OUTCOME ORIENTATION CONCEPT NOTE

Concept note

Last updated 26 July 2024

Title:	Outcome orientation Concept note
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Publication date:	Last updated 26 July 2024

Version	Description	Publication Date
V 1-0	First version approved by FSC International	00 Month 0000

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A. SUMMARY

This concept note presents how FSC defines the concept of outcome orientation and how FSC envisions its integration in its certification system. Specific approaches and requirements to concretize the deployment of outcome orientation are to be developed and presented as part of the revision of relevant normative documents.

For FSC, outcome orientation means that standard setting and implementation of normative requirements is guided by a few key intended outcomes. Its main objective is to foster the achievement and demonstration of key intended outcomes, or progress towards them. Outcome orientation will be deployed through selected international normative documents and notably through Forest Stewardship Standards. These will allow the collection of data on a few selected sustainability topics of particular importance in the country related to each of these standards. These data will be the foundation to derive insights about the effectiveness of Forest Stewardship Standards, improve them to become more impactful, and to substantiate communication about positive outcomes of FSC certification across Forest Management certificate holders (i.e. at the country level). This shift should help FSC certification to remain a relevant tool to certify responsible forest stewardship in time when the need for companies to disclose impacts and substantiate sustainability claims in their supply chain is increasingly needed.

B. REFERENCES

The following documents are relevant for the application of this document. For references without a version number, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies:

FSC-STD-01-001	FSC Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship
FSC-STD-01-002	FSC Glossary of Terms
FSC-STD-60-004	FSC International Generic Indicators
FSC-STD-20-007	Forest Management Evaluations
FSC-PRO-60-006	The Development and Revision of FSC Country Requirements
FSC-PRO-60-006a	Structure and Content of FSC Forest Stewardship Standards

C. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

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

Impact: Positive and negative long-term effect resulting from the implementation of a standards system, either directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. (Adapted from OECD Glossary).

Outcome: The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term result from the implementation of FSC normative requirements. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Key intended outcome: Short-listed outcome for which the implementation of normative requirements and progress monitoring is prioritized.

Requirements for outcome monitoring: A clear and precise description of the requirements related to the achievement and monitoring of key intended outcomes. They are composed of the key intended outcomes, the outcome-oriented indicators, the expected insights, the data needs.

THE CONCEPT OF OUTCOME ORIENTATION

Defining outcome

What is meant by *outcome* should first be clarified before explaining the concept of outcome orientation.

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. Development and sustainability interventions such as Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) systems (e.g. FSC), develop such causal chains (usually called Theory of Change) to describe how they intend to create change on the ground and over time. This can be seen as a strategy clarifying what actions should be taken to achieve desired effects in the long-term. A simplified illustration of a causal chain is presented below.

Outcomes refer to the short to medium-term effects resulting from the implementation of activities.

An example of an outcome related to FSC-certification of forest management is the following: a forest management company organizes health and safety trainers and buy safety gears (inputs) to provide tree felling training courses to workers (activities) which results in having several workers to be trained and equipped with safety gears when felling trees (output). A direct result of this can be that the frequency and severity of accidents is reduced (outcome), which contributes to increase worker's health (impact).

