

ASSESSING WHETHER AND HOW RESEARCH CONTRIBUTES TO CHANGE: A THEORY BASED APPROACH

Impacts of international agricultural research:
Rigorous evidence for policy Conference,
World Agroforestry Center,
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OVERVIEW

- Background and context: the challenge for FTA
- Theory-based evaluation of R4D
- Examples of application
- Lessons Learned

FTA FLAGSHIP PROJECTS

FP1: Tree genetic resources to bridge production gaps and promote resilience

FP2: Enhancing how trees and forests contribute to smallholder livelihoods

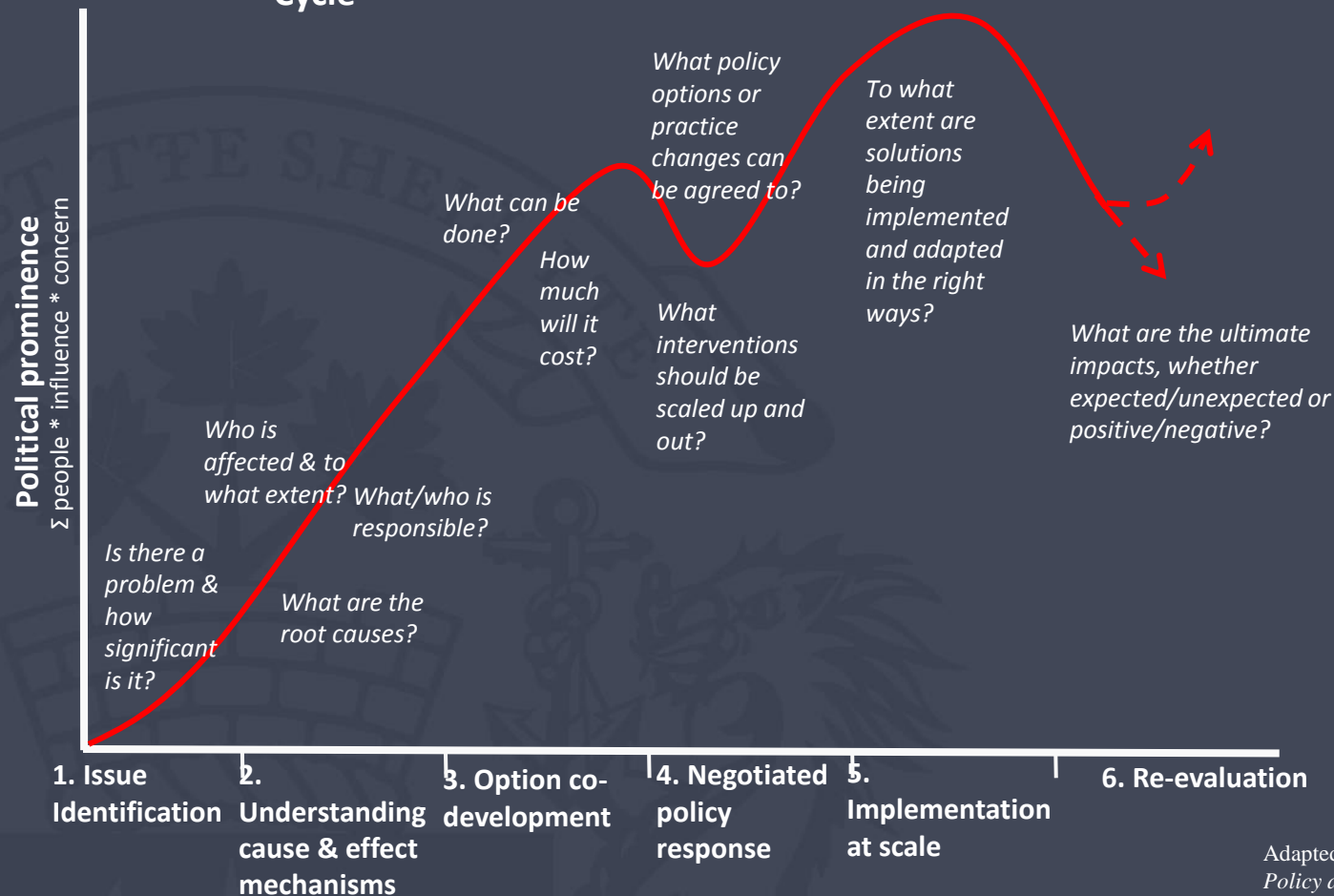
FP3: Sustainable global value chains and investments for supporting forest conservation and equitable development

