

---

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

OCTOBER 2023

## LEADERS IN ACTION

*Johary Mustapha*  
CEO and Founder  
Forest Interactive



## CONNECTING THE WORLD

At 28, Johary dreamed of creating innovative mobile technology solutions to enhance the mobile experience for both businesses and consumers. There was an opportunity to tap into the Malaysian telco industry, as it was exponentially booming around the time where people were buying their first mobile phones. Relating his journey, Johary said: "Building Forest Interactive was filled with character-developing moments. I was young and ambitious, never expecting that I'd be an entrepreneur, trying to find my footing in the telecommunications industry."

Wanting to bridge the gap between mobile operators and content providers and maximize the power of mobile technology, Johary Mustapha then founded Forest Interactive in 2006. The company is now servicing more than 80 mobile operators and over 120 content partners, bringing connectivity to more than 1.6 billion subscribers globally.

With over 240 talents of 20+ nationalities in 15 offices all over the world, Forest Interactive became a WEPs signatory in June 2021 to reaffirm its commitment to diversity and inclusion. Following soon after, the Forest Interactive Foundation was established to further create impact in underserved communities through a long-term mission to nurture and develop talents for the digital economy, empower society by providing access to basic needs and opportunities, as well as raise awareness on environmental preservation.

*"Our commitment toward advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is also our guiding light when it comes to how we structure our sustainability pillars. This includes achieving our focus*

*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and pledging to commit to key areas such as developing future innovators, promoting gender equity within the workplace and in our surrounding communities, as well as increasing accessibility to food and tech through programs and initiatives that aim to empower underserved communities.”*

This is facilitated not only through education-related initiatives such as #seKODlah, a flagship program with CIMB Foundation that aims to nurture future innovators and their employability, as well as #seKODlah x Kampus Merdeka, a similar program in Indonesia in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, but also through sustainable community programs under the #ForestCares initiative such as empowering the Desa Temuan indigenous community in Selangor and collaborating with Global Peace Foundation (GPF) Malaysia to provide clean drinking water to the indigenous Jakun community in Pahang.

## **TAKING A STAND**

The gender gap in the technology industry is something that Johary has always been cognizant of and wanted to address. Since its inception, Forest Interactive has strived to actively create opportunities for women from all over the world to grow their careers in tech. The company's senior management team boasts of more than 60% women, all who share similar values when it comes to gender equality. **This** holds everyone in the organization accountable, including their founder.

*“When we were invited to be a WEPs signatory, we recognized that this was not only an opportunity for us to reaffirm our gender equality commitments, but also one where we can, hopefully, inspire other companies in our industries and beyond to commit in similar ways. It's important that we also share our progress with our partners and the people who are watching us. When we take a stand, we are playing a part in telling everyone that embracing the WEPs should be the norm.”*

As a male leader and ally, Johary worked with his team to institutionalize equitable practices in the workplace, such as mechanisms to limit unconscious bias in hiring, promotion and retention. When considering company-wide policies, the multifaceted and intersectional identities of their talents are taken into account as people first, employees second.

*“Good leaders were instrumental in supporting my advancement as I progressed from a learning phase and onwards to becoming an asset*

*to the team and organization. I want this for the leaders in Forest Interactive too, be it men or women. Pushing gender equality doesn't always have to come from a female perspective, but rather the perspective of the minorities, those that are often not as outspoken, regardless of gender."*

Elaborating that the corporate culture in Malaysia, where the company is headquartered, still revolves around male leadership, Johary believes that amplifying the impact of women leaders will advance the country as a society, but he acknowledges that changing individual beliefs & shaping the culture is heavy work.

*"Women have been leading the gender equality movement for decades, including in the workplace. We need male allyship, starting with male leaders setting the tone, to be thoughtful and proactive in how they show support to initiatives that support gender equality."*

## **Gaining momentum**

After signing on as a WEPs signatory, Forest Interactive embarked on an internal assessment using the WEPs Gap Analysis Tool (GAT) and made a series of improvements in its operational practices to reaffirm its gender equality commitments. For example, in its employment practices, Forest Interactive has made an internal written commitment for gender equality within the organization under the Code of Ethics & Business. Here it notes that the company does not allow for any kind of discriminatory behavior and that talents should conform with the equal opportunity policy in all aspects of their work.

In 2021, the company's People Operations team also issued a memorandum addressing sexual harassment, outlining a zero-tolerance policy that specifies what unwelcome conduct entails and establishing a complaint procedure, with the reassurance that all incidents will be treated seriously, with respect and in confidence. Last year, the organization also launched its #ItEndsNow committee, a proactive prevention effort based on the UN Women Addressing Sexual Harassment in the World of Work roadmap, which aligns with Principle 3 of the WEPs.

*Johary said: "My team started this cause back in 2020 when the Anti-Sexual Harassment referendum was petitioned to be tabled in the Malaysian Parliament. Our commitment in making Forest Interactive a safe workplace for our talents is constant. One of our core Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is SDG 5 on Gender Equality, which helps us with our progress and efforts to champion women empowerment in the workplace, such as forming an anti-harassment policy. This is a*

*part of the culture we embody. Although we may not have the resources of larger companies, we are still constantly working on setting an example to empower women.”*

With Johary’s advocacy for women’s active roles in the workplace, Forest Interactive has led several gender equality advancements, including gender-neutral hiring practices, fair career progressions, employee inclusivity and diversity, as well as operational safety and health measures. Johary’s advocacy for women empowerment also goes beyond the various equality and diversity-focused efforts at the company, such as initiating and supporting programs that make the workplace environment fair and equitable, and promoting materials that highlight inclusivity in the company, and for other business leaders to follow.

The #ItEndsNow campaign included a policy dedicated to sexual harassment, grievance mechanisms both internally and externally with NGOs, as well as engaging biweekly newsletters that addressed topics surrounding discrimination and harassment and grievance resolutions. A whistleblowing policy and anti-retaliation framework has also been recently implemented to safeguard employees’ wellbeing.

## **Continuing the legacy**

Despite being a smaller company in the tech industry, Johary hopes to demonstrate that organizations do not need a lot of resources to start working on gender equality.

*“Since becoming a WEPs signatory, we have seen positive progress in our efforts, especially following the utilization of the self-assessment tools, which helped to provide a baseline and guidance of where we were achieving and where we needed to improve.”*

Having worked towards and attained gender balance across all levels of management, with this being most prominent in its operations, products and services, and value chain, he stated that Forest Interactive is proud to publicize its continuous effort in ensuring gender equity is advocated on the community and industry levels.

“In a male-dominated field like ours, we believe that proactive action from a corporate policy level is required to ensure that we are promoting active participation, career growth, and psychological safety for the women in our company,” Johary shared. “By actively engaging and involving them in our diversity and inclusion initiatives, we not only show them that we value them as individuals, but we also hope that we can help inspire change in ensuring women’s visibility in the tech industry.”

## Women's Empowerment Principles



High-level corporate leadership



Workplace HR



Employee well-being and safety




Education and training for women




Supplier diversity & marketing practices



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)

### WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

Established by UN Women and the  
UN Global Compact Office

