Vivek Wadhwa – In Chile's Slums, a Lesson in How to Make Apps for Social Good

www.washingtonpost.com. April, 2, 2012 – How many of the hundreds of thousands of mobile phone applications seek to do truly great things, such as lift people out of poverty or improve health care for the poor?

The App Economy, to date, has largely touched the lives of those living in the developed world. This is due, in part, to the high cost of smart phones but also because app development has lacked real vision and purpose. I have found that Silicon Valley, generally speaking, doesn't build apps to save the world or lift people out of poverty. It builds them to sell Angry Bird t-shirts and generate lots of virtual currency.

The folks at Centro de Innovación in Santiago, Chile, aim to change that.

I met Julian Ugarte, an Industrial designer, and his team during a recent trip to South America, and I was blown away by what they are trying to do. On March 22, Ugarte and Centro de Innovación launched a contest with Movistar — a mobile subsidiary of Telefonica — and TechoLab, a non-profit subsidiary of Un Techo para mi País (UTPMP) — a pan-Latin American NGO that dispatches youth volunteers on projects to eradicate the extreme poverty that affects tens of millions in Latin America. A $10,000 prize will be given to each of the creators of the best three apps that address problems facing the millions of people living at the bottom of the pyramid (BoP).

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