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Biodiversity and the Fashion Industry: A Literature Review on Risks, Strategies, and Sustainable Solutions

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ABSTRACT: Biodiversity, the diversity of life on Earth, is crucial to ecologic stability and the maintenance of human well-being. It encompasses species diversity, between species diversity, and ecosystem diversity. The richness of life promotes food security, climate stability, medicine, and cultural values. Biodiversity is severely threatened by the loss of habitats, pollution, overexploitation, invasive species, and climate change. The textile and fashion industry, among others, has a large influence on biodiversity through unsustainable behaviour. This paper discusses the significance of biodiversity, major threats, and international and Indian conservation strategies. It emphasizes the contribution of business towards the management of biodiversity risks and the necessity of mainstreaming biodiversity strategies within sustainability objectives. Frameworks such as TNFD, SBTN, and nature-based solutions present avenues for sustainable corporate action. The research calls for immediate, concerted international and domestic action to stop biodiversity loss. Conserving biodiversity is not only an ecological responsibility but a commercial imperative and the basis for sustaining the environment in the long term.

KEYWORDS: Biodiversity, conservation, ecosystem services, ecological balance, sustainable development

I. INTRODUCTION

Any kind of living thing, whether plants, animals, microorganisms, and ecosystems thereof, make up biodiversity. It is stated to occur at three levels: genetic diversity, species diversity, and ecosystem diversity. This interdependent web of life maintains ecological integrity intact on which human beings exist. Biodiversity offers very important ecosystem services like pollination, cleansing of water, regulation of climate, and fertility of soils. Conversely, biodiversity makes humanity obtain food, fiber, fuel, and medicine. Biodiversity worldwide is facing accelerated extinction at an unprecedented rate due to anthropogenic perturbations and other human activities. These are deforestation, industrial pollution, non-sustainable agriculture, habitat loss, and climate change, all of which threaten to bring about the extinction of many species and the loss of natural habitats. WWF Living Planet Report reports a 69% decline in wildlife since 1970. This article aims to discuss the extent, threat, and frameworks of biodiversity conservation, especially in relation to its significance for business industries such as fashion. It highlights the need for embracing biodiversity-focused sustainability strategies

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Understanding Biodiversity and Natural Capital

Some of the good definitions describing biodiversity are mentioned below:

Biodiversity refers to the variety of living organisms across ecosystems, including variations in genetic, phenotypic, and functional attributes, as well as their abundance and distribution over time and space. [1] Biodiversity is the variability among living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological complexes of which they are part. It includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems.

[2] Biodiversity, a contraction of the words "biological" and "diversity," refers to the variety of life on Earth or within a specific ecosystem or region. It encompasses all living things, including bacteria, plants, animals, and humans. [3] Natural Capital encompasses the world's natural assets, including geology, soil, air, water, and all living organisms.

The Relationship between Biodiversity and Natural Capital

Biodiversity and natural capital are closely intertwined. Biodiversity is a key component of natural capital because it contributes to the resilience and productivity of ecosystems, enabling them to provide essential services. For example, diverse plant species help maintain soil fertility and structure, which in turn supports agricultural productivity (a provisioning service). Biodiversity also ensures that ecosystems can adapt to changes, such as climate fluctuations, thus maintaining the flow of ecosystem services over time.

Maintaining biodiversity is essential for preserving natural capital, as it ensures that ecosystems continue to function effectively and provide the resources and services that human societies depend on. Conversely, the degradation of natural capital—through deforestation, pollution, or overexploitation of resources—can lead to a loss of biodiversity, which in turn diminishes the ability of ecosystems to support life and human needs.

