

---

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

MAY 2022

## LEADERS IN ACTION

*Suzy Hutomo*

*Founder and Executive Chairperson  
The Body Shop® Indonesia*



## BUILDING BUSINESS, CREATING SOCIAL IMPACT

Suzy Hutomo is the founder and Executive Chairperson of The Body Shop® Indonesia. The brand is part of the global cosmetics and skincare company, The Body Shop®, which is committed to producing ethically sourced, cruelty-free products made with natural ingredients. Suzy and her husband obtained the licence to franchise The Body Shop® in Indonesia in the mid-1990s. This was a visionary move at a time when no other retail beauty product brands in Indonesia championed the values of being environmentally or ethically conscious.

*"For me, The Body Shop® felt like a good fit. I was no longer inspired by building a career in the fashion industry, and I wanted to be an entrepreneur. My husband is also an entrepreneur, and we both wanted to be in business for ourselves. Social issues and the environment were things that I cared deeply about, so it really felt like a match made in heaven: I got to be an entrepreneur, and I also got to champion social causes that I personally cared about," Suzy said.*

Prior to launching The Body Shop® Indonesia, Suzy did an informal survey among her friends to test the market. The result was not exactly what she had hoped for. “They weren’t very supportive, to be honest,” she said. “I don’t mean that my friends discouraged me from doing it or that they told me it was a bad idea... it was more that they were baffled by the products and the eco-friendly aesthetic. They didn’t understand why none of the products came packaged in a box.”

Suzy’s friends also thought the store design was boring. “*Why is it all green?*” she recalled them saying, “*And why aren’t there any pictures of beautiful women?*” “They asked me all those questions... and, yes, it could have been disheartening, but for me the vision was fascinating –that we could combine idealism with business. And, despite the absence of boxes, the products are great. I used them myself at the time, so I told my friends, ‘Hey, the products are good and made with natural ingredients, and this is much cheaper than other high-end cosmetics brands.’ Back then you could only get really cheap brands or really expensive brands – nothing in between. No one catered to the middle market, so I was confident that it was going to work.”

The first store she opened quickly became successful, with many Indonesian customers embracing the brand and its mission. She credited the first store’s success with luck on her side, but it was her vision that successfully led The Body Shop® Indonesia to grow into what it is today.

## **Being Part of the Change**

Suzy understands that her background differentiated her from her peers early in her career. Having studied abroad most of her life, with a university degree from the U.S., Suzy was forced to adapt to a different culture when she returned home to Indonesia.

At the beginning of her career, she adjusted her mindset to fit into Indonesian corporate culture. Coming from the fashion industry in the United States, one of the first things she noticed in Indonesia was the unequal position of men and women in her workplace. Men were running things, while women were relegated to middle management positions.

Moving back started a trial by fire period for her, where she had to learn by essentially “bumping around here and there.” She noted, “I’m very straightforward, so if I had an idea, I would just utter it. I would always speak up. But then I realized no one was really listening.” She understood that she had a lot of learning to do and started paying attention to what was happening around her. She took notes of other women who had great careers, who were smart and had the respect of their peers, and began to study what they were doing right. She soon learned that most women were expected to adapt to the culture and climb the corporate ladder. After a while she realised it was not what she wanted to do. She wanted to become an entrepreneur and create a different company culture.

*“After a few discussions, my husband and I decided to go into business together, to build a company that has a progressive culture and that shares our values.”*

Suzy was already familiar with The Body Shop® from her time studying abroad, and after researching the company further, she knew it was the right fit for her business. It really stood out that The Body Shop®’s founder, Anita Roddick, was an active champion of women’s causes and the environment – two issues dear to Suzy’s heart. She wrote to The Body Shop® expressing her interest in becoming a franchisee, and the rest is history.

## Building a Business with Conviction

Similar to its global parent company, The Body Shop® Indonesia has always been a strong supporter of gender equality. Leading by example is one of the reasons Suzy decided to go into business herself. Back when the company first started, the retail industry in Indonesia was not known for its equal treatment of female employees.

*“From back when we started in the 90s until fairly recently, about five to six years ago, you would immediately have to resign if you were pregnant [if you worked in retail],” Suzy explained, “But we have never done that. All our employees are entitled to four months of maternity leave when they are pregnant.”*

When it came to representation of women – their target customers – the retail industry in Indonesia was also not known for its celebration of diversity and inclusion at the time. “Back then, you needed to be tall, beautiful and young. You needed to be this and that, but we have never subscribed to those stereotypes of beauty.” Suzy noted that a lot has changed in the retail industry since then, and now women’s representation is more diverse. “Hopefully, The Body Shop® Indonesia has helped to usher in that change,” she added.

Suzy has always found it important to build a business with conviction; that has always been her *why*. Her passion in social causes including the environment, animal welfare, gender equality, and women’s empowerment continues to inform her business vision today.

*“At the time I knew it wasn’t the trend yet to care about the causes that The Body Shop® cares about. But even then, I believed that it was possible to get people to care, if we truly backed those causes and inspired others to support them,” she said.*

## Brands for Social Impact

Suzy remembers how a meeting with The Body Shop® founder Anita Roddick changed her perspective on championing worthy causes. Roddick asked her: “Do you know how powerful retail is? How many people go in and out of your store every day? Imagine having the power to reach and influence that many people in a day.” Suzy did the numbers and realized that through her stores, she could reach and influence many people without them even realizing it.

“Back then, our stores were attracting about 100,000 people a day. Now millions of people go through our stores every single day. That’s our opportunity to get our message across, to educate people about the causes that we care about.”

This wider education first began with the staff in The Body Shop® Indonesia. Suzy continuously educates her employees on various issues that matter to the company and to herself personally. She envisions her company as a place that provides social and environmental education for women, in addition to a positive working environment.

Despite advocating for many causes, Suzy feels strongly about the prevalence of sexual violence in Indonesia and the urgent need for powerful laws to bring justice and protection to survivors. In 2020, The Body Shop® Indonesia launched the “**Stop Sexual Violence**” Campaign with several partners, including feminist media platform *Magdalene*, Yayasan Pulih and Makassar International Writers Festival, to raise awareness on this issue, to push Parliament to pass the anti-sexual violence law, to provide psychosocial support for survivors and to educate the public on ways to curb the issue.

*“We are a feminist brand. Anita Roddick has always made that clear. It is our job at The Body Shop® to join in the movement for gender equality, and one powerful way to do that is through stopping violence against women,” Suzy said.*

The Body Shop® Indonesia also became a signatory of the Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs) in 2020. “We want to make sure there is a framework that we can refer to, a framework to guide the policies we make in our company going forward,” she said.

As a woman in a leadership position and as an entrepreneur who has built a company that has withstood the tests of time, Suzy has one piece of advice for those wanting to follow in her footsteps, “Find your own way and try to build your self-confidence. It’s good to learn from others but, at the end of the day, you need to discover your own path and your own way of doing things.”

## Women’s Empowerment Principles



High-level corporate leadership



Workplace HR



Employee well-being and safety



Education and training for women




Supplier diversity & marketing practices




Community engagement



Measurement and reporting

 [weps.org](https://weps.org)

 [weps@unwomen.org](mailto:weps@unwomen.org)

 [@WEPrinciples](https://twitter.com/WEPrinciples)

 [@Empower\\_Women](https://twitter.com/Empower_Women)

Funded by:



European Union

Produced by:



Funded by the European Union



In support of:

**WOMEN'S  
EMPOWERMENT  
PRINCIPLES**

Established by UN Women and the UN Global Compact Office