OUTCOME ORIENTATION CONCEPT NOTE

Concept note – Short version

8/04/2025

THE CONCEPT OF OUTCOME ORIENTATION

Outcomes refer to the short to medium-term effects resulting from the implementation of activities. Outcomes should be understood as part of a causal chain describing successive steps linking the original inputs (resources) invested with the long-term impacts (long-term sustainability effects from the inputs) that are intended to be achieved. such causal chains (or Theory of Change) describe how ones intend to create change on the ground. A simplified illustration of a causal chain is presented below.

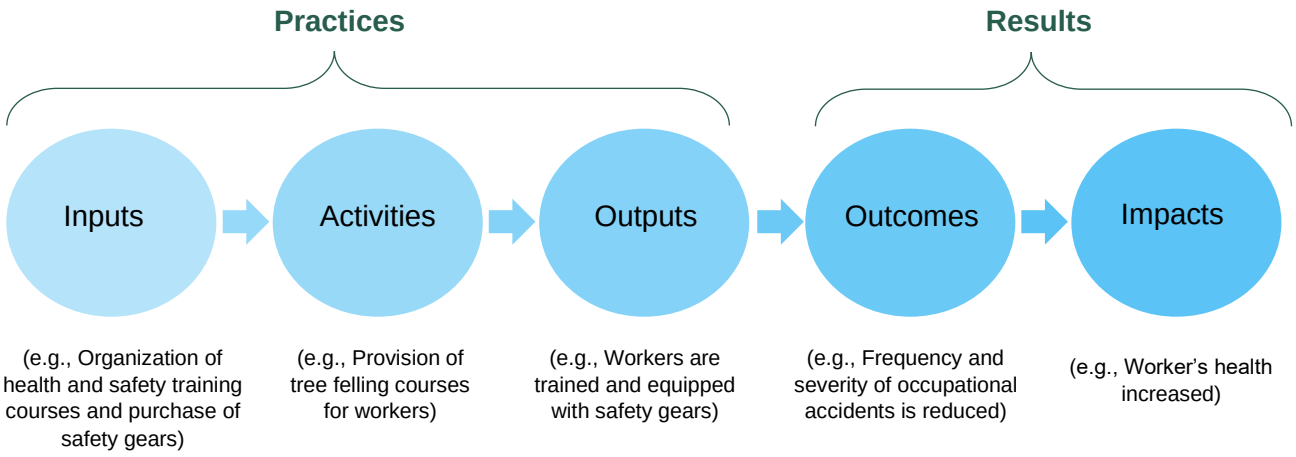

Figure 1. A simplified illustration of a causal chain (Adapted from Gorter & Wotjynia, 2017).

Voluntary Sustainability Standards systems typically develop **practice-based** standards: these have requirements prescribing what must and must not be done. The requirements and their evaluation relate to the implementation of activities (*how*) that are expected to deliver positive outcomes (*what*). On the contrary, **outcome-oriented** standards recognize there is a variety of ways to achieve the same result and focus more on **what to be achieved**, on the results, effects, outcomes of activities..To date, there has been a limited number of Voluntary Sustainability Systems providing outcome-oriented standards. A few examples include the Rainforest Alliance (Rainforest Alliance, 2024), Bonsucro (Bonsucro, 2024) and ASC (ASC, 2024). Further examples, explanation and reflection about developing and shifting towards outcome-oriented standard can be found in Gorter and Wotjynia (2017).

OUTCOME ORIENTATION AT FSC

Background

FSC normative requirements, including those for Forest Management Certification, have been mostly designed to define good practices and to avoid negative impacts: they are practice-based. FSC's assurance system is largely based on an assessment of performances against such practices in a binary pass-fail approach. It is not clear what outcomes or benefits are generated on the ground even if all the requirements of a given standard are implemented.

Practice-based requirements offer great advantages as their assessment remains relevant and fair across the many and diverse local forest contexts found across the globe. They are also the most appropriate approach when outcomes are difficult to assess, when delivering on outcomes is beyond the control of forest managers, and when critical good practices must be implemented.

The FSC Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system aims at improving our understanding of the impacts of FSC certification on social, environmental, and economic aspects of forest stewardship. All M&E activities rely on the use of data to create insights and these data are collected through different approaches. However, given the variety of sustainability issues covered by forest stewardship and the diversity of countries where FSC-certified forests are found, the current M&E system is not adapted to accurately monitor the outcomes at scale. Therefore, integrating the assessment of outcomes into standard development processes will allow deriving insights from data effectively and complement other efforts to ensure a robust and comprehensive scientific evaluation of the impacts of FSC certification.

Our concept

For FSC, outcome orientation means that the development and implementation of normative requirements are guided by a few prioritized key intended outcomes and that progress against these are reported and demonstrated.

The implementation of outcome orientation is intrinsically linked with monitoring and evaluation because intended outcomes are typically not achieved over short time periods and require tracking progress over time, usually through means of quantification. There is no point in defining outcomes unless there is progress monitoring, evaluation, and feedback. Therefore, the deployment of the outcome orientation concept should be done hand in hand with that of monitoring activities.

