

**May 24, 2010**

**Dear Data Use Net Members,**

We are looking forward to your contributions to the discussion on using dashboards in decision making. To generate conversation we'd like to say a bit more about dashboards in general.

Dashboards aren't a new decision support tool but they have recently begun to receive growing attention as the amount of data programs are required to collect, analyze, report and apply in decision making increases. This increase in the amount of data collected thankfully coincides with an increase in availability of tools to display data in interesting and helpful ways. We are now able to access tools that help us make sense of data quickly – so that we can take actions equally as quickly.

One of the key aspects of creating a dashboard is have a good understanding of the data being collected and the relationships between the data variables. Creating a dashboard requires a lot of thought before you decide how the data should best be displayed. You need to ask - what information do decision makers need to review to **monitor** program objectives? What are the decisions they need to make about their programs? These questions should be actionable. Once you know what data you want to see, you can determine the best way to arrange it into one screen.

For the SCA Dashboard (the example provided in the discussion announcement), we went through a series of sessions with key stakeholders to understand the different data needs of the dashboard users (country managers, program managers and facility managers) as well as the different breakdowns of data required to inform the dashboard. In addition to simply seeing the Assessment scores for each facility, dashboard users wanted to compare scores across countries, within a country and between facilities. For example, country managers wanted to be able to see country level trends so they could better allocate technical resources for specific areas needing improvement. They also wanted to be able to see trends among facilities so they could easily identify factors that impacted capacity, such as if the facility was rural or urban. The dashboard provided this data by segmenting the Assessment scores in different ways.

The second important aspect to consider when designing dashboards, is data display. The data must be rendered in a way that increases a user's ability to see meaningful relationships between the variables. We have seen a number of attractive dashboards but they have not done a good job of highlighting the most important data or have not used colors or labeling effectively. In the SCA Dashboard, we tried to make the display interesting as well as meaningful. We used a variety of display types, such as maps, column graphs, bullet graphs, radar charts and tables. As well, the score ranges were given meaning by consistently using red, yellow, green and blue to reflect scores within a designated range. These colors are used in every page and graph. We used controls (select lists) at the top of each display page to allow users to change data views across

the entire page. For each page and graph/table, we did a lot of thinking and cross checking to make sure the display elements painted a comprehensive picture of the Assessment results.

There are many other elements to consider when developing dashboards that affect their usefulness in decision making. We would like to hear from other dashboard developers and users to learn about their experiences. Please tell us:

- The context in which you used or developed dashboards
- How dashboards were used in decision making
- Program enhancements that resulted from the use of dashboards
- Barriers and facilitating factors to using/developing dashboards
- Any other interesting information you'd like to share

Please contribute. We look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Data Use Net Moderators

DataUseNet is moderated by MEASURE Evaluation, a MEASURE project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under terms of Leader with Associates Cooperative Agreement GHA-A-00-08-00003-00. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the U.S. government. MEASURE Evaluation is the USAID Global Health Bureau's primary vehicle for supporting improvements in monitoring and evaluation in population, health and nutrition worldwide.