While biodiversity risks might seem more relevant to heavily impacted sectors like mining, forestry, and agriculture, many companies rely on natural capital and could be affected by its degradation. Thus, incorporating biodiversity and natural capital into risk management is crucial for all businesses. [4]

Biodiversity Loss Across Ages: (Biodiversity Timeline)

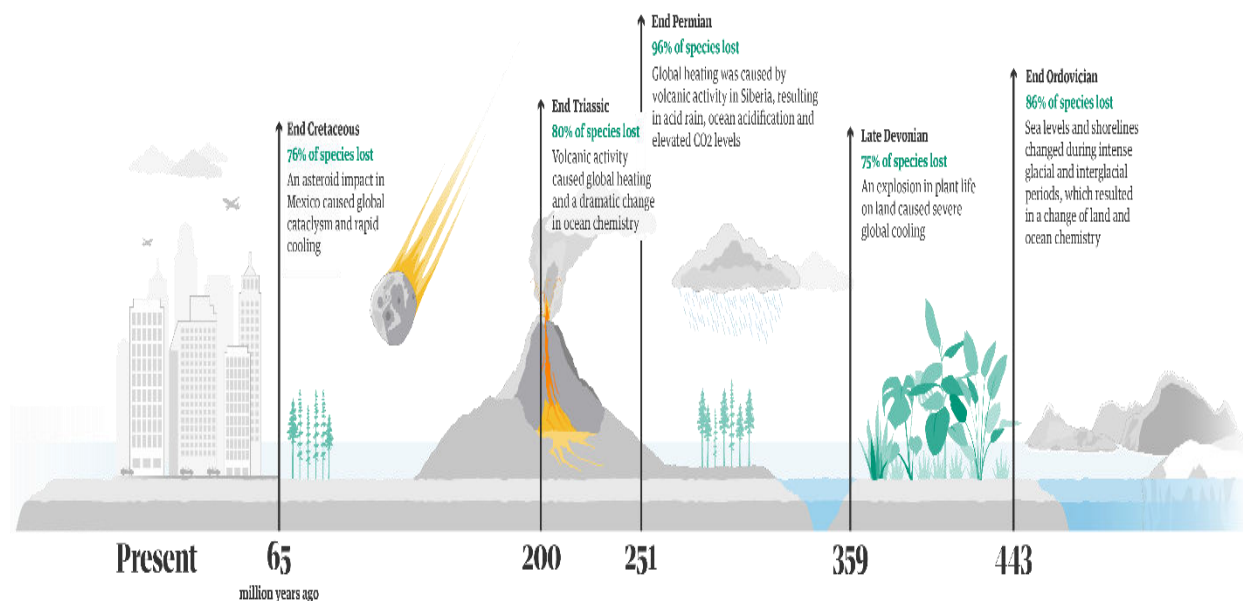


Fig.1. Decline in Biodiversity due to Human Activities

The above picture depicts the significant decline in biodiversity due to human activities, stating that species are now going extinct up to 1,000 times faster than pre-human rates. The Living Planet Index reports a 69% average drop in monitored wildlife populations between 1970 and 2018. This decline is particularly acute in Latin America (94%), followed by Africa (66%), Asia and the Pacific (55%), North America (20%), and Europe/Central Asia (18%).

Key drivers of biodiversity loss include changes in land and sea use, over-exploitation of resources, climate change, pollution, and invasive species. For instance, tropical rainforests and coral reefs—home to diverse species—are particularly at risk. The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List identifies over 41,000 species

as threatened with extinction, with certain groups like cycads (ancient plants) and sharks being disproportionately affected.

Despite this, conservation efforts have successfully saved species like the Iberian lynx and California condor, demonstrating the potential for recovery with targeted action. New metrics like the IUCN Green Status are aiding in planning for species restoration. [5]

III. WHY BIODIVERSITY?

Biodiversity plays a more significant role in your business than you might realize. The loss of biodiversity can disrupt supply chains, increase compliance costs, and damage a company's reputation. Investors are now prioritizing businesses that adopt nature-positive strategies and set science-based targets, making it crucial for companies to adapt. Healthy ecosystems, supported by biodiversity, provide essential resources like raw materials, clean water, and climate stability. As biodiversity declines, supply chains face greater risks, such as resource shortages and increased operational costs. Stricter environmental regulations are also emerging to address this issue. By incorporating biodiversity protection into their sustainability plans, businesses can reduce these risks, strengthen their resilience, and appeal to stakeholders who prioritize nature-conscious practices.

