

Why GM debates do not persuade public opinion

When, earlier this year, SciDev.Net decided to host a live online debate around genetically modified (GM) plants and animals, it was because we knew the topic elicits strong views.

That's hardly surprising — the GM debate has been steadily bubbling since the early 1990s, and will no doubt continue for years. It is an emotive topic, ripe with the tantalising promise of science and technology coming to the aid of a global food production system facing climate change and an ever increasing human population. It is, however, also a topic dogged by confusion, suspicion, polarised opinion and recrimination.

We posed a deliberately general question, 'What's wrong with GM?', in an effort to understand what makes the topic so emotionally charged. Going over the contributions, what immediately strikes me is the frustration and confusion of scientific researchers working on GM and encountering opposition to uptake of their research.

I would suggest that there is a tendency for those promoting GM to see those who refuse to accept it as either foolish or wantonly malicious or both, much like the way people label so-called climate change deniers. But this is unhelpful. Instead, it is necessary to understand the cultural, social and psychological roots of reactions to GM. These were evident in many of the contributions coming from most of the regions we cover.

What I have in mind is not only research into the safety of GM — it is, more importantly, research into people's engagement with GM, into what we might call the psychology of resistance to GM. This resistance merits more respect and understanding than it has had thus far.

Read the full, original article: [SciDev.Net's GM debate: A postscript](#)