Our vision

The outcome orientation concept should be deployed through the revision or development of normative documents to allow incorporating learnings from past implementation. Therefore, a given normative document should become more impactful throughout successive iterations of revisions. FSC's vision for outcome-orientation can be represented by two main components:

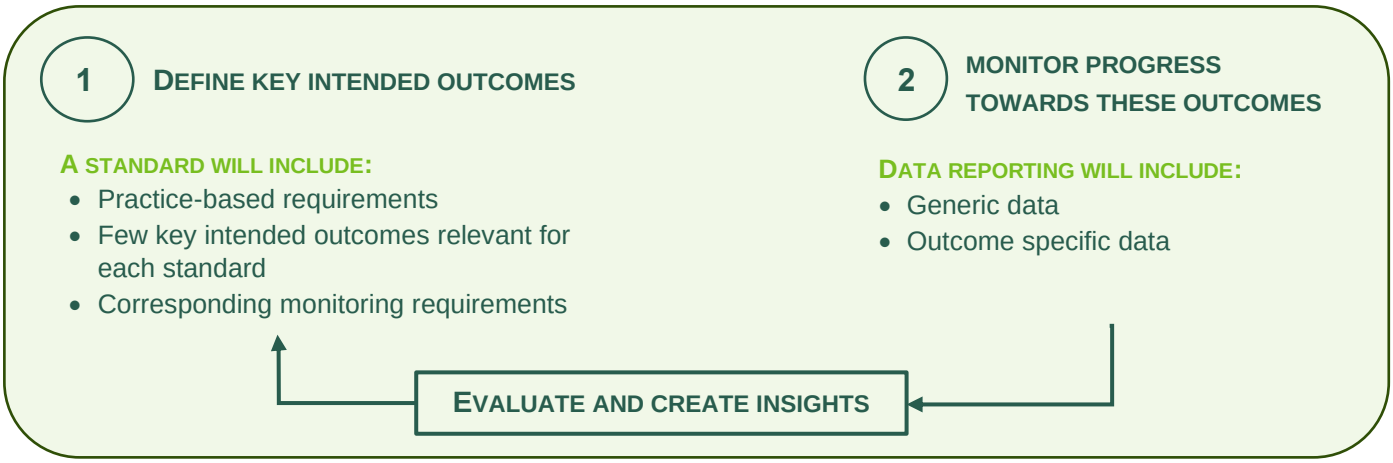

Figure 2. Overall simplified vision for outcome orientation at FSC.

First, the key intended outcomes of a given normative document should be defined. Because of the wide range of topics covered by FSC normative requirements, it is critical that the key intended outcomes results from a strict **prioritization** to ensure realistic monitoring and data demands for the most urgent and critical outcomes in each iteration of a standard revision. The key intended outcomes should be completed with monitoring requirements to ensure clear and consistent monitoring of progress.

Second, monitoring is implemented to ensure that the right data are collected and reported to FSC. A centralization of the data is critical to allow analysis to be conducted across certificate holders and generate insights about certification at the country level can in turn inform revision processes.

Scope of application and strategy for deployment

Outcome orientation is intended to be deployed at FSC in **selected international standards** and **Forest Stewardship Standards (FSS).** FSS represent the main target for outcome orientation because they are the key vehicle to ensure forest stewardship and the achievement of positive sustainability outcomes. Therefore, the deployment of outcome orientation focuses on two international normative documents that influence the development of FSS:

1. **<FSC-PRO-60-006 The Development and Revision of FSC Country Requirements> and <FSC-PRO-60-006a Structure and Content of Forest Stewardship Standards>**: these two documents define how FSS should be developed and what they should contain. Specifically, they play a role to ensure the development of outcome-oriented FSS as per the above vision.

2. **<FSC-STD-01-001 FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship>** (hereafter refer to as the P&C) **and <FSC-STD-60-004 The International Generic Indicators>** (hereafter refer to as the IGI)**:** the revision of these major standards should allow defining the intended outcomes of forest stewardship at a global scale. In other words, these standards should allow defining the expected results from forest stewardship and provide a comprehensive and consistent deployment of outcome orientation, thus complementing FSC-PRO-60-006.

Value proposition

Outcome orientation will create two main direct benefits for the FSC system and its stakeholders. Firstly, it will allow improving FSC's normative requirements and make them more effective to deliver on outcomes. The insights gained about the effectiveness of forest management activities to deliver on key intended outcomes will inform standard revision processes and allow streamlining standards by focusing on the most effective activities and in turn make forest stewardship and certification more efficient and impactful. Secondly, outcome orientation will help FSC tell its story more effectively, building on data and substantiation of what has been achieved on the ground. Such data and results may benefit certificate holders more directly by supporting the process to demonstrate their impacts as part of the Ecosystem Services Impact Demonstration Procedure, andcompliance with sustainability reporting frameworks and disclosure requirements.

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