Biodiversity maybe more Important to your Business than you Realize

Biodiversity loss can have far-reaching and often overlooked consequences, damaging a company's social license to operate. Many companies are just beginning to explore their impact on biodiversity, and only a few have developed credible strategies with robust, science-based goals aligned with the Science-Based Targets Network. Investors are increasingly focusing on biodiversity, seeking to allocate capital to companies that can demonstrate effective biodiversity strategies and transparent reporting. The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) has introduced a beta version of its framework to help businesses understand and disclose their biodiversity risks and opportunities, aiming to drive investor action like the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). [4]

INVESTORS TRENDS AND REGULATORY DEVELOPMENTS

Businesses causing negative biodiversity impacts may face challenges accessing capital, as investors seek to avoid stranded assets due to emerging biodiversity regulations. Unlike climate change, which took decades to be recognized as a financial risk, biodiversity risk might prompt faster regulatory action. Anticipated regulations include stricter land use rules, subsidy reforms, and environmental taxes, with many countries already making strides in this area.

Examples of regulatory actions globally:

- France has had a biodiversity reclamation law since 2016, aiming for zero biodiversity net loss and creating the French Agency for Biodiversity.
- The European Parliament is working on the EU Directive for mandatory due diligence on human rights, environmental, and governance issues.
- Regulatory and Compliance Research:
- Research the compliance landscape around biodiversity, focusing on emerging regulations and standards like the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) and the European Green Deal.
- Indonesia has imposed a moratorium on peatland conversion.
- Costa Rica redirects cattle subsidies to support ecosystem services.
- Australia is reviewing its Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. [4]
- India, a megadiverse country, has taken multiple steps to protect and preserve its rich biodiversity. These initiatives focus on the conservation of ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity, while also addressing environmental challenges such as habitat loss, poaching, and human-wildlife conflict. [6]

BIODIVERSITY RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Ecosystem collapse can pose significant operational risks – An ecosystem collapse is defined as the failure of an ecosystem to maintain functioning cycles that sustain life. Such a phenomenon creates huge operational risks for business and industries. Major business sectors like farming, fishing, forestry, and pharmaceutical businesses directly depend upon ecosystem services like pollination, water filtration, and raw material supplies. Collapses of such systems can cause disruption in supply chains, resource shortages, and higher production costs. In addition, higher

environmental legislation pressures companies to pay for more expensive compliance costs and suffering reputational damage, which may reduce consumer trust and access to the marketplace. Physical risks, comprising soil degradation, water scarcity, and extreme weather events, further threaten operations and infrastructure while financial losses increase due to expenditures spent on replacing natural services with artificial solutions. Addressing such risks is essentially what businesses should do: implement sustainable practices, nature-based solutions, and direct contributions toward conserving biodiversity.

The World Economic Forum reports that more than half of global GDP depends on nature, and many sectors are highly reliant on natural resources. To address the destruction of nature, which continues relentlessly, there is a push by delegates at the 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Montreal, Canada, popularly known as COP15, to try to halt the alarming decline of animals, plants, and insects. The conference sought to enact a new global framework for the protection of biodiversity.

In a highly empowered opening address UN Secretary-General António Guterres described humanity as "a weapon of mass extinction" and urged all present to take decisive action, saying the gathering was "our chance to stop this orgy of destruction".

Destruction on such scale is appalling and alarming, just as Guterres described, mainly because more than 1 million species are facing extinction and disappear through extinction at a pace unseen since the last 10 million years. Furthermore, a maximum of up to 40 percent of the world's land area is degraded. The International Union for Conservation of Nature has established various studies showing that 79% of the threats presented to the endangered species arise from human-related activities-which include agriculture, infrastructure developments, energy, and mining. [7]