FP4: Landscape dynamics, productivity and resilience

FP5: Climate change mitigation and adaptation opportunities in forests, trees and agroforestry

“Issues Attention Cycle”

Key Stages of the Issue-attention Cycle



Adapted from: Tomich, Thomas, P. et al. (2004)
Policy analysis and environmental problems at different scales: asking the right questions,
Agriculture, Ecosystems, and the Environment, 104,
pp.5-18.

HOW RESEARCH CONTRIBUTES

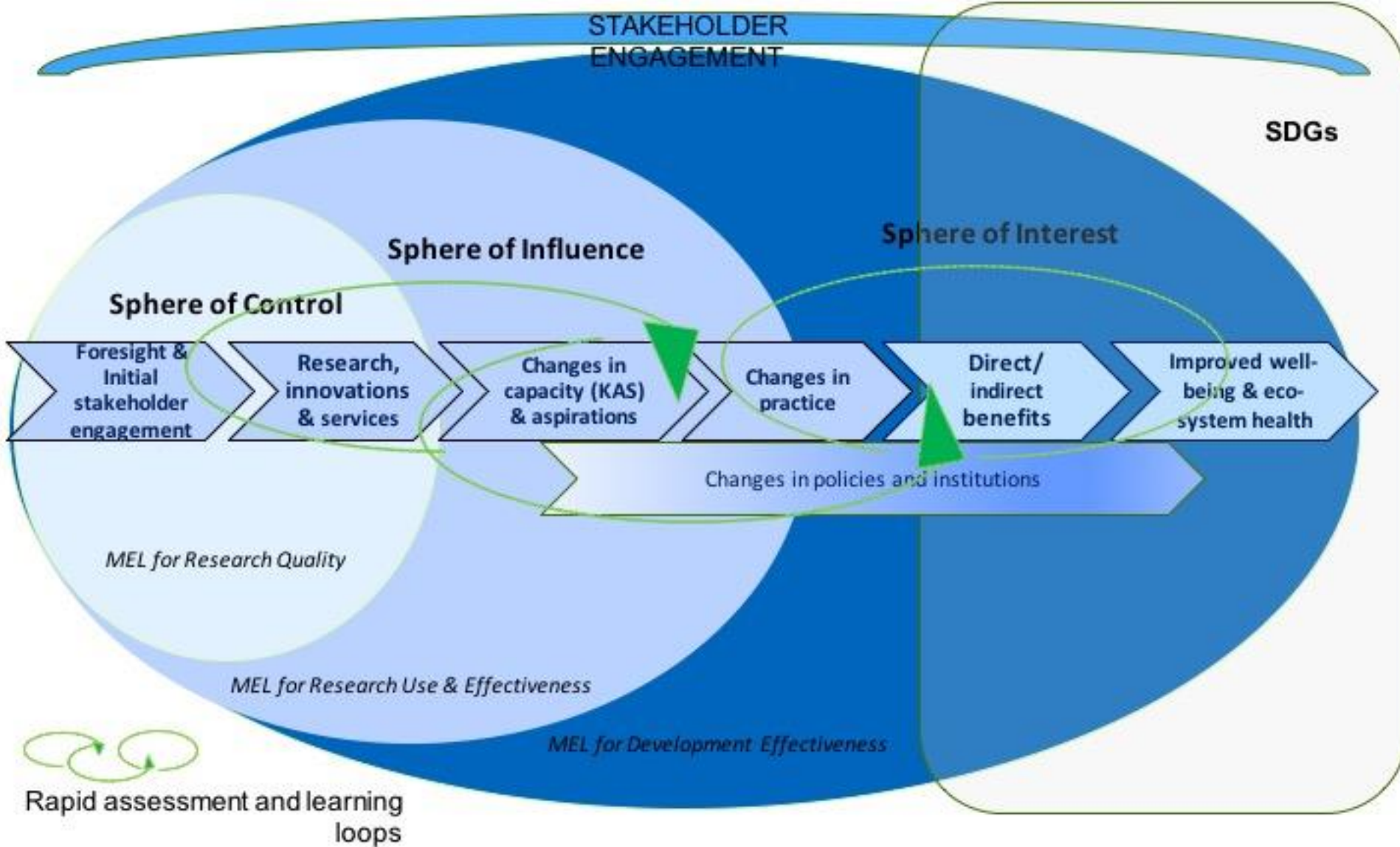
Knowledge Contributions

- Improve theory & methodology
- Issue identification
