

Augumenta Helps JICA Deliver Remote Learning Collaboration to Developing Countries Using Smart Glasses

A remote support solution developed by Finnish software company Augumenta helps Japanese experts continue to train researchers in Ghana and Zambia despite the pandemic.

Oulu, Finland –19 April, 2021 – Augumenta, Ltd., today announced it was selected to supply software and systems integration services to support technical training programs for life sciences and agricultural researchers in Africa working with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The training solution is based on the Augumenta SmartEyes system, which uses camera-equipped smart glasses to connect field workers in Africa with Japanese experts who can view the local scene and provide instructions and support in real-time.

JICA is responsible for delivering Japan's official development assistance as an implementing agency, providing ODA Loan and Grant Aid, and executing Technical Cooperation in developing countries. With approximately 100 offices and a network of people cooperating within its numerous programs running all over the world, the organization provides, for example, technical training for participants from developing countries in a wide range of fields, such as medical, industrial, and agricultural fields.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, JICA programs allowed Japanese counterparts to host experts and researchers from developing countries in Japan and thousands of Japanese experts to travel to the target countries to arrange hands-on training locally. The pandemic caused disruptions to the programs: experts have been forced to evacuate and the hosting of trainees has been suspended. Last autumn, JICA launched an open call for proposals to find solutions that enable the programs to continue operating despite travel restrictions.

The Augumenta solution will initially be deployed in two countries in Africa as a tool to aid technical guidance:

1. In the medical field, including infectious disease control, between the researchers at Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research in Ghana and experts in research institutions in Japan;
2. In the field of infectious disease control between the University of Hokkaido and The School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Zambia;
3. In the field of agriculture, connecting experts in Japan and the Agriculture Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture in Zambia studying rice cultivation.

Augumenta's SmartEyes solution matched the criteria set by JICA and was selected out of the 24 submitted proposals to provide the much-needed communication solution. SmartEyes fulfills the key program requirements, including:

1. Needs to work with varying network conditions.
2. Does not require the researcher to stop working to communicate.
3. Provides proper visibility to the target, traditional webcams have not been sufficient.
4. Short learning curve, the solution does not require technical expertise to be used.
5. Can be customized based on JICA's needs.

Moreover, the solution was developed to provide the expert with visibility to the target as close as being on-site in person. Live video call shows the expert(s), the work at hand and lets the participants communicate without a need to stop working. Additional video cameras show the experts a wider view of the target area. The solution is self-contained and easy to set up. It takes care of authentication, encryption, and streaming to the cloud. The only thing the user has to do is basically switch the system on.

The SmartEyes remote collaboration solution, designed to solve remote working challenges in industrial settings, functions well in challenging environments and varying network conditions and is easy to use by workers with different skill levels.

Augumenta provides the total solution including the needed software, hardware, and support services, and coordinates the field-testing phase. The company works in close cooperation with Iristick, whose smart glasses will be used in the project. Iristick has extensive experience in remote assistance in general, and various types of NGO projects in developing countries in particular and brings valuable expertise to the project.

“In 2019, TICAD7 was organized under the theme, ‘Advancing Africa’s Development through People, Technology and Innovation’. TICAD8, in Tunisia in 2022, will be held by advocating the promotion of innovation. Aligned with this, JICA has been conducting research on the applicability of science, technology and innovation (STI) in cooperation with technical cooperation projects and technical experts in order to solve the development issues facing Africa and to achieve SDGs, and we have launched ‘Africa Open Innovation Challenge’ since 2019. We are looking forward to working with Augumenta and hope to promote innovative solutions through our collaboration”, says the agency representative.

“We are extremely happy to help JICA with their remote collaboration challenges caused by COVID-19”, says Tero Aaltonen, CEO & Co-Founder of Augumenta. “Our SmartEyes product is designed to give experts a comprehensive view of the remote target, enabling them to promptly provide accurate guidance on the matter at hand, whether in a research laboratory, manufacturing shop floor, or fixing equipment in the field. Together with Iristick, we deliver a solution that’s stable in challenging conditions and has a short learning curve.”

“From the very early days of our company, we believed that Iristick smart glasses can address social deficiencies and grant field and frontline workers in developing countries access to expert support and help. That’s why we are very happy to collaborate with JICA on this project, teaming up with Augumenta and supporting their solution. The pandemic has been an accelerator for the usage of smart glasses enabling remote assistance. This way, the JICA research project can be continued thanks to the combination of Iristick’s smart glasses and Augumenta’s remote assistance solution,” says Steven Serneels, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Iristick.

For more information:

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