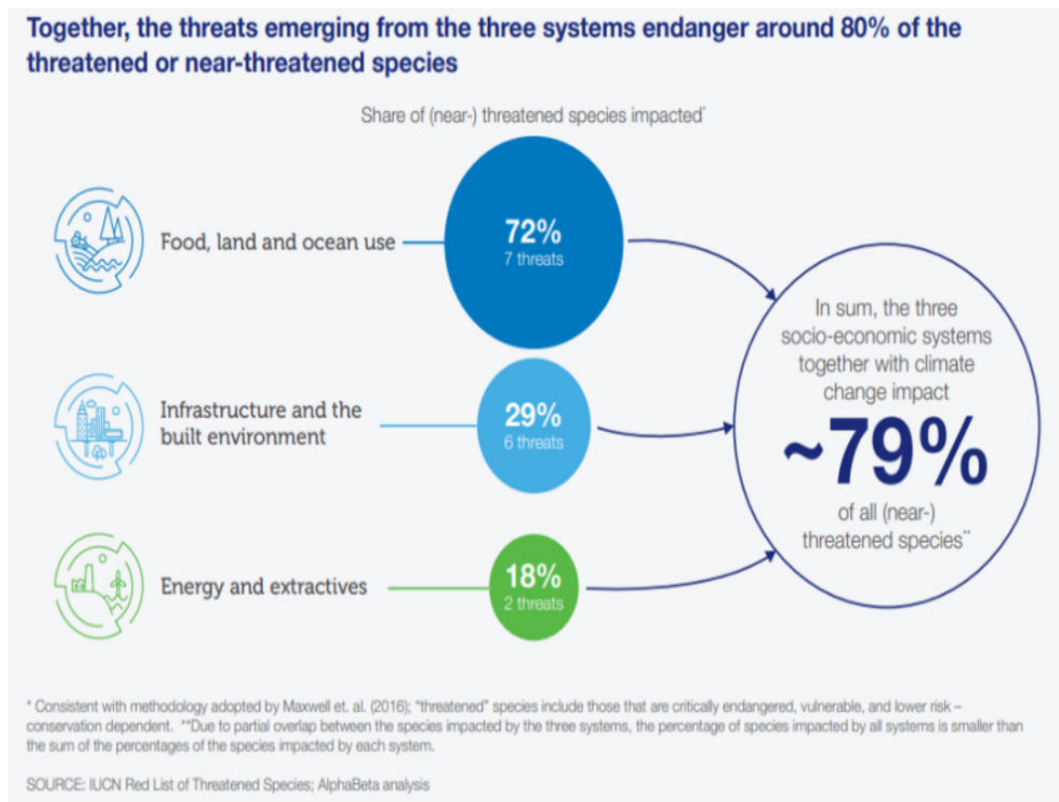


Fig.2. Threats to Endangered Species- International Union for Conservation of Nature

Risks can be categorized as:

- Dependency Risks: Businesses dependent on nature (e.g., water, pollination) could face financial challenges if these resources are compromised.
- Impact Risks: Negative impacts on nature can lead to reputational damage, legal issues, or financial losses.
- Transition Risks: Changes in policy, law, or technology related to biodiversity can affect businesses.
- Disruption Risks: Loss of nature can disrupt societies or markets, such as through disease outbreaks. [4]

Steps Towards Managing Biodiversity Risks:

As businesses transition to a low-carbon economy, they are expected to demonstrate how they mitigate biodiversity impacts. This involves:

1. Educate and Enlist: Educate executives on biodiversity and engage in relevant initiatives.
2. Enrol and Enforce: Bring in expertise to map biodiversity risks, set science-based targets, and build internal accountability.
3. Embed and Explain: Integrate biodiversity strategies with climate strategies and disclose management practices and performance regularly. [4]

With the rapid acceleration of biodiversity loss worldwide, businesses must identify and tackle the related risks to maintain long-term sustainability and resilience. By understanding their reliance on natural systems, evaluating their environmental impacts, and adopting proactive measures to protect and restore ecosystems, companies can not only reduce risks but also discover new avenues for innovation and growth. In today's interconnected world, prioritizing biodiversity conservation is not just an environmental obligation—it's a critical business necessity.

IV. BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT- KEY STEPS FOR IMPROVING BIODIVERSITY

The fashion and textile industry heavily relies on natural resources, which has serious environmental consequences, particularly affecting biodiversity and ecosystem integrity.