- Develop conceptual frameworks
- Provide theoretical and/or empirical analysis & possible solutions
- Challenge conventional analysis & "myths"
- Provide evidence-based recommendations & guidance for improved policy & practice
- Evaluate impact

HOW RESEARCH CONTRIBUTES (CONT)

Capacity & Process Contributions

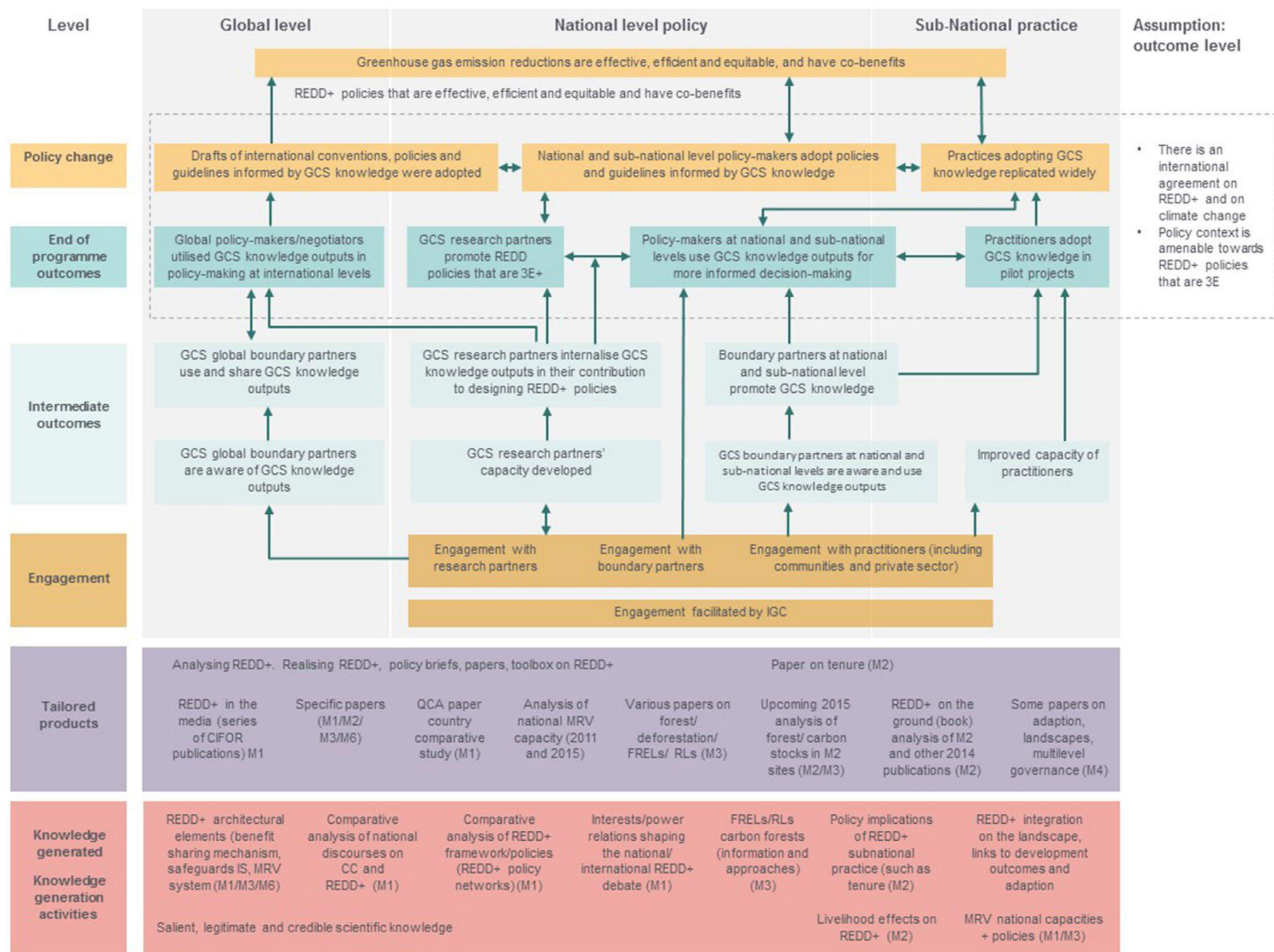
- Build social and scientific capacity
- Influence public discourse
- Provide forum and/or facilitate negotiated solutions
- Influence research agendas
- Influence policy and practice through multiple pathways



