Check this out – Nonprofit- Maya Penn

# Meet Ms. Penn

A 21 yeaA 21 year old phenom, award-winning founder and CEO of eco-fashion brand Maya’s Ideas, keynote speaker, sustainability consultant, 3 time TED Speaker, artist, global activist, animator, filmmaker, social entrepreneur, coder and Simon & Schuster author.

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Maya's Ideas 4 The Planet

Founded in 2011, Maya's Ideas 4 The Planet is a 501(c)3 environmental, humanitarian, and tech focused nonprofit founded by Maya Penn with a mission to fight for environmental justice, mental health in regard to climate anxiety, and diversity in STEM and tech in creative careers, among other social good efforts.

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|  | [Maya Penn - Sustainable Fashion](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmayasideas.com%2F&data=04%7C01%7C%7C4f7f8659112a417f105408d9d90b9c00%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C637779466157097588%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=siI863jdjCoRIK7NvBCtLfp97RejyKUj2pIJ%2FnV2pFs%3D&reserved=0)  Maya is a three-time TED speaker, and has spoken for a number of well-known brands. She has vast professional experience doing keynotes, panels, hosting, remote talks, workshops, and so much more.  mayasideas.com |

#### f eThe Pad Project

In 2013 Maya launched a project where she designed and created eco-friendly reusable/rewashable sanitary pads for girls in countries in need. Many menstruators that have access to education cannot go to school on their monthly cycle because they have no sanitary pads to wear and taking around 5 days a month out of school can lead to youth dropping out of school. Since the project launch Maya's Ideas 4 The Planet has worked with MedShare and Youth Action Without Borders for pad distribution. Since then, pad kits have been shipped to healthcare facilities in Haiti, Senegal,

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#### on Left: Women with eco-friendly sanitary pads in healthcare facility in Babak, Senegal --- Right: Madame Bafou Ba President Nationale Sénégal Croix Rouge and President Babacar Sow with Maya's Ideas 4 The Planet masks

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**This story appears in the May issue of VICE magazine. Click**[***HERE***](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fcheckout.subscriptiongenius.com%2Fvice.com%2F&data=04%7C01%7C%7C4f7f8659112a417f105408d9d90b9c00%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C637779466157097588%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=ZQVUn%2BtCeoHqFF8uko%2FmDW9gaXVLJt%2BQygi0ewvEck8%3D&reserved=0) **to subscribe.**

At just eight years old, Maya Penn started her own eco-friendly clothing business. Nine years later, she has delivered TED Talks, started a nonprofit, written a book, and worked the public-speaking circuit. Now, Penn, who is finishing high school in Atlanta this year, is setting her sights on a new initiative: getting sanitary products to women and girls in developing countries. The dearth of these items, Penn said, causes tragic ripple effects for many women's health and impacts their access to schooling and work. Plus, there's a stigma about female bodies she's trying to squash. I talked with Penn about why it's "crazy" that people are still hung up when it comes to talking about menstruation—here, there, or anywhere.

**CE: You've championed many causes in a short amount of time. How did access to sanitary pads in the developing world become a priority?**  
**Maya Penn:** I started on this project three or four years ago because I learned about how girls in developing countries can't go to school during their monthly cycle. They don't have pads or sanitary items available to them. Days not at school lead them to drop out. I wondered, What is something that I could do to make an impact on this issue? I sew and create products, so I decided to make eco-friendly sanitary pads.

**What did you find while researching the issue?**  
There are substitutes that girls will use, like random fabrics or rocks that are really harmful to their bodies. It was crazy to me that they had to suffer like this, just to go to school or work for a normal day. Then there were problems with just shipping over the types of pads you get at the drugstore. Once those pads are used, they're gone, and the problem is still there. On top of that, a lot of them have chemicals in them, so when they do go to a landfill, they're bad for the environment. I wanted to make something that was reusable.

**How did you design products that were eco-friendly?**  
Mine are made with nontoxic materials, organic cotton, fleece, and barrier material. The barrier fabric is also nontoxic and more like what you would see in the medical industry. It's healthier for girls' bodies, and they're really high quality. There are four pads that come per kit, plus soap and everything. The girls can use a pad for up to 300 machine washes, which is more safe and biodegradable.

**How did you get the kits from Georgia to other parts of the world?**  
I partnered with two organizations, MedShare and **Youth Action Without Borders**. They're both based here in Georgia. They've taken the pads and gone to Haiti, **Senegal**, Cameroon, and Somalia.

**How many have you sent out?**  
About 1,000 kits. I want to increase that number, of course. I'm working to get more donations and volunteers to get the supplies to make them.

**Have you found people unwilling to talk about menstruation?**  
I have no problem talking about this because it's so important. When you start running low on pads, it's a panicky feeling, and I think for a girl who has zero access to anything at all, it's horrible. I think it's really important to talk about it, even when it makes people uncomfortable. This is still a reality for those girls and women and what they have to go through every day.

**What about this cause spoke to you?**  
Even if you haven't dealt with a lack of sanitary pads, it felt personal to me that something natural to our bodies gets in the way of girls being able to get an education or have a life. In some third-world countries, once you drop out of the education system, it can lead to an underage marriage. Education is really their best chance at having a life and being able to make a living for themselves and their families. Knowing that there is something so simple holding them back seemed compelling.

**When you think about the best way to create change, how do you approach it?**  
It's hard to know where to start for anybody but especially for young people. One way is just to volunteer with an organization that focuses on a cause you care about. I started with an eco-friendly clothing business because it was a mixture of sewing, which I love to do, and doing good in the world. I think you can make a big difference through doing what you love. One thing leads to another. Everything ties into a bigger picture.

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