CHAPTER 5 : LESSONS LEARNED

While working in the field under stress from time constraint, inclement weather and social stigma, they met with serious challenges but tried to carry on with improvised solutions. Here we mention a few nuggets of wisdom that comes only with getting one s feet wet in the field with the hope that reading these the future investigators will be more prudent and not make the same mistakes.

5.1 Using E. Merck field kit

- The color chart supplied with the E. Merck kit has no gradation between 0.0 mg/L and 0.1mg/L. Therefore, it is not possible to determine arsenic concentration falling between these limits although an experience tester can detect faint coloration. This is the most serious drawback of the Merck kit. However, Merck kit has proven to be the most reliable, easy-to-use and accurate kit available in the market.
- The bottle of zinc should not be left uncapped for long. If left open for long, zinc powder seems to change in color and possibly affect detection reliability.
- Test tubes are fragile. One needs to be very careful in handling glassware. Replacements are very difficult to get in the field.
- The chemical reaction produces highly toxic arsine gas that poses a serious health hazard if inhaled. Users must be careful in minimizing escape of gas from the test tube.

5.2 Testing and marking tubewells

- Sometimes social or political elite do not want their tubewells to be marked red even if they are found contaminated. It is important that government, NGO and elected officials are notified and sensitized prior to embarking on testing and marking tubewells. The purpose of the testing and marking must also be discussed with local people before beginning the work.

5.3 Identifying patients

- Some households do not allow outsiders (especially male workers) to examine their womenfolk, particularly unmarried girls. This makes patient identification very difficult. The field teams