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Science [Microsoft, Intel-sponsored Cash Prizes Go to Top Charities](#)  
[Jason Mick \(Blog\)](#) - November 13, 2008 9:30 AM



The Cheetah Conservation Fund's Biomass Energy Project creates clean fuel out of invasive plants. It uses its profits to help save the Cheetah. (Source: Biomass Energy Project, Cheetah Conservation Fund)



Digital Study Hall brings lessons by profession educators to underprivileged children in Bangladesh and India, all via p2p. (Source: Digital Study Hall)  
 The Tech Museum awards honor the most inspirational science stories you might not hear about

While [major research projects at universities](#) often steal the show when it comes to tech and science news, it's important not to forget the dedicated efforts of teams worldwide who are looking to safeguard the environment and [bring a higher standard of living](#) to local people.

The Tech Awards, held annually since 2000, looks to honor the efforts of these people who seek to contribute their time to benefit humanity. It also awards \$50,000 USD cash prizes, which in some economies can be a massive boost.

[This year's top winner](#) of the 2008 Intel Environment Award was the [Cheetah Conservation Fund's "Biomass Energy Project"](#). The Biomass Energy Project consists of 15 local Namibians working at a biomass plant. The workers process harvested invasive plants and convert them to fuel blocks, suitable to replace wood or coal in stoves across the country.

The project is helping to cut greenhouse gas emissions and to restore 25 million acres of land in Namibia. The project also generates key revenue, which is used to protect the Cheetah, one of the world's greatest large predators.

The next award, the 2008 Accenture Economic Development Award, went to [DESI Power: Decentralised Energy Systems India](#). DESI Power is assisting 100 cities in building small power plants to provide electricity to remote regions which currently have no power. The plants will create microenterprises and generate jobs, boosting local economies as well. The DESI plants are not overly complicated using biomass gasification through agricultural waste, a technique first pioneered in the 1800s.

In the category of education, a not-so-illegal [file sharing](#) effort took the cake. The Microsoft Education Award went to [Digital Study Hall](#), which was described as the educational equivalent of Netflix + YouTube + Kazaa. The corporation is based in Lucknow, India. It records lectures and lessons from experienced teachers and professors and distributes them to underprivileged regions of India and Bangladesh.

How much does the project help? Participants in the program scored 400 times higher on English tests and nearly 300 times higher in math.

An American firm was the recipient of the Katherine M. Swanson Equality Award. [Build Change](#), a San Francisco-based nonprofit, won the prize for designing earthquake-resistant homes and training builders (and homeowners) in developing nations how to build them. It trained 130 builders at one of its target location, Aceh, Indonesia. Its efforts strengthened 4,200 homes in the community. Other cities its working with include West Sumatra, Indonesia, and Sichuan, China.

In the medical realm, the Fogarty Institute for Innovation Health Award went to Marc Koska for inventing a special syringe that will help stop the spread of disease. A common source of disease in developing and third world nations is reuse of infected syringes. The new syringe, the K1 "Auto Disable" Syringe, prevents this practice via a plunger, developed by [Star Syringe](#), locks in place when fully depressed. The new kind of single-use syringe will help to save millions from cross-infection with Hepatitis B and C and HIV.

It's truly inspiring to see the lengths these companies went to make a difference. It's also encouraging to see two of the tech industry's greatest powers promoting such efforts.

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"The Space Elevator will be built about 50 years after everyone stops laughing" -- Sir Arthur C. Clarke

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