- One major challenge is “land system change”, where forests are converted for raw material cultivation like cotton, leading to habitat destruction, ecosystem fragmentation, and a decline in species. This also reduces carbon sequestration, worsening climate change.
- “Biosphere integrity” is compromised by extensive production and human wildlife conflicts, weakening ecosystems critical for fibre production and increasing the risk of species extinction.
- “Freshwater change” from excessive water use and pollution disrupts hydrological cycles, degrading aquatic ecosystems and harming biodiversity. Similarly, “atmospheric aerosol loading”—air pollution from manufacturing—traps radiation and alters climate patterns, threatening species survival. The overuse of “biochemical flows”—nitrogen and phosphorus in fertilizers—causes nutrient pollution, soil degradation, and eutrophication in water bodies, harming both terrestrial and aquatic life. “Novel entities” like toxic chemicals in herbicides and pesticides further degrade ecosystems and biodiversity.
- “Ocean acidification”, driven by CO₂ emissions, lowers the pH of seawater, affecting marine species like shellfish and corals, with cascading effects on biodiversity and marine ecosystems. “Climate change” exacerbates all these issues, altering species survival conditions and destabilizing ecosystems essential for fibre production.
- Finally, “ozone depletion”, although less severe now, still poses a risk to biodiversity by increasing harmful UV radiation, affecting plants, animals, and ecosystems

To address these challenges, the fashion industry must shift toward more sustainable practices, halting habitat destruction, restoring ecosystems, reducing chemical pollution, and integrating nature-based solutions to ensure long-term environmental and industry viability. [9]

Key Obstacles in Addressing Biodiversity in Fashion ---

Despite growing awareness of the importance of biodiversity, the fashion sector faces several key obstacles: - Lengthy and intricate supply chains make it difficult to trace the environmental impact of raw material production. - Limited understanding of biodiversity within the industry hinders effective action. - A lack of alignment on measuring biodiversity impacts complicates efforts to track progress and set meaningful targets. These challenges underscore the urgent need for fashion companies to transform their operations with a focus on reversing biodiversity loss. To secure a

resilient future for nature and business, we must take concrete steps to avoid further ecosystem degradation and promote sustainable practices throughout our supply chains.

Goals for Biodiversity & Impacts

To align with global biodiversity targets, we have set the following key goals:

- Goal A: Maintain and enhance the integrity of ecosystems. This includes preventing further biodiversity loss by restoring degraded ecosystems, reducing the extinction rate of species, increasing the population of native wild species, and maintaining genetic diversity across species.
- Goal B: Use biodiversity sustainably, ensuring that our resource consumption is aligned with the regeneration capacity of ecosystems.
- Goal C: Ensure that monetary and non-monetary benefits from biodiversity are shared fairly with local and indigenous communities by 2050. The fashion industry's dependence on natural ecosystems must also contribute to the wellbeing of those who are most closely tied to the land.
- Goal D: Build capacity and financial resources, promote scientific cooperation, and transfer technology to implement the "Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework", aligning with the 2050 vision for a world living in harmony with nature.

Four overarching goals to be met by 2050:

- Halt loss, restore nature
- Use lands and seas sustainability
- Share benefits and services
- Mobilize necessary resources

- Stop unsustainable use, harvest, trade of species
- Reduce alien species spread by at least 50%
- Reduce pollution risks, impacts by at least 50%
- Reduce climate change impacts

- Mainstream biodiversity into all policy, practice
- Businesses to monitor, disclose nature impacts
- Sustainable consumption, half food waste
- Phase out 'perverse' subsidies, increase finance
- Strengthen capacity, participation, IPLC, women

