(See: Responsible Data for M&E in the African Context)

TIP SHEET 8

Improving data visualisation

☑ Simple aesthetic improvements to a visualisation can be made with aid of the following eight elements:

☐ **Alignment –** Generally your reader will read from left to right or top to bottom so structure or organise your data in this manner so that it is read in a logical pattern. Scattered visuals require the reader to organise and make assumptions about your storyline. If you make the flow easy it is easier to follow. Use gridlines as markers to check alignment.

☐ **De-clutter –** Remove any aspects of your visualisation that are not useful to the reader. For example, do not present gridlines if you have included data labels – labels are enough to understand the scale you are presenting so gridlines are just a distraction. Identify other unnecessary clutter in your visuals.

☐ **Font –** Use font differentiation only where it has a purpose, such as in headings or labels. As far as possible, limit your fonts to 3–4 types but keep them simple and related to the same family of fonts. Also check your organisation's brand standards and style guidelines in this regard.

☐ **Lines –** Lines are helpful in creating structure and grouping information and can be used as a visual paragraph to indicate the end of a thought and the start of a new one. This helps the reader to organise and process the data visualisation in a logical manner, thereby assisting the user to assimilate the data.

☐ **Arrows –** Where there are many components in the visualisation, arrows are useful in guiding the reader to relationships between data visualisations or to a specific point which will help interpret the visual.

☐ **Colour –** While colour can be very emotive, it is also subjective – e.g. generally we interpret red as bad, negative, or suggestive of danger. Check that your colour use is appropriate in emphasising a data point but does not distract the reader from more salient points. Also consider whether the colours you use can be seen by your reader. Might the audience include a colour-blind person? As with fonts, often your organisation may prescribe a certain palette which will guide your colour choices.

☐ **Text –** Use an appropriate amount of supporting text for your audience to provide context, guidance, or further details that are important in interpreting your visualisation. Too much text can be overwhelming, but too little could leave the reader with insufficient information to draw meaning from the visualisation.

☐ **Icons and images –** Include icons and images to help categorise information for the reader or convey the gravitas of the data you present. Icons and images can also provide quick insights into the context if you need to reduce the text – e.g. an image of young people is representative of the demographic that the data represents.

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