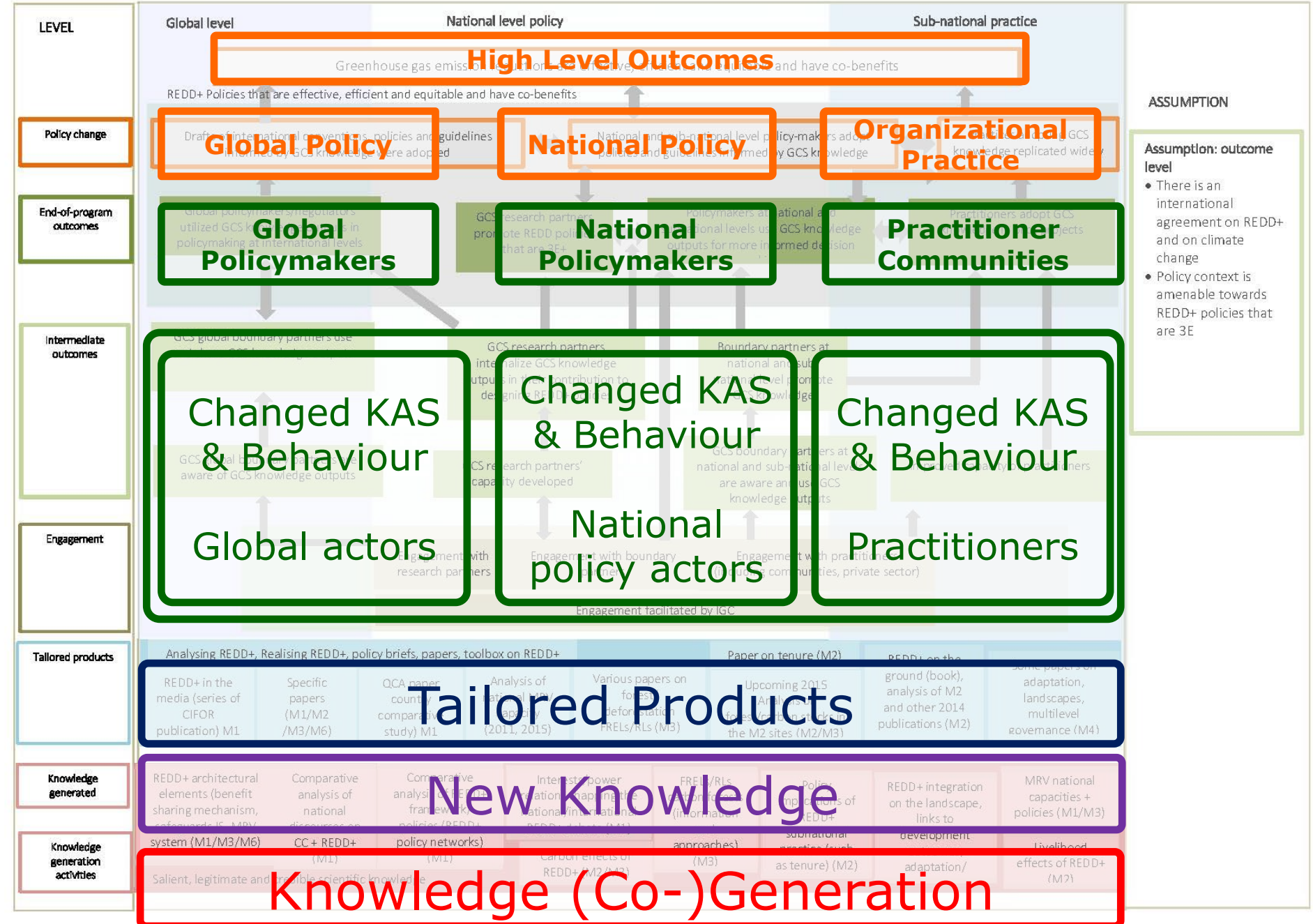
CGIAR RBM Framework

THEORY-BASED OUTCOME EVALUATIONS

- Document the ToC (key actors, steps and assumptions)
- Use ToC to identify data requirements & sources
- Collect and analyse data against the ToC (mixed methods) to assess:
 - Did the expected results occur?
 - Did the assumptions hold and provide a reasonable explanation for the results?
 - Are there other factors to be included in the causal logic?
 - Are there plausible alternate or supplementary explanations?



GCS Overall Theory of Change Final (26/03/2015)



[illegible]

CASE STUDY FINDINGS IN BRIEF

SFM Congo Basin: CIFOR and CIRAD **made “necessary contributions”** to the international SFM agenda, national management standards, adaptation of international certification criteria and private sector implementation of forest management and certification.

GCS-REDD+: Research **contributed through multiple pathways to national and international systems** that will achieve reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from forests in ways that are effective, efficient, equitable.

CASE STUDY FINDINGS IN BRIEF (CONT.)

SWAMP: Research results and recommendations helped **raise academic and policy interest in wetlands as carbon reservoirs and were used by key decision-makers in the policy discourse.** UNFCCC recognizes SWAMP as key reference on wetland issues. Knowledge translation was achieved through a variety of mechanisms; **direct engagement with policy processes was particularly important.**

FVC: Project **facilitated the establishment of a small-scale furniture association, capacity building and engagement and influenced local government policy on small-scale furniture production.** Association became less active and weak

LESSONS LEARNED: USE OF TOC