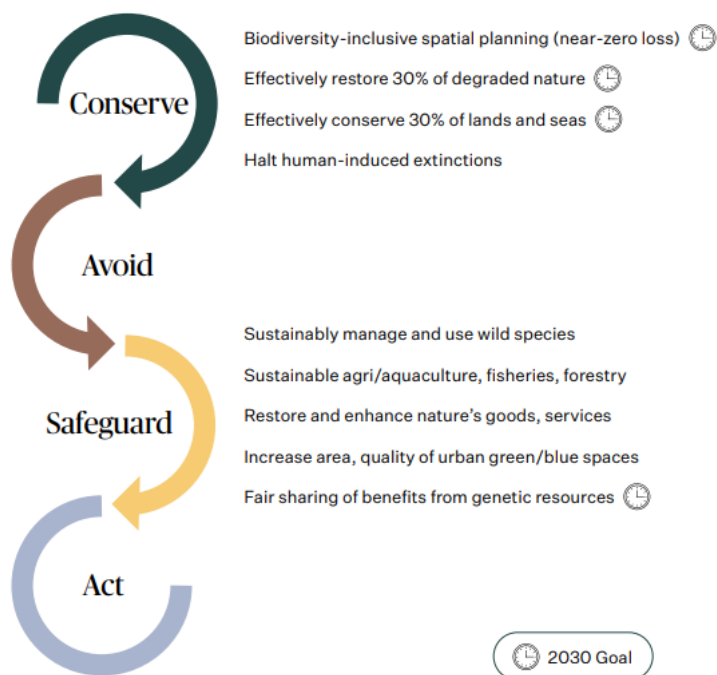


Fig.3. Overarching Goals

In terms of land management, it is crucial to implement strategies that prevent the conversion of natural ecosystems, ensuring that valuable habitats remain intact. Reducing the land footprint of production is another key priority, minimizing the ecological impact of our activities. Additionally, active landscape engagement through sustainable practices and collaboration with local communities can help restore and maintain ecosystem health, promoting long term biodiversity conservation and resilience. By focusing on these principles, we can mitigate the environmental impact of the textile industry while securing the natural resources vital for fibre production. • In managing freshwater resources, it's essential to focus on both quantity and quality. Reducing freshwater withdrawal from surface and groundwater sources helps conserve vital water reserves. At the same time, improving water quality by cutting down

company-specific pollution loads, particularly nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) runoff, mitigates the impact on aquatic ecosystems and contributes to healthier, more sustainable water systems.

In 2022, more than one-third of fibres used in the textile industry were sourced from agriculture, with key drivers feeding into pressures on natural systems. These pressures, which vary in importance across different realms, contribute significantly to the ongoing state of nature loss as observed in 2024. [8]

BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT

Key frameworks and standards to effectively integrate biodiversity into our operations, we can utilize the following frameworks:

- The Science-Based Targets for Nature (SBTN), which guide businesses in setting measurable biodiversity goals.
- The Textile Exchange Biodiversity Benchmark, developed in collaboration with ****The Fashion Pact**** and the “Global Environment Facility (GEF)” ‘offers guidelines for assessing biodiversity impacts within fashion.
- TNFD (Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures) provides a roadmap for addressing biodiversity in financial decision-making

V. HOLISTIC APPROACHES: NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS AND REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE -

Implementing “nature-based solutions” is essential for improving ecosystem health. Regenerative agriculture practices—such as crop rotation, minimal tilling, sustainable forestry, and water management—are key to ensuring biodiversity conservation. By promoting richer ecosystems and enhancing soil biodiversity, we can contribute to the long-term sustainability of the natural systems that underpin fibre production. [12]

HOW COMPANIES CAN GET STARTED

The time has come for the fashion industry to take bold action in reversing biodiversity loss. As a company, we are committed to integrating nature and biodiversity into our sustainability strategies by:

- "Halt habitat loss", restore degraded areas, and improve biodiversity intactness.
- "Collaborate with SBTN" and other leading frameworks to set, measure, and achieve biodiversity targets.
- "Educate and align our supply chains", ensuring that biodiversity becomes a shared priority across all stakeholders. By taking these steps, we can transform our business practices, secure the resilience of our supply chains, and contribute meaningfully to the preservation of our planet's rich biodiversity for future generations. [13]

To effectively address the environmental challenges facing the fashion and textile industry, the AR3T framework for action can guide strategic initiatives aimed at fostering sustainability. This framework encompasses five key actions:

1. **Avoid:** Prioritize the prevention of further degradation by halting the conversion of natural ecosystems for raw material production. This includes implementing strict land-use policies and promoting sustainable sourcing practices that protect existing habitats.
2. **Reduce:** Focus on minimizing the environmental footprint through reduced resource consumption and waste generation. This involves optimizing supply chains, enhancing water and energy efficiency, and reducing harmful chemicals and fertilizers.
3. **Restore:** Commit to restoring degraded ecosystems to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services. This can include reforestation efforts, wetland restoration, and rehabilitating polluted water bodies, thereby improving the health of both land and aquatic environments.
4. **Regenerate:** Embrace regenerative practices that enhance soil health and biodiversity, such as regenerative agriculture, which focuses on building resilient ecosystems. These practices can help sequester carbon, improve water retention, and promote sustainable land use.
5. **Transform:** Drive systemic change within the industry by adopting circular economy principles and innovative business models that prioritize sustainability. This can involve rethinking product design, encouraging recycling and upcycling, and fostering a culture of sustainability among consumers and stakeholders.