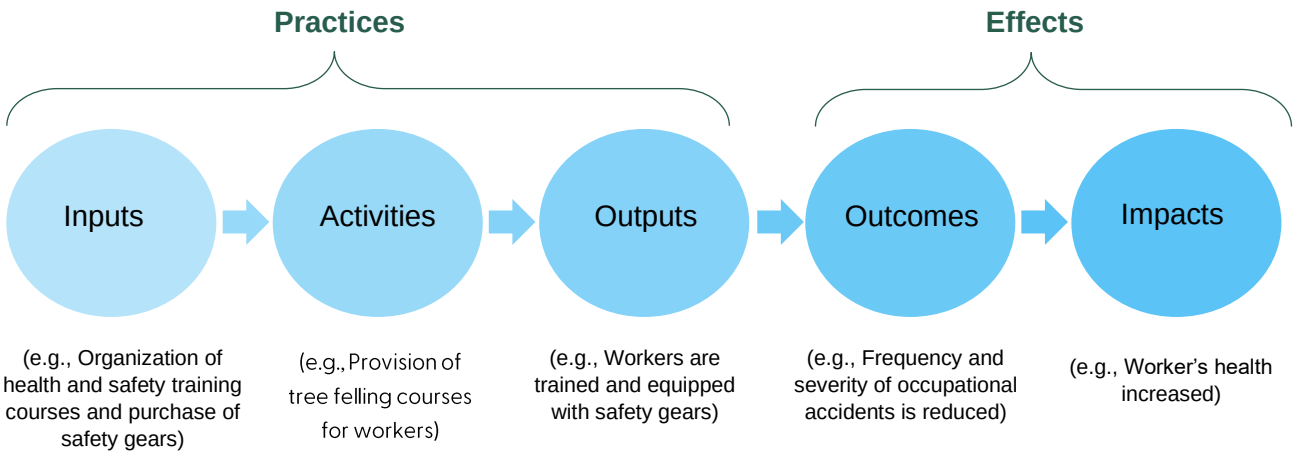

Figure 1. A simplified illustration of a causal chain (Adapted from Gorter & Wotjynia, 2017).

Practice-based and outcome-oriented standards

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 (i.e. by third party certification bodies) relate to the implementation of activities (*how*) that are expected to deliver positive outcomes rather than on actual outcomes achieved (*what*).

On the contrary, **outcome-oriented** (also called outcome-based) 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. This provides opportunities to gives flexibility in how to achieve such outcomes and for the evaluation to focus not exclusively on activities but to some extent on the outcomes achieved or progress towards them.

Example of a practice-based requirement:

Health and safety practices to protect workers from occupational safety and health hazards are implemented.

Example of an outcome-based requirement:

Frequency of severe accidents is lower than or equal to national industry average.

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

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. For instance, the reporting of performances of forest management certificate holders from auditors is limited to a few generic metrics (as per Digital Audit Reporting) and does not allow any quantification or tracking of progress towards desired outcomes over time. The <Ecosystem Services Procedure: Impact Demonstration and Market Tools FSC-PRO-30-006> (hereafter referred to as the ES PRO) is an exception. However, due to its voluntary nature it does not ensure the delivery and demonstration of outcomes for all forest management certificate holders in the FSC system.

Developing hybrid standards with both practice-based and outcome-oriented requirements will fast-track the demonstration of positive outcomes on the ground while ensuring FSC's credibility.

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.

FSC Monitoring and Evaluation system

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 and their analysis to create insights. These data are organized according to three components:

1. **Uptake of certification:** this component tracks the spatio-temporal uptake of certification and describes basic characteristics of FSC certificate holders. It provides a foundation and guides the prioritization of M&E efforts and activities.

2. **Performance of certificate holders**: this component aims to describe performance of certificate holders around short to medium term outcomes of certification (thus covering social, economic and environmental aspects). It aims to provide a good understanding of *what* happened in FSC-certified forests in a cost-effective way and some insights about the effectiveness of FSC requirements. It guides further impact evaluations.

3. **Impact evaluations** aim to provide a deep understanding of *why* outcomes and impacts have happened and to quantify the contribution of FSC certification. Cause-effect analysis are typically conducted by researchers with complex and costly field research over several years. Consequently, impact evaluations are limited to small samples of certificate holders (case studies) and cannot easily be used to upscale findings about FSC.

Given the variety of sustainability issues covered by FSC's Principles and Criteria for Forest Stewardship and the diversity of outcomes generated by Forest Stewardship Standards (FSS) around the world, the current M&E system needs to expand to incorporate this variety and to accurately quantify and demonstrate the outcomes on sustainability topics at scale.

Integrating the assessment of outcomes as per FSC M&E system into standard development processes will allow deriving insights from data effectively. The combination with complementary approaches of data collection and analysis will ensure a robust and comprehensive scientific evaluation of the effectiveness and impacts of FSS.

