

DECCAN Chronicle *On The Web*

Published on Deccan Chronicle (<http://www.deccanchronicle.com>)

Young grads innovate for rural India

Jul 17 2010

Chennai, July 16: A ‘pin pulveriser’ that will spare rural women a long walk or tiring bus journey to the nearest flourmill and a smart, energy-saving stove that uses wood but does away with smoke and soot. These are just two of the novel devices being promoted by a group of young engineering and management graduates in Chennai who have spurned lucrative job offers to help transform the lives of the underprivileged in rural India.

“Our mission is to make the lives of the rural poor less weighed down by their lack of access to technology,” Joseph Thomas, an aeronautical engineer from IIT-Madras and chief technology officer of Villgro, told Deccan Chronicle. “Over the past few years, we have succeeded in transforming 3.6 lakh rural lives with our innovations.”

Mr Thomas is most excited about the company’s latest brainchild — a ‘pin pulveriser’ to grind rice and wheat that will be strategically placed in abandoned telephone kiosks. “Hapless villagers are fleeced by flourmill owners. Our team worked with innovators in one of the villages in Coimbatore and came out with a pin pulveriser which is powered by a 1 hp motor,” he said.

Villgro executive Sidharth, an instrumentation engineer with a degree in management, said the device will ensure that there is no adulteration in the flour as is commonplace in conventional flour mills. “Even small quantities of grain and cereal can be ground with the pulveriser,” he pointed out. “The invention will also cut down on the pollution caused by big flourmills.”

Sustaintech, a high efficiency biomass stove, developed by Bengaluru-based Swati Bhogle, is another innovation being promoted by Villgro. “This stove is 50 per cent more efficient than a conventional stove. Nearly 74,000 owners of tea shops and small eateries and street food vendors in Tamil Nadu can benefit from this stove,” Mr Sidharth said.

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