



International
Water Association

60 second interview | *Richard Franceys*

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Eur Ing Richard Franceys, PhD, MBA, BSC, FRSA, MICE, MILTM is Director of the Water and Society Programme at Cranfield University, UK following five years with UNESCO-IHE, Delft and thirteen years at the Water, Environment and Development Centre, Loughborough University. He has also been a regional member of the Consumer Council for Water (and its various predecessor bodies linked to economic regulator Ofwat) in England and Wales for the past nine years. Before commencing this commitment to research and capacity-building Dr Franceys spent five years in Southern Sudan with an NGO, working on all aspects of the built environment in integrated rural development programmes, including improvements to wells, check dams, rainwater catchments and latrines. This followed a more conventional period as a young engineer in design and construction of waste water systems for an international consulting engineer.

- *What do you consider to be the most significant recent change in your field of expertise to have occurred in the last 10 years?*

Maintaining an appropriate academic scepticism about the role of international private operators in sensitive, community oriented development, I found my preconceptions confounded, sitting in a slum house in Buenos Aires and hearing from the community how they were involved, along with NGOs, in a participatory way with the supposedly 'wicked' private company so as to be able to access water and sanitation well in advance of any contractual requirements.

Subsequent work for the Asian Development Bank, looking at twenty cases of Public Private Community Partnerships for the Poor (Weitz & Franceys) confirmed that this was not an isolated experience. The best international private companies could support service provision to the poor more effectively than NGOs who, not unreasonably, do not have the equivalent capacity for 'scaling up' their work. One of the reasons why the private operators could be (temporarily) so effective is that the concession model gave them the power, not only to invest when and where operations demanded it, but also to overcome the vested interests that so bind-up national public operators. But we all know that the initial surge of international private operator involvement is over for now. Governments have too often reneged on agreements and fail to recognise that without adequate revenues based on viable tariffs the capital maintenance, on which our asset intensive industry depends, is never undertaken.

I have since described Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) as 'development short-cuts', temporarily able to deliver; but by taking an institution so far ahead of the trend-line of socio-economic development it appears that they are doomed to failure.

- *What do you consider to be the most significant future challenge that professionals must deal with in the next 10 years?*

The challenge remains of serving the billion slum dwellers with adequate networked water and on-plot sanitation. To achieve that will require institutional reform of the public utilities, promotion of national water service contractors, involvement of local NGOs to act as social intermediaries and never-ending 'capacity-building' to ensure that the process remains in step with society's expectations.

One of the longer-lasting results of the 'privatisation experiment' has also been the introduction of economic regulators. These 'impartial referees' are very necessary to judge the appropriate tariffs which drive efficiency whilst enabling investment by the utility, whether public or private ('Tapping the market', Nickson and Franceys, 2003).

- Whom do you consider to be the leading expert in your field, outside of your own organization, and why?*

I continue to learn most from Ofwat, the economic regulator for England and Wales. The improvement in services in UK with the concomitant increases in efficiency, for all the occasional failures, has been dramatic and I believe that incentive based regulation is a powerful tool which can be used widely. Ofwat continues to develop its thinking, as well as reporting in great detail on the performance of the water companies it regulates (www.ofwat.gov.uk).
- Which report, product or service from your organization deserves more attention and why?*

I have just finished a ten country study for DFID (UK's international development agency) investigating 'Regulating Public and Private Partnerships for the Poor'. The case studies and other outputs are now available online (www.silsoe.cranfield.ac.uk/iwe/projects/regulation/) and show that regulators can influence service to the urban poor, but that there remains a long way to go to achieve sustainable urban service for all. We can take communities 'beyond stand posts' whilst achieving cost savings through 'differentiated household connections' in the slums. However, the necessary adaptation of technical standards remains a challenge to many government sectoral agencies and there continues to be the need for community involvement, whether through NGOs or through customer committee type structures such as in Zambia and Indonesia.
- In what ways would you like to see IWA change in the next 5 years?*

I am very pleased that IWA is taking an integrated view to water development in the world. I look to see these ideas develop and am particularly interested in the development of the Regulatory Special Interest Group.
- Special interests...*

Coming full circle on all these ideas, Cranfield University is now a member of the Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor partnership (www.wsup.com), bringing together private companies, NGOs and knowledge partners to deliver full feasibility studies for at least twenty projects which can move directly to funding and implementation to serve a hoped for 100,000 slum dwellers in coming years. IWA has also now become involved in WSUP and we look to see water professionals from all countries assisting each other in this critical task.
- Career defining moments...*

Finally you ask about who has had most influence on my career? I believe that person has to be Emeritus Professor John Pickford of Loughborough University. John recognised the critical role of on-plot sanitation before most others and with great humour in his many lectures around the world demonstrated how we could make a real difference in disposing of excreta safely and affordably. John developed and led for many years the excellent 'WEDC' (Water, Engineering and Development Centre) at Loughborough University and through that made a most significant difference in the world. I wish him very well in his retirement though sadly note that his health is now not so good.
- Contact points*

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