

NOTE

Women and Technology

MD writes:

Women's rights are particularly threatened by new genetic technologies because their development requires extensive testing on women and their genetic materials. Now, as debates rage on about cloning and other reproductive and genetic technologies, the issue of experimentation and testing is often overlooked. Much of the stem cell research and cloning mentioned in these debates will require huge amounts of eggs, which must be donated by women. Egg donation is invasive and potentially dangerous.

Debating the merits of cloning and this kind of human experimentation is premature without considering the health and safety of the women that would be required to pursue the research. Beyond safety, there are a number of other specific women's rights issues that need to be addressed: access and equity, reproductive choice, commodification of life and specifically, of women's bodies. Some women are involved in developing new technology but many more can become involved in critically interrogating it, asking important questions about its use, and presenting alternatives.

In terms of GM foods and other agricultural technology-related issues, a gender analysis is crucial yet often missing. While women are the majority of the world's farmers, in most patriarchal systems they have very little access to resources and very little power. In other words, they are doing the work to feed their families and communities but are disempowered when it comes to getting their needs met or demanding appropriate technologies for that work. Women have typically been the holders of indigenous knowledge and wisdom, including seed saving and food and medicine preparation.

Technologies can and do transform gender relations and roles. Gender relations are also transformed as reproduction, thanks to assisted reproductive technology, moves into the laboratory and the domain of (often male) scientists and biomedical enterprises.

Some kinds of technologies are immediately related to women and their specific social or biologically defined roles, but this does not mean that women should not be involved in debating other technologies such as biological weapons. It is important to highlight not only what impacts on women directly, as women, but also what impacts on their equality and their ability to access and enjoy their rights. ✍

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