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Awards go to groups bringing power, homes, health to the poor

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A group working to save land in Namibia, projects bringing power to Indian villages and building earthquake-resistant homes in Indonesia, the maker of a single-use syringe, and a group that uses technology in classrooms in India were the winners of the [Tech Museum awards](#) held Wednesday.

The Biomass Energy Project, [Cheetah Conservation Fund](#) in Namibia won the 2008 Intel Environment Award. The group converts invasive bush into clean fuel. It employs 15 people at a biomass processing plant that uses a high-pressure extrusion process to create an economically viable alternative to firewood, coal, and charcoal. The fund is working to recover 25 million acres of land in Namibia and to save endangered cheetahs.



Employees at the Cheetah Conservation Fund's Biomass Energy Project use tech to convert bush into blocks of clean-burning fuel.

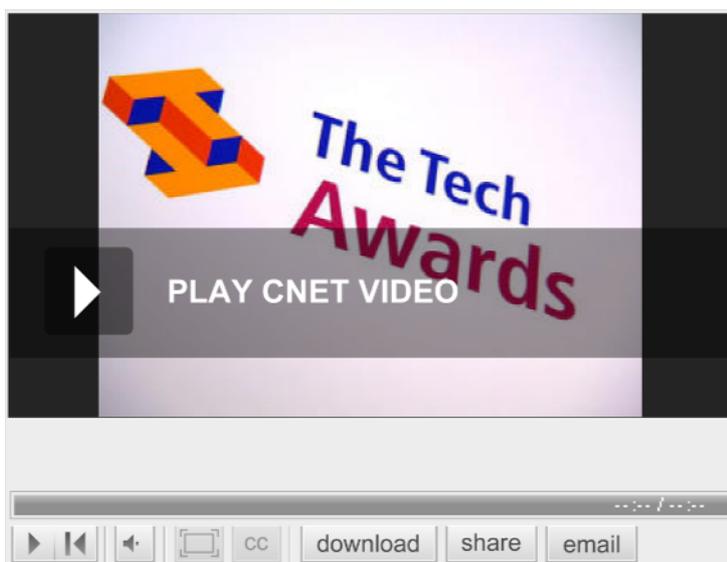
(Credit: Biomass Energy Project, Cheetah Conservation Fund)

[DESI Power: Decentralised Energy Systems India](#) won the 2008 Accenture Economic Development Award. DESI Power is helping more than 100 villages build power plants to areas that lack electricity and is creating jobs with the launch of micro-enterprises. The DESI plants use 19th-century technology--biomass gasification through agricultural waste.

A completely different type of invention took the prize for education. Described as the educational equivalent of Netflix + YouTube + Kazaa, the peer-to-peer file-sharing system [Digital Study Hall](#) won the Microsoft Education Award. The Lucknow, India-based project records classroom lessons from experienced teachers on DVDs and

distributes them to underprivileged classrooms in India and Bangladesh. Students participating in Digital Study Hall scored nearly 400 times higher on English tests and nearly 300 times higher in math.

The Katherine M. Swanson Equality Award was given to [Build Change](#), a San Francisco-based nonprofit that designs and trains builders and homeowners how to build earthquake-resistant houses in developing countries. The designs use local materials, and are affordable and sustainable, as well as easy to build. In Aceh, Indonesia, alone, Build Change has strengthened 4,200 homes and trained 130 builders. The group also has programs in West Sumatra, Indonesia, and Sichuan, China.



Winning the Fogarty Institute for Innovation Health Award is Marc Koska who developed a syringe that reduces the spread of disease because it can only be used once. The plunger in the K1 "Auto Disable" Syringe developed by [Star Syringe](#) locks in place when it is fully depressed, preventing it from being used repeatedly, a common cause of cross-infection among patients in the developing world. The single-use syringes save millions of people from getting infected with Hepatitis B and C and HIV.

For more information about the K1 syringe and four other Tech Awards laureates, read "[Tech Museum honors tech that benefits humanity](#)".



Digital Study Hall students benefit from watching lessons on DVD in their underprivileged classrooms in India and Bangladesh.

(Credit: Digital Study Hall)



Elinor Mills covers Internet security and privacy. She joined CNET News in 2005 after working as a foreign correspondent for Reuters in Portugal and writing for The Industry Standard, the IDG News Service, and the Associated Press. [E-mail Elinor.](#)