Book reviews

Evaluation of Environmental Health Programmes: Report of a WHO Scientific Group. (Pp. 64; 65p) Geneva: WHO. 1973.

Professionals in any field have a natural tendency to believe that more money should be devoted to their particular area. Teachers think we do not spend enough on education; soldiers are anxious about our meagre commitment to defence; doctors see salvation only in our spending more on medical care. Often these positions are shored up by the revelation that Ruritania spends *x* per cent more of her national income on such-and-such an activity than we do. If present trends continue, we are told, we shall by the year 1990 be approaching the bottom of some international league table of health, education or welfare, ending up below San Marino and just above Rockall.

The sterility of this high-level numbers game hardly needs to be insisted upon. It is refreshing, therefore, to find an increasing concern with the rather more tractable problem 'What are we getting for the money we currently spend?' This is the essence of 'evaluation' and, in a world where the resources likely to be made available are never going to be sufficient to carry out all the projects which the professionals consider necessary, it is a vital question.

This report, by a group of international experts, sets out with some rigour an approach to the evaluation of environmental health projects. The style of the report will not be to everyone's taste, it certainly is not to mine, and will, I suspect, alienate those for whom it is intended, namely, health administrators. The tone is self-consciously formal with much emphasis on semantic exactitude. The author also appears to suffer from a morbid tendency to compile lists. Points (a), (b), (c), and (d) follow points (1), (2), (3), and (4) like tanks across Red Square on May Day!

But if the style is unhappy, what about the content? Here the committee have fallen out among themselves. In a note of dissent one of the members, the only Briton and the only economist in the group, dismisses the report as too general and too confused to make a useful contribution to environmental health project evaluation. Coming as I do from the same intellectual stable as the dissentient I can only agree with this judgement. The formal model which the report constructs as a paradigm for an evaluation process serves in the end only to mystify, although in the process of constructing the model some sensible points are made. It may well have been that if the report had included an example of the evaluation of

an environmental health project (even a hypothetical one) flesh would have been given to its somewhat stark precepts. In the event this has not been done, and the section dealing specifically with the problems of environmental health projects is disconcertingly short.

As a token of a continuing concern with the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental health projects the report is to be welcomed, but I fear it is unlikely to inspire many improvements in the practice of evaluation.

N. J. GLASS

Vector Control in International Health. (Pp. 144; £3.20) Geneva: WHO. 1972.

In many industrial organizations, the medical officer tends to accumulate miscellaneous odd jobs with a health and hygiene aspect. Among these, he is often expected to have a special insight into the identification, behaviour, and control of pests—insects and others. If he has been sent on special expensive 'hygiene' courses and has even returned with additional letters after his name, he will certainly be regarded as the man to consult, and to be made responsible for the removal of anything that offends, bites, stings, causes illness or is in any sense counter-productive and removable.

Such talents are especially important where the climate is hot and the disease vectors readily proliferate, or reintrude from remote or neighbouring sources. In this, those associated with international seaports and airports have major problems, and major responsibilities for setting up efficient control measures against disease vectors.

Realizing this need and its urgency, WHO has now published a special volume with the above title, which in its 140 pages provides a mass of sound advice and information to help those responsible for vector control operations. Written by 12 experts on their special subjects (seven from the US Public Health Service, the remainder from organizations of comparable special experience), this book serves not only as a guide on how to do it but includes pest identification, biology, and behaviour on which control measures must be based. It deals thoroughly with mosquitoes, fleas, sucking lice, flies, cockroaches, rats, and mice, in their tourism and habitats of seaports, airports, ships, and aircraft. It lists suitable chemicals, with sound advice on how and when to use them and on safety precautions, and having whetted the appetite, closes with the usual helpful description of other WHO literature on the subject. It is