- Steep but valuable learning curve for scientists
- ToC development process valuable
- Good analytical framework: hypotheses made explicit and testable
- Transparent analysis & reporting provides defensibility
- Lack of counterfactual and quantitative analysis compromises credibility for some audiences
- ToCs still basic: need better incorporation of social-science theory for more robust assumptions

LESSONS LEARNED: DATA ANALYSIS

- ToC provides framework for identifying data needs & sources
- Results table key to summarise & present data as evidence
- “End-of-programme outcomes” useful conceptually and practically
- Easier to test causal links with more limited geographic and sectoral scope
- Challenge of different (e.g. political) perspectives on change process

LESSONS LEARNED: INDEPENDENCE & OBJECTIVITY

- Participatory evaluation approach aids learning, risks concerns about objectivity
- Careful & transparent documentation of methods, ToC & results chart adds credibility
- Reputable external organisations led SFM and GCS-REDD+
- Additional review by a “reference group” (GCS-REDD+) and/or peers (FVC, SWAMP, SFM)

NEXT STEPS

- Advance ToC use at program scale
- Strengthen theory in ToC
- Develop explicit ToCs for all new projects
- Improve monitoring data collection & use
- Publish outcome evaluations
- Link outcome evaluations to *ex ante* and *ex post* impact assessments
- Advance research program on research effectiveness

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- The Institute of Advanced Study Fellowship Programme, Durham University
- See also: Belcher, B., Suryadarma, D., & Halimanjaya, A. (2017). Evaluating Policy-Relevant Research: Lessons from a Series of Theory-Based Outcomes Assessments
https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2948337