



Banana-Based Sanitary Pads – and Their Female Inventor – Win Top Design Prize

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Elizabeth Scharpf of Sustainable Health Enterprises (SHE) has this week been announced as the winner of the annual Curry Stone Design Prize – an award which each year grants \$100,000 to a designer who has made a significant global and social impact with their work. Scharpf was awarded the prize at Google HQ in New York City earlier this week.

Scharpf, and SHE, work with organized [networks](#) of women to manufacture and sell banana leaf-based sanitary pads in Rwanda.

Millions of girls and women in developing countries miss up to 50 days of work or school each year because they do not have access to affordable sanitary protection when they menstruate. Currently girls and women in this setting have two options –turning to international sanitary protection brands which are extremely costly, or using rags which, when combined with a lack of clean water, are unhygienic and ineffective.

Women in developing countries are vital to the well-being of their families and [communities](#) and it is important that they have access ...

... to education, employment and [health](#). The fact that a period could prevent a family from eating properly for a week, or put a mother's health at risk, is what drove Scharpf to set up SHE with her award-winning design – sanitary pads made from banana leaves.

The pads are manufactured by local networks of Rwandan women, and are thus a locally-produced product that both provides local women with a secure income. The pads are sold at 30% of the current market price of sanitary pads in Rwanda – pads that are both highly taxed and made from imported ingredients from Europe. The banana-leaf pads are much more affordable, of better quality and eco-friendly.

SHE couples its product innovation with a financially-[sustainable business](#) model that is operated and owned by local women in their own community – a model that can be replicated wherever the need exists. From learning about SHE, it is clear why Scharpf has won the Curry Stone Design Prize for her work – the prize is to award designers of innovations that make considerable impact in the fields of education, food, water, health, energy, peace [promotion](#) and social justice. Clearly a number of these boxes are ticked by SHE and by Scharpf's designs.

Scharpf herself is not trained in design, and thus she represents a new breed of designer, for whom user-based [research](#), innovation and production have become increasingly relevant, as well as a designer for whom social conscience and a desire to solve real problems play a large role in her work. Scharpf's work, and her winning of this award, typify the changing landscape of design in 2010. And it totally rocks that this changing landscape is helping out some of the world's most vulnerable women too.