Tracking International Innovation: New Research Paper

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Innovation and "innovation indicators" are not part of the common lexicon. Not all researchers follow the same definitions, and the subject is constantly evolving – by definition. This poses a problem for policymakers, says Prof. Fred Gault in our new working paper.

Innovation is the bringing to market of a new or significantly improved product, or of finding a better way to get a product to market, to paraphrase the 2005 Oslo Manual by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat. In turn, innovation indicators are statistics, or a combination of statistics, fed with data from a range of sources including surveys and administrative reports.

However, not everyone agrees on the definitions, on what they mean, and how they can support public policy. This poses a problem for policymakers, as comparisons are key to the design, roll out and assessment of policies. So what are international organisations doing to reconcile approaches?

Among others, the OECD and World Bank are building an Innovation Policy Platform (IPP) to provide information on member and observer countries; UNESCO has launched the Global Observatory of STI Policy Instruments (GO-SPIN) for its member countries; and UNU-MERIT is working with the African Union on a series of innovation policy workshops (DEIP).

Revising horizons

In terms of definitions, the OECD's Frascati Manual — on the collection and interpretation of R&D data — is now on its sixth revision since 1963. That will be followed by the third revision of the Oslo Manual for innovation data and indicators. Meanwhile, the Ibero-American Network of Science and Technology Indicators (RICYT) is revising its own

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