



Sustainable Health Enterprises' Elizabeth Scharpf wins Curry Stone Design Prize

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Contributed by Annamarya

This week, [Sustainable Health Enterprises'](#) (SHE) founder and chief instigating officer, Elizabeth Scharpf, won the [Curry Stone Design Prize](#), a \$100,000 grant started by UK architect, Clifford Curry, and his wife, H. Delight Stone, and awarded annually to a designer making a global impact in the education, water, health, food, social justice, energy or peace promotion field. With SHE, Scharpf helps Rwanda's existing networks of women develop their own businesses to produce and dispense eco-safe banana leaf-based sanitary pads, which are, ultimately, an affordable and accessible solution to a distressing problem. According to SHE, girls and women in developing countries, like Rwanda, are limited to using highly taxed imported brands of sanitary pads, which are too expensive to purchase. As a result, they can miss up to 50 days of work or school per year. Also, says the site, because low-cost materials are generally unavailable, they turn to rags, which, when combined with the lack of clean, available water, are not only unsanitary and potentially hazardous but also useless in controlling leakage. Not only has SHE created a ground-breaking business model that aids women in Rwanda earn income but it's also created a way for them to help women maintain proper hygiene during menstruation, stimulate productivity and spread education within their community.

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But what's most amazing about this win is that it was awarded to someone without a conventional design background. Unlike her traditional design-based Curry Stone Prize competitors—the Chilean design firm ELEMENTAL, which designs alternative housing structures in Chile, and the non-profit Maya Pedal, which, in an effort to streamline household and agricultural tasks in developing countries, recycles bicycles to create pedal-powered technology—Scharpf comes from the business world, where, according to her bio on the SHE website, she “spent most of her professional career starting up ventures or advising business on growth strategies in the health care industry.” She holds an MBA from Harvard Business School, an MPA in international development from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and a BA from the University of Notre Dame. In addition, she has worked at the Clinton Foundation, the World Bank in Asia and East Africa, respectively, and as a strategic management consultant at Cambridge Pharma Consultancy. As *Fast Company's* Jenara Nerenberg wrote: “You can see why Scharpf's win is a game-changer in the design space... she represents a whole new breed of designer for whom social innovation and user-centered research—which SHE relies on heavily—has become increasingly relevant.” It just goes to show that innovation and social impact isn't only dependent on traditionally relevant education. It's also important to have the passion and the ability to creatively apply research and first-hand experience, as Scharpf has done with SHE. So here's to Scharpf and all the women in the world thinking outside of the box to bring about positive and effective social change.

[Fast Company: Banana-Based Pads Win the Curry Stone Design Prize](#)