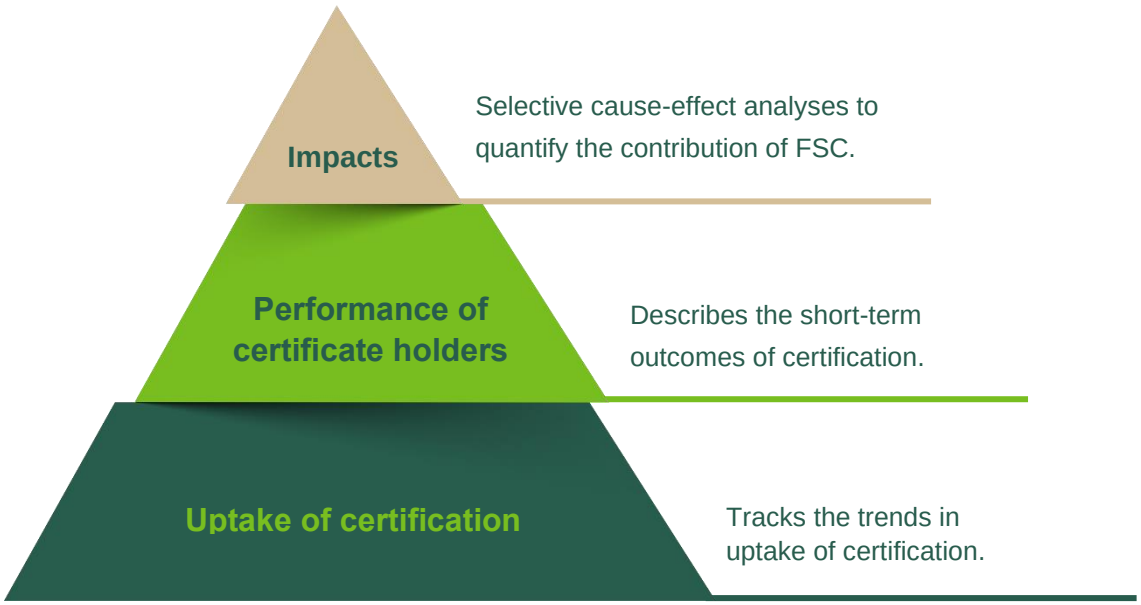

Figure 1. A data pyramid showing the three main components of the FSC M&E system building on each other.

Our concept

Definition

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.

Goal

The goal of outcome orientation is to achieve and demonstrate key intended outcomes of selected normative documents.

How do outcome orientation and monitoring fit together?

Outcome orientation is integrated in the FSC M&E system because it determines the intended outcomes – hence, indirectly, the impact that FSC wants to achieve with its certification. The concepts of outcome orientation and monitoring and evaluation are intrinsically linked 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.

FSC first aims to address outcome orientation in normative documents related to Forest Stewardship as this is where we have our core business and greatest impact ambition. FSC will explore how to address and deploy outcome orientation in Chain of Custody at a later stage. This is the best approach also for capacity reasons and to make sure we learn from the approach with Forest Stewardship.

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:

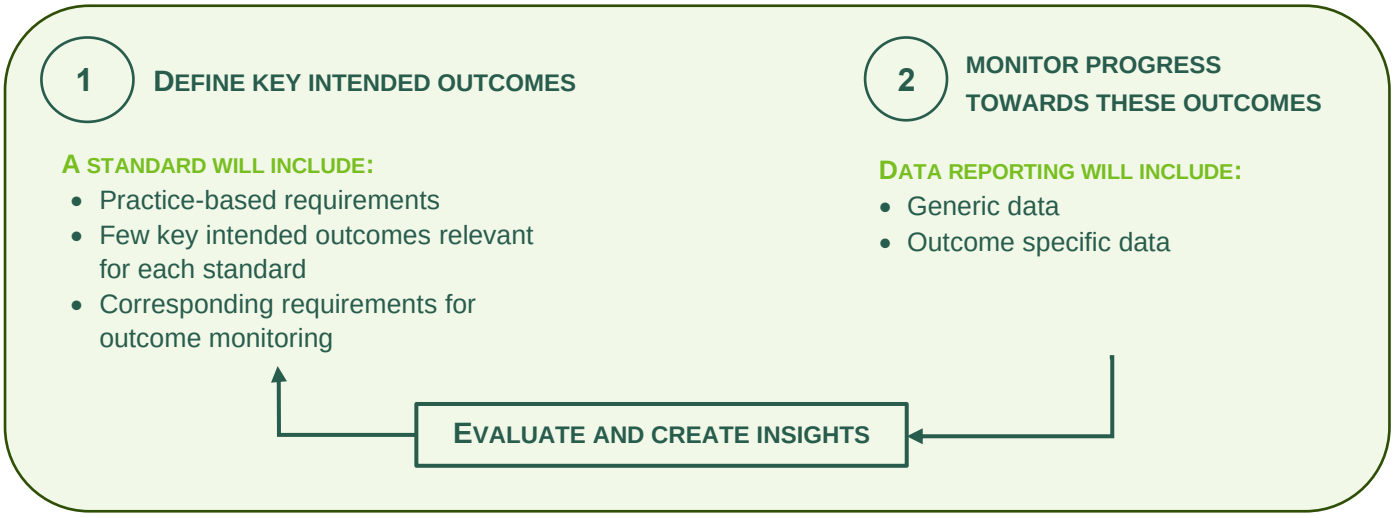

Figure 2. Overall simplified vision for outcome orientation at FSC.

