

Book Reviews

Triple Jeopardy: Women and AIDS, Panos Institute, London, 1990 (104 pp, price not known, ISBN 1 870670 20 5).

In **Triple Jeopardy** the authors focus on the three fold impact of HIV/AIDS on women as carers, as infected persons, and as mothers who may infect their babies. It is a well-researched, thought provoking, balanced, and sensitive publication. It should prove very useful for AIDS service organisations, and for a wide range of community organisations, policy makers and concerned individuals. It is, of course, of particular relevance to women and women's organisations.

The book has seven chapters covering epidemiology, the mechanics of risk, questions of choice, reproductive issues, pediatrics, economics and prevention strategies.

It examines the impact of AIDS on women in diverse settings, from sex workers in Asia and Australia to poor rural women in Africa, to middle class professional women in Africa, Europe and the USA. The authors quote World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that of the eight to ten million people thought to have already contracted HIV, one third are women. WHO estimates that the year 2000 75-80% of HIV infections will have resulted from heterosexual intercourse. This places heterosexual behaviour change at the centre of prevention strategies. However, **Triple Jeopardy** highlights the enormous difficulties in achieving such change because of fundamental socioeconomic and cultural factors. These are well illustrated throughout the book along with examples of current strategies to promote such behaviour change and supportive attitudes. Some of the most telling examples used are first person accounts which enormously enrich the whole book.

The authors conclude that HIV is not merely a medical issue but raises fundamental issues of equity between the sexes and between regions of the world which are at the heart of the development debate. Without radical change, women, and particularly the most disadvantaged women in the poorest communities around the world, will remain in **Triple Jeopardy** (pp91-92). Thus the authors strongly advocate improving women's economic and social status to promote effective control of AIDS, and to mobilise support for infected people.

The style is highly readable and engaging, with numerous personal quotes and comments. The text is broken up with information boxes, case studies, and examples of education material, and uses the format of the three earlier Panos books on AIDS. **Triple Jeopardy** is shorter than the previous books, but maintains a similar high standard of factual content, breadth and readability. While it does stand on its own, it usefully complements the previous publications.

The book is comprehensively researched and tightly referenced, although one limitation is the lack of an index. A detailed index would make it easier to access material on specific issues where, from the contents section alone, coverage is not immediately obvious. An index could usefully cover factual subjects, such as female condoms or prostitution, for

example, as well as geographical references. The book's utility could also be enhanced by more developed examples of strategies for education and change. However it in no way purports to be a 'how to' manual so this may be an unfair criticism. Its aim is to increase information and awareness, and to stimulate discussion and appropriate action based on sound analysis. In these aims it should succeed very well.

Reviewed by Helen Jackson, Lecturer, School of Social Work, Harare.

Miracle or Menace? Biotechnology and the Third World, Robert Walgate, Panos Institute, 1990 (199 pp, price not stated, ISBN 1 870670 18 3).

The word biotechnology is emotive. Recently, I wrote an article arguing that science cannot be separated from emotion, though the temptation is to say 'Stop being emotional and approach the matter in a scientific way'. Scientifically, biotechnology is almost a miracle (Science doesn't believe in miracles!). It is leading science into discoveries and possibilities beyond that which many laypeople could imagine is possible. But this also is the menace. I remember Pat Mooney giving a talk at a Conference in Harare two years ago. He warned that when approaching the issue of biotechnology a basic Law of Technology should not be forgotten. He phrased it as follows: "Any new technology introduced into a society which is not fundamentally just will exacerbate the disparities between rich and poor". [On page 107 there is an interesting printing error, instead of 'so patients can be identified early' it reads 'so patents can be identified early'. Is biotechnology as it is being researched and applied more interested in the patents or the patients?]

While reading *Miracle or Menace? Biotechnology and the Third World*, both the *Development Dialogue* 1988 issue "The Laws of Life" and the *New Internationalist* 1991 issue "Test Tube Coup. Biotech's Global Takeover" were important to me. I would certainly recommend that all three publications are read to gain a comprehensive picture of the implications of this (terrifying?) new technology. *Miracle or Menace* is the one to start with, because it has an accessible style, helped by useful informational inserts which give point by point explanations on topics such as Recombinant DNA, plant cells, vaccines, etc.

Miracle or Menace covers the main areas of biotechnology application and controversy, its potential use and abuse in agriculture and food processing, how it can help improve world health, ownership of plant genetic resources (most of which come from South, but are being altered and patented by the North), and the possible unforeseen environmental dangers that could be caused by the release of novel organisms into the environment. But for some reason it makes no mention of the potential use of biotechnology in biological warfare, nor how research in this direction is going fast ahead. Perhaps the subject is too controversial, or the information so classified that it is impossible to report on it satisfactorily.

Another criticism I would make is that the book fails to question the whole premise on which modern science seems to be based, ie treating the symptom rather than looking for the real cause. A good example of this is in agriculture. The real cause of the problem is that agricultural science continues to look for ways of dominating nature, hoping to understand and control its incredible complexity instead of working with it. The proposed directions for biotechnology are a continuation of this trend. Any discussion of its beneficial potential or dangers needs instead to debate this fundamental issue and not presume that