with low-risk designation are not applicable during the main evaluation when no-site disturbing activities are foreseen before the surveillance evaluation in year 3 of the Action Plan cycle.

Year 3 surveillance

Criteria with low-risk designation are not applicable during the year 3 surveillance evaluation when no-site disturbing activities are foreseen in year 4 and 5 of the Action Plan cycle.

Changing plans

However, when The Organization changes its plans and is going to carry out site-disturbing activities during the following year that were not set-out in the Action Plan, the certification body shall be informed through the Self-Monitoring report and may decide to carry out an additional surveillance evaluation to evaluate the criteria with low-risk designation.

Exceptional circumstances

In exceptional circumstances, if for any reason The Organization needs to carry out site-disturbing activities in the time interval between two Self-Monitoring reports or evaluations, The Organization needs to inform the certification body, and the low-risk criteria need to be evaluated during the next surveillance evaluation.

5. Self-Monitoring

- 5.1. The Organization shall implement a Self-Monitoring in years one (1), two (2) and four (4) of the Action Plan cycle and prepare a report including the following information:
 - a) Information on the implementation of the Action Plan during the previous twelve (12) months; evidence of conformity with the criteria set out in the Action Plan.
 - b) Information and evidence on actions taken to address any non-conformities.
 - c) Information on whether there are stakeholder complaints and whether they have been addressed according to the mechanism for resolving grievances established by The Organization (according to Criteria 1.6., 2.6. and 4.6. of the FSC P&C) and the status of the complaint's resolution process.
 - d) Whether any site-disturbing activities are planned in the coming twelve (12) months that were not included in the Action Plan.
- 5.2. The Organization shall send the Self-Monitoring report together with supporting evidence to the certification body on a date agreed with the certification body.

NOTE: In case of groups, the Self-Monitoring can be carried out by the group entity or by the group member.

Information Box 4

Differences between Initial Conformity Self Check and Self-Monitoring

	Initial Conformity Self Check	Self-Monitoring
Responsible	User of this procedure	User of this procedure
Nature	Voluntary	Required
Content	Initial level of conformance	Action Plan implementation, changes of site-disturbing activities, stakeholder complaints, nonconformities.
Template	Template provided in Annex 1	No template
When	During preparation phase; before main evaluation	Year 1, 2 and 4 of the Action Plan cycle
Objective	Understand The Organizations starting point and provide input for the CB to prepare for the main evaluation. Additionally, it can serve as training, provide educational value, empowerment and ownership of the process by The Organization.	Part of the evaluation process. If the Self-Monitoring shows good implementation of the Action Plan without any change and there are no stakeholder complaints or existing ones are well addressed, nonconformities are well addressed, no additional surveillance evaluation will be applied.

6. Applying the continuous improvement concept in forest management groups

- 6.1. The group entity shall establish specific rules in its management system to ensure conformance with this procedure.
- 6.2. Before adding a new member to the group, the group entity shall evaluate each applicant wishing to apply this procedure to ensure that there are no nonconformities with the applicable Core Criteria of the applicable FSC standard and that the applicant is committed to implementing the Action Plan.
- 6.3. In cases where not all members of the group apply this procedure, in order to differentiate those who use this procedure from those who do not, one or more subgroups shall be established with the members who apply this procedure.
- 6.4. The group entity shall define how new members who apply this procedure can be incorporated into the group, using the following options:
 - a) New management units can only be added to the group when a new certification cycle begins, and all new members will start at the year zero (0) of the Action Plan cycle;
OR
 - b) New management units can join the group at any year of the certification cycle. In this case, one or both of the following options can be implemented:
 - i. The group entity shall form a subgroup and all its members start in year zero (0) of the Action Plan cycle.
 - ii. New management units can join a group or subgroup at a year different than year zero (0) of the Action Plan cycle. In this case, the group entity shall verify that the applicant conforms with all

requirements corresponding to the year of the Action Plan cycle in which the applicant will join the group or subgroup.

6.5. The group entity shall develop an Action Plan in accordance with Section 3 of this procedure.

- a) As far as possible all group members using this procedure should follow the same Action Plan.
- b) When the group entity considers it essential to have different Action Plans for different group members, the same Action Plan shall be followed by all subgroup members.

6.6. The group entity shall keep a register of the subgroups, their members and the Action Plan versions used by each subgroup.