The vision is **not** to develop fully outcome-based normative documents. The vision is to develop a **hybrid approach** integrating both the current type of **practice-based** requirements (i.e. those defining good practices and *how* to achieve outcomes) and complementing them with **outcome-oriented** type of requirements (i.e. those defining *what* to achieve) for selected key sustainability values.

Practice-based requirements are very valuable in many situations, and especially when external factors beyond the control of an organization can affect the value of an intended outcome (e.g., climate change, land use around a management unit, etc.).

Defining key intended outcomes

The first component consists of defining the key intended outcomes that should be specified in the normative documents. These should be defined at the beginning of the development/revision process and constitute the basis to streamline requirements and guide the focus of standard implementation (see section below).

Because FSC FSS often regulate a wide range of topics aiming at a wide range of possible intended outcomes, outcome orientation should involve a strict **prioritization** of such outcomes to ensure realistic monitoring and data demands. This prioritization does not imply less significance for other requirements but rather allows to focus on the most urgent and critical outcomes in each iteration of a standard revision. The key intended outcomes should be completed with requirements for outcome monitoring such as outcome-oriented indicators, sampling, and other to precisely define what and how to monitor progress

against the key intended outcomes. The intention is to ensure clear, robust, and consistent monitoring of progress.

Example of key intended outcomes and outcome-oriented indicators

Example 1:

Key intended outcome: Workers have safe working conditions.

Outcome-oriented indicators:

1. Low number of working days lost because of work-related accidents.
2. Low number of disabling accidents.

Example 2:

Key intended outcome: Diversity of deadwood-dependant epiphytes and saproxylic species resemble that of pristine forests.

Outcome-oriented indicator: Average of 15m^3 of deadwood per ha.

Monitoring progress towards these outcomes

Monitoring is then implemented to ensure that the right data are collected and channelled to FSC. The reporting of data is an essential part of the whole vision because it ensures a centralization of the data so that analysis can be conducted across the different certificate holders, pending standardization of such data. Such analysis is key to generate insights on the progress made towards the outcomes and to capture variation among certificate holders and countries. These insights should in turn inform revision processes and further monitoring and evaluation activities such as in-depth impact evaluations. The results will also contribute to the development of communication material.

Therefore, reporting to FSC will consist of two types of data and information: generic data (similar to every certificate holder) as it is currently done as part of Digital Audit Reporting, and data related to the specific indented outcomes defined for each FSS.

Certificate holders are not expected to systematically be responsible for conducting data collection. FSC International will take the responsibility of data collection when technology such as remote sensing permits effective centralized monitoring of the relevant metric. Also, research collaborations between FSC and other organizations such as certificate holders and research organizations can offer good potential to collect data.

Streamlining requirements

The development of outcome-oriented standards should go hand in hand with their streamlining. Once desired outcomes are made clear and explicit, standard development, implementation and evaluation could be simplified to enable more focus on the achievement of or progress towards outcomes than on the activities intended to deliver on them. For instance, certification processes such as audit efforts could

be more focused on outcomes and reducing requirements that are less relevant to achieve the key intended outcomes. This approach is now being explored. Notably, the right balance between such activities which are often necessary to mitigate risks and ensure consistency among certificate holders, and outcome requirements which can add burden, needs to be carefully defined.

In addition, the solution provided with the risk-based approach (<FSC-PRO-60-010 V2-1 Development of a Forest Stewardship Standard Risk Assessment> and <FSC-GUI-60-010 Guideline for Standard Developers on incorporating a risk-based approach in National Forest Stewardship Standards>) can and should be combined with the development of outcome-oriented FSS.

Scope of application and strategy for deployment

Outcome orientation is intended to be deployed at FSC in **selected international standards** and **Forest Stewardship Standards.**

Deploying outcome orientation in selected international normative documents aims at better understanding their implementation, assessing how effective they are, and keeping them relevant and effective over time throughout revision iterations. Notably, some international normative documents influence how FSC certification is implemented on the ground and how it delivers on sustainability issues (see below).

Some FSC normative requirements do not require outcome orientation due to their contents having limited or, at best, an indirect potential to create demonstrable outcomes (e.g. policy documents or the product type list in FSC-STD-40-004a).

FSS represent the main target for outcome orientation because they are the key vehicle to ensure responsible forest stewardship and the achievement of positive sustainability outcomes.

The concept of outcome orientation is to be deployed across four key international normative documents*:

1. <**FSC-PRO-01-001 V4-0 The Development and Revision of FSC Requirements>**: this overarching normative document commonly referred to as “the mother of all standards” influences the way all other international normative documents under the lead of FSC are revised or developed. The latest version now includes requirements for FSC to define key intended outcomes and monitor whether they have been achieved. This has then cascading effects on other documents in which outcome orientation is to be deployed.

