

Title: Zylight in Africa

It is said, "Once you travel to Africa, you'll come back for sure". That has happened to me, returning more than 10 times since my '98 first doc on Kilimanjaro. One location in Africa is extremely different from another; so are the assignments. A safari brings serenity; a fashion photo-session in a Masai village is eccentric; crossing Sahara with second-hand cars became a pure adventure...and Kili...well, Kili is Kili...professionally tough. To succeed with your doc you need to sharply focus on the job as well as to choose your right gear; because any missing item or mistake, so far from your facilities, hurts a lot. Those who worked in Africa better now what I mean.

Three UNICEF assignments in the last half a year were quite a challenge: Niger and Central Africa are hot political spots where the insurgents can attack you at any time even if you are under the UN flag. We had to move fast, in tight time frames, in crowded environments, under extreme heat and often covered in dust; a small production crew means only my partner Andreea Marin as host on camera and me as cameraman and director.

And here comes the last, Cote d'Ivoire assignment, video documenting a part of the global vaccination project developed by UNICEF and Pampers.

It could probably sound nice: 12 ladies and me! Weak and scared I asked for an assistant; and I was granted, so this time we were two men working for Goodwill ambassadors and mothers from Romania, Serbia Bulgaria and Bosnia, in the campaign "1 pack = 1 vaccine".

Configuring the shooting gear I had in mind reliability, mobility and of course picture quality. A Z1 HDV was good enough for the compromise picture vs. weight. What I do not compromise is the Arrow from Miller. Sanken lavalieres were on the list too; plus Rode directional. Even I am always looking on the artistic aspects of a frame, an independent - stand alone - light on a side is impossible to be used as the sets are often crowded and you are in a move. Have I mentioned the constant machine-gun protection around us?

To make it short: ZYLIGHT made my shooting, being all what I needed: a fill & eye light, soft enough itself without a soft-box, dimmable; and perhaps the most important feature to be emphasized: the colour correction. I put it on a 3 shoe support which is fixed on the main camera shoe, together with a mike receiver and the Rode. ZY is bright and dimmable so I took advantage and adjusted the intensity depending on the set and subject, often changing from 1 meter to 5 or more; and often shooting on shelters which are in shade or even darkness but with bright side natural light hitting the lens, normally asking for filling light. Shooting black and white faces in the same frame is critical – and I will not pretend here I have the best tune answer for it. But when it comes about African interviewee ZY was great again as I could slightly change the colour of it, with the talking head in the shade and usually sunny backgrounds.

For a job that involves fast decisions on the move and many compromises on location, ZYLIGHT 90 without fragile bulbs and glass filters, gels or moving parts, with a strong metal body, proved also one can physically rely on it... and probably some can imagine it could become a "light" hand weapon - just in case.