6.7. The group entity shall have sufficient capacity and resources to manage the implementation of this procedure and the option chosen.

NOTE: It is recommended that a group does not form more than one subgroup during a certification cycle, as this may increase the cost and complexity of the evaluations.

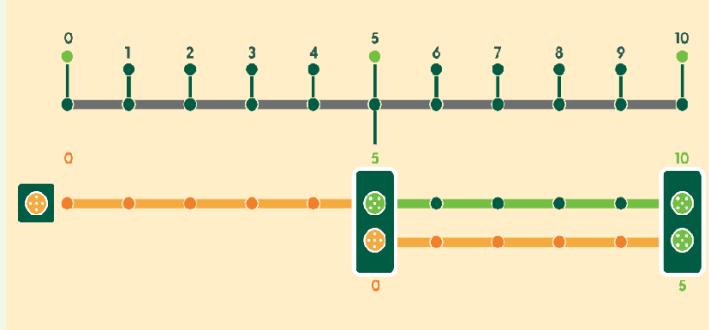
6.8. The group entity shall include the annual monitoring of the Action Plan implementation of the users of this procedure in their internal monitoring system.

6.9. The group entity shall define and document whether Self-Monitoring is the responsibility of the group entity or the group members.

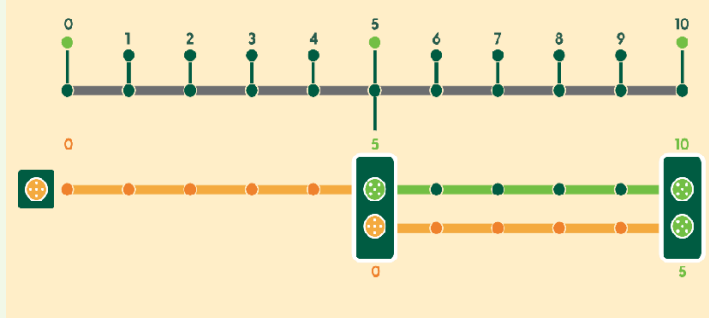
6.10. In any case, the group entity shall ensure that the Self-Monitoring report of its members applying this procedure is in accordance with Section 5 of this procedure.

Information Box 5

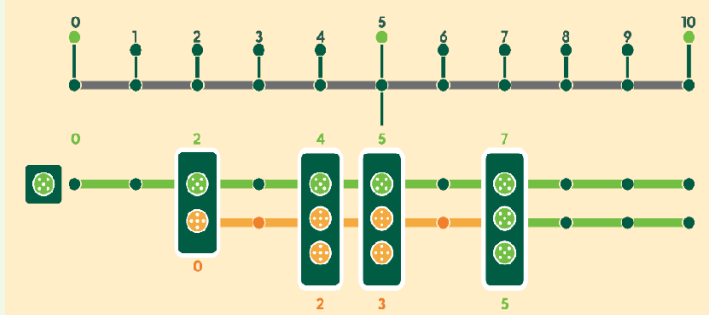
Option 1: New management units can only be added when a new certification cycle begins, and all new members will start at year zero (0) of the Action Plan cycle.



Option 2: New management units can join the group at any year of the certification cycle. The group entity needs to form a subgroup, and all its members start at year zero (0) of the Action Plan cycle.



Option 3 New management units can join a group or subgroup at a year different of the year zero (0) of the Action Plan cycle. In this case the group entity shall verify that the applicant conforms with all requirements conforming the year of the Action Plan cycle in which the applicant will join the group or sub-group.



- Timeline
- Certification Cycles
- Action Plan Cycle
- "Normal" FSC Certification Cycle
- The Organization
- Members using "normal" FSC procedures

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Self Conformity Check (Excel template)

Annex 2: Action Plan (Excel template)

Annex 3: Specifications for local experts

1. Prior and proven knowledge and practical experiences of the specific local context, culture and living conditions and on governance and territorial interrelationship of Indigenous Peoples, traditional communities, or smallholders whose management unit will be evaluated.
2. Knowledge of the local language is desirable but not mandatory.
3. Experience in forest management, FSC requirements and FSC audits is desirable but not mandatory.
4. Being able to work independently.
5. Having access to the required technology.
6. Having sufficient technical skills to use the required technology including capabilities to share documents and participate in meetings online