The NYU Stern Center for Sustainable Business and Tigress Ventures came together on September 21st to host a sustainable-business themed conversation with 5 women leaders in business about what ‘doing good’ in the real world of business looks like.

Panelists:

* **Jessie Gould**, Founder, Ox Verte
* **Devon Leahy**, Director of Sustainability and Social Innovation, Etsy
* **Eleanor Murphy**, Head of Business Development, East Coast, Acumen
* **Samantha Reiss**, Strategy & Corporate Development for the CEO’s Office, Bloomberg
* **Tensie Whelan**, Director, Center for Sustainable Business and Professor for Business and Society Programs, NYU Stern
* **Ita Ekpoudom**, Tigress Ventures, Moderator

Tensie Whelan kicked off the discussion by explaining that sustainable business is “thinking about your shareholders and stakeholders, but also about how you create value, not just extract value. It’s an approach that’s different from ‘winner take all’ and shows that you’re focused on the long-term and not just the short-term.”

When asked how a sustainability approach has affected innovation in its companies, Eleanor Murphy described an Acumen investment in “D-light,” a solar-energy company working toward solving energy poverty in Uganda and India; she says that the innovative D-light “has impacted over 50 million lives and created millions in revenue each year.”

Bloomberg’s drive for social sustainability led to the creation of the Gender-Equality Index – a new methodology for analyzing the gender dynamics within a company. Samantha Reiss says of the Index, “it’s beyond just a good thing to do, it’s good for the bottom line” and for that reason, companies’ desire to be included in the Index has grown rapidly.

For Ox Verte, a sustainable catering business, pursuing its sustainability goals wasn’t always an easy or clear path. In many ways, as a small business trying to expand and be viable, Jessie Gould of Ox Verte faced the challenge of sticking by her core business values as a start-up and realized that “you can’t wait until tomorrow to be the business you want to be. Start there, and then go social with a good conscience.”

The focus at Etsy was on making its business sustainable in terms of its own footprint, but also through helping the millions of entrepreneurs who sell on the site. Devon Leahy, Director of Sustainability and Social Innovation at Etsy said, “We are setting a good example, but no one really sees that because it’s happening on an operational level and isn’t clearly visible within our marketplace. This means we have opportunities to bring our sustainability and social impact initiatives to our products, sellers and buyers. So we’ve worked to enable the micro-businesses and sellers on Etsy.com to make the decisions that are right for them.” This includes educating them about sustainability in sourcing and manufacturing, and even helping them go solar by converting the company’s referral incentives into deeper discounts for sellers.

During the audience discussion, one participant asked “What was being a woman in a male-dominated business world like for you personally, and what kind of mentors did you have?” Ita Ekpoudom advised women to “get out there” into the networking places that men frequent, and make connections outside of work and home. Tensie, of NYU Stern CSB, described the importance of mentoring and teaching young women how to navigate this world of men. Jessie, of Ox Verte, talked about the challenges of being a woman founder looking for male investors, and advised young women in business to “Go where they go, talk how they talk, and then expand the conversation to where you want to take it.”