2. **<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 ensure the development of outcome-oriented FSS. Since FSS are the main normative vehicle directly generating sustainability outcomes and impacts on the ground, these normative documents play a fundamental role for deploying the concept consistently on the ground.

3. **<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 upcoming revision of these major standards should allow answering two important questions and contribute to a full and consistent deployment of outcome orientation, thus complementing FSC-PRO-60-006:
   1. *What are the key intended outcomes to be delivered by forest stewardship at a global scale?*
   2. *How can we make forest stewardship and its certification – by means of FSS implementation – more strongly guided by such outcomes?*

4. <**FSC-STD-20-007 V4-0 Forest Management Evaluations>:** given the variations in the definition of key intended outcomes and outcome monitoring requirements, the scope of reporting on the standard implementation (audit reporting) must be flexible in nature taking into account these variations to facilitate monitoring and evaluation activities at FSC. Such flexibility will be ensured with the Forest Management Evaluations standard which allows for flexible reporting, that is, a reporting that caters for variations in the scope and data across FSS. The need to report on varying data across FSS beyond the current generic set of reporting data in Annex 4 should trigger the revision of this standard in the years to come.

As a result of the latest and upcoming versions of the international normative documents listed above, outcome orientation will be deployed in Forest Stewardship Standards. These will represent the main trigger for the achievement of sustainability (social, economic and environmental) outcomes.

* at least and at the time of developing this concept note. Other international normative documents might be concerned in the future.