By implementing the AR3T framework, the fashion and textile industry can take meaningful steps toward reducing its environmental impact, protecting biodiversity, and ensuring a more sustainable future.

- Currently, only 8% of companies in the fashion and textile industry have established comprehensive biodiversity strategies, despite 67% having made public commitments to sustainability. This gap highlights a critical area for improvement in aligning commitments with actionable strategies.
- Furthermore, the trend in biodiversity reporting has seen a significant increase, rising from 10% to 27% of companies reporting on their biodiversity impacts and efforts. This indicates a growing awareness of the importance of transparency in biodiversity-related initiatives
- Additionally, 32% of companies have conducted materiality biodiversity assessments, which evaluate the relevance and impact of biodiversity issues on their operations and supply chains. While this progress is encouraging, it also underscores the need for more companies to actively engage in comprehensive biodiversity strategies to ensure their commitments translate into meaningful action and sustainable practices. [14]

VI. BIODIVERSITY TOOLS

Table.1. Biodiversity Tools list

Initiative	Business for nature's call to action
Strategy tool	Fashion Pact Biodiversity Navigator
Regulation	EU deforestation Regulation
Risk assessment tool	ENCORE- exploring nature capital opportunities, risks and exposure IBAT – integrated biodiversity assessment tool Materials impact explorer WWF biodiversity risk filter WWF water risk filter Fashion nature risk lens
Spatial data tool	Global forest watch
Data resource	Natural lands map
LCA assessment tool	WALDB – world apparel and footwear lifecycle assessment database
Mandatory reporting framework	EU CSRD – corporate sustainability reporting directive EU taxonomy
Reporting framework	GBF – Global biodiversity framework, SBTN, TNFD, CDP, GRI, HIGG BRM
Environment accounting std	ISO 14007 – environment costs and benefits ISO 14008 – monetary valuation of environment impacts
Nature based solution std	IUCN – global standards for nature-based solutions
Natural capital accounting framework	Natural capital protocol

Implementing effective biodiversity practices within the company can be achieved through the following tools and standards: Initiative Business for nature's call to action Strategy tool Fashion Pact Biodiversity Navigator Regulation EU deforestation Regulation Risk assessment tool ENCORE- exploring nature capital opportunities, risks and exposure IBAT – integrated biodiversity assessment tool Materials impact explorer WWF biodiversity risk filter WWF water risk

filter Fashion nature risk lens Spatial data tool Global forest watch Data resource Natural lands map LCA assessment tool WALDB – world apparel and footwear lifecycle assessment database Mandatory reporting framework EU CSRD – corporate sustainability reporting directive EU taxonomy Reporting framework GBF – Global biodiversity framework, SBTN, TNFD, CDP, GRI, HIGG BRM Environment accounting std ISO 14007 – environment costs and benefits ISO 14008 – monetary valuation of environment impacts Nature based solution std IUCN – global standards for nature-based solutions Natural capital accounting framework Natural capital protocol.

VII. CONCLUSION

Biodiversity is life on Earth and is irreplaceable for human wellbeing, development and ecological integrity. Biodiversity loss puts at risk the biophysical environment which will impact the global economy, food security, and public health. In particular, the resource-based sectors including Fashion need to reflect on their biodiversity footprint and strive for responsible and regenerative change. Biodiversity should be included in the business frameworks that are adapting. Outdoor companies should exercise adaptation frameworks like TNFD and SBTN for sustainability and resilience. Actions taken in the mode of conservation must undertake action outside of the declared protected area when engaging science-based or comprehensive pathways to integrate the important business world with communities and policy makers. Biodiversity must be recognized along with the climate crisis when establishing more ambitious pathways for natural. Supporting nature is no longer a decision, it is a mechanism to achieve balance, economic health, and respect for the rights of future generations!

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