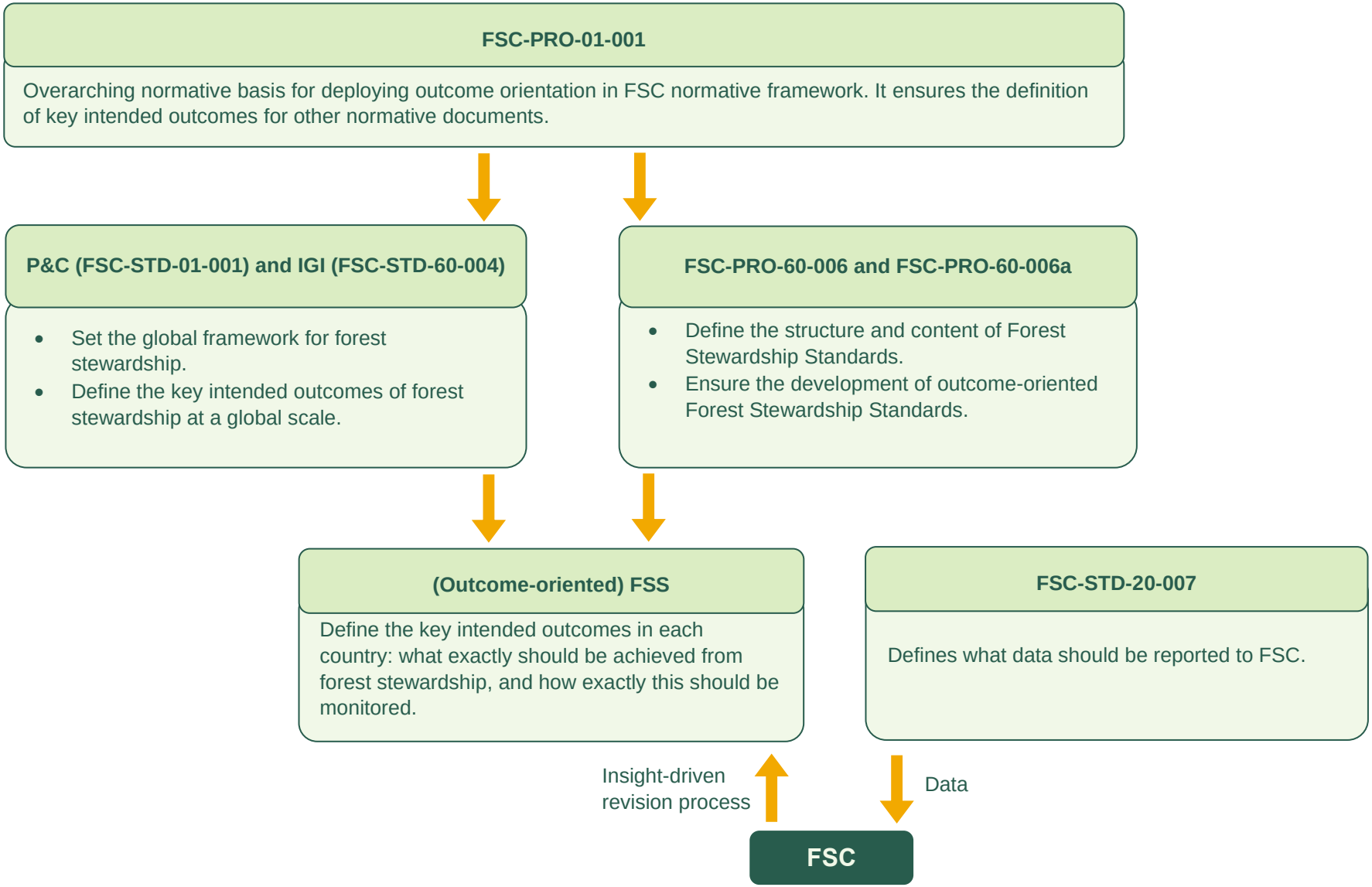

Figure 2. Diagram illustrating how the main normative documents under the scope of outcome orientation are interrelated.

Making Forest Stewardship Standards outcome oriented

Deploying outcome orientation for the development and implementation of FSS means:

1. **Redesigning FSS** to bring clear and explicit intentions as regards to few **key** sustainability (social, economic and environmental) **intended outcomes**,
2. **Strengthen** the **monitoring** of progress towards such outcomes as part of **forest management certification and evaluation,**
3. Leverage the use of robust and consistent **data** to derive insights about these outcomes across certificate holders (from national to global scale) and evaluate the effectiveness of the FSS.

Striking the balance between consistency and adequacy

The selection of key intended (sustainability) outcomes of FSS should ideally be done consistently. Currently, FSC defines a list of intended outcomes that are built on the Principles and Criteria (FSC-STD-01-001 V5-3) as per its Theory of Change. These are defined at an international level in view of being relevant for all forests worldwide. This represents the overall framework assuring consistency in the deployment of outcome orientation across FSS. The upcoming revision of the P&C and IGIs is envisaged to bring a more exhaustive and updated set of intended outcomes at global scale.

Similar to the need to adapt the IGIs to match the local context during the development of FSS, the key intended outcomes should be relevant and specific enough to match the local context in which a given FSS is applicable. Eventually, key intended outcomes might differ from country to country or region to region. FSS development should then provide clear information about the critical aspects that need to be delivered on the ground and require strengthened monitoring to understand the progress being made.

Building on available knowledge and expertise

The development of outcome-oriented FSS should as much as possible build on in-depth expertise available for the specific national and regional contexts. For this purpose, it is recommended to use the FSC Research Portal to search for names of active researchers and experts in different topics. Such topical experts should be selected based on the sustainability values and intended outcomes defined as crucial for a given FSS, and they should be closely engaged and brought into the standard development process. For example, if the maintenance of deadwood and its associated biodiversity is defined as one of the most crucial values in a given country, local experts from NGOs or research institutions should contribute to define specific key intended outcomes, (*what should be achieved,* e.g., how much volume of deadwood per ha) and monitoring activities (*what data should be collected, how, where, etc.,* e.g., types of deadwood to be monitored, locations, frequency, and methods of data collection in the Management Unit).

Also, standard development processes should be supported by available guidance developed and regularly updated based on lessons learnt and calibrations from the implementation of outcome orientated standards.

The collaboration with regional and national experts available in FSC and outside the organization will be fundamental in regional and national implementation of outcome orientation and to define corresponding data needs.

Also, in the development, implementation, and monitoring of key intended outcomes, the application of available research will be critical to ensure the objectivity and the use of proven methods. To support standard setting and monitoring activities, FSC has developed the FSC Research Portal which hosts publications reporting on FSC outcomes and impacts as well as other topics relevant to FSC stakeholders. The publications included in the portal are expected to be the solid and transparent

foundation that informs the development of the requirements for outcomes monitoring to be implemented for a given FSS.

The FSC Research Portal is an online library with a comprehensive selection of publications related to the outcomes and impacts of FSC certification, as well as various forest management related topics relevant to FSC stakeholders. These publications range from peer-reviewed scientific articles to grey literature, such as books, theses, and reports, published by universities and various international organisations. The Portal offers a customised and curated platform that makes the findings of these publications easily accessible and digestible for a wide range of stakeholders.

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 and impacts and impactful. The use of data to create insights on the effectiveness of practices and activities on key intended outcomes will foster informed decisions during standard development processes. For instance, this should allow streamlining normative documents by focusing on the most relevant and effective activities and in turn benefit certificate holders to reach and maintain certification.

Secondly, it will foster the demonstration and communication of positive outcomes of responsible forest stewardship. Generally, outcome orientation will help FSC to tell its story more effectively and robustly. It can substantiate the value of FSC certification by building on data and facts and prove what FSC has achieved on the ground, rather than presenting what it wants to achieve. This in turn will increase the relevance and credibility of FSC certification in the market for sustainable forest-based products and services.

The generation of data and results about sustainability outcomes may benefit certificate holders more directly by supporting:

1. The process to demonstrate impacts as part of the ES PRO (see section below),
2. Compliance with current and future legislation and reporting frameworks around sustainability impact and disclosure such as CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive), and the Green Claims Directive,
3. The development of communication material and marketing activities,
4. The transfer of data throughout the supply chain.

The benefits highlighted should be seen as areas of **opportunities** and potential future development rather than concrete products or results of outcome orientation. The need to disclose and substantiate impacts is increasingly important in our society. Outcome orientation aims to enhance the FSC system by making data related to sustainability outcomes available. How exactly such data will in the future support some of the potential benefits highlighted and the extent to which different stakeholders (e.g. certificate holders and actors throughout the supply chain) will gain from these benefits is yet to be clarified and will likely vary across regions.

Outcome orientation and the Ecosystem Services Procedure

Two different approaches to demonstrating impacts

Generally, the outcome orientation approach and the ES PRO are similar in that they both consist of collecting data on the effects of specific forest management practices to better understand and demonstrate what effects such practices have on sustainability issues (e.g. biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, etc.). However, both differ in quite some aspects.

The main differences are presented in table 1 below. Notably, the ES PRO allows the demonstration of the impacts **of certificate holders** on ecosystem services-related values, and this demonstrated is conducted **by certificate holders**. In other words, it allows highlighting the maintenance or change in values (of ecosystem services) specifically attributable to a certificate holder. The ES PRO is a voluntary tool that works as an add on to the regular FSC Forest Management Certification, and the choice of intended impacts is at the discretion of certificate holders. Importantly, the ES PRO aims to bring a direct demonstration of positive impacts to the market. Therefore, it allows a rapid and tailored response to market demand (e.g. consumers demand on specific issues, disclosure requirements) and opportunities (e.g. sponsors).

On the other hand, the deployment of outcome orientation establishes key intended outcomes that should be the same for all certificate holders across the geographic range of applicability of a given FSS (or across relevant geographic or local socio-environmental conditions for which the key intended outcomes have been defined). These key intended outcomes should relate to the most crucial sustainability values related to the P&C and IGI selected for a given FSS. In addition, the outcome orientation approach is part of the overall FSC M&E system and, thus, is to be complemented by targeted and independent impact evaluations to evaluate the causal relationship between forest management activities and observed changes (i.e. impacts).

In sum, while primary data should be collected in certified management units (at the level of certificate holders) for both outcome orientation and the ES PRO, the level at which data are compiled and analyzed and the result presented differ (see next section for data comparability). The ES PRO consists of analyzing data and communicating results **at the level of a certificate holders**. However, outcome orientation consists of having FSC-centralized data analysis to gain insights and report about outcomes across certificate holders **at the level of a given country** or across countries when possible.

These differences make the two approaches complementing and reinforcing each other.

Two reinforcing approaches

On the one hand, the implementation of outcome-oriented FSS should facilitate the process towards ES PRO and reduce some of the burden of certificate holders. Specifically, the data to be collected as part of outcome oriented FSS could be used by certificate holders as part of the ES PRO. Also, outcome orientation will popularize the conduction of monitoring activities according to robust scientific methodologies across certificate holders. This should facilitate their access to ES PRO, especially for those certificate holders not trained in conducting scientifically sound data collection. Finally, communication around the positive sustainability outcomes achieved across certificate holders enabled by outcome oriented FSS should foster awareness of the potential of using the ES PRO to develop impact claims. The previous will depend on the extent to which the data collected will differ, which will become clearer as the requirements for outcome monitoring are being defined over time for the FSS.

On the other hand, the implementation of the ES PRO will create knowledge which will inform the development of outcome oriented FSS. For instance, practical experience with the use of specific methodologies for monitoring and data collection that are cost-effective and easily implementable will be

very useful, and especially for complex topics such as biodiversity. The implementation of the ES PRO will also generate important knowledge about forest management practices that disproportionately support ecosystem services, and what values of outcomes can be expected in certified management units. Such information will become increasingly available as the number of certificate holders demonstrating impacts with the ES PRO will grow.

	Ecosystem Services Procedure	Outcome-oriented FSS
General differences		
Normative scope	Voluntary	Mandatory, within the defined scope
Objective	To communicate and claim about good practices of CH and their impacts	To learn about the effects of, and improve, forest management requirements
Scope of the effect	**Impacts***	**Outcomes***
Topical scope	Ecosystem Services	Any social, economic or environmental issue covered by the P&C and IGI
Main steps of the implementation		
Responsible to define the intended effect, monitoring elements	Certificate holders	Working group and experts
Geographic scale of primary data collection	Certificate holder	Certificate holder
Geographic scale of data analysis and insights (i.e. scale of communication material)	Certificate holder	Geographic scale of the relevant Forest Stewardship Standard (usually a country)
Responsible to analyze data	Certificate holder	FSC

*Impacts and outcomes are different, see Glossary of terms.

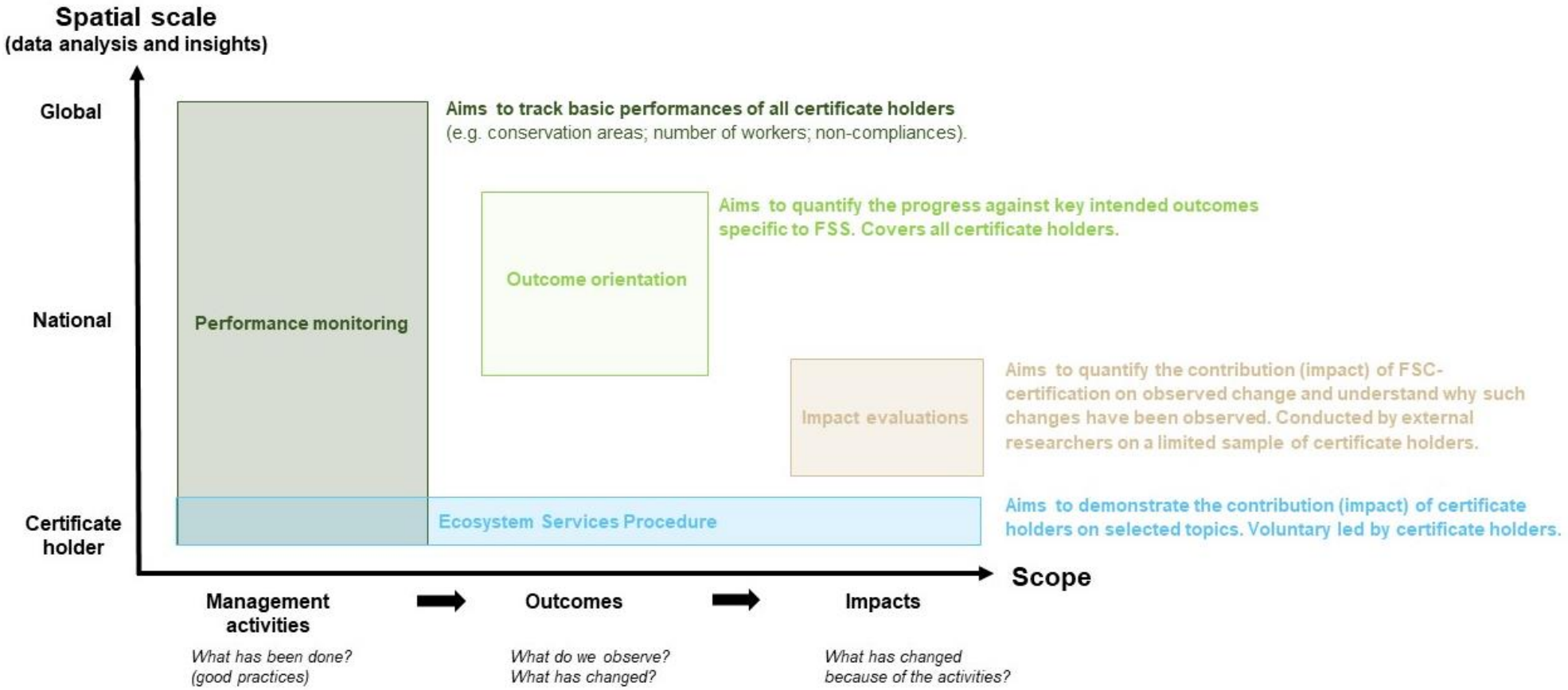

Figure 3. Diagram illustrating the spatial scale and scope of data analysis and insights gained for the main approaches related to impact at FSC.

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