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**Tied-Evaluation in Global Education Policy:  
Critical Policy Analysis of the Education Policy Landscape in Eastern Caribbean  
Small Island Developing States with Voices from the Field**

Kelsey Nichole Hood Cattaneo

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

York St John University

School of Education, Language, and Psychology

October 2023

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## **Acknowledgments**

I want to thank my supervisors, Dr. Clare Cunningham and Dr. Charlotte Haines-Lyon, who guided me through the ebbs and flows of research. To my committee members Dr. Dean Garratt and Dr. Verna Knight for their time, thoughtful attention and recommendations to right the ship.

To my friends and colleagues, who have taken turns riding each wave with me, providing momentum or breakers where needed, and keeping the lighthouse ablaze when I found myself lost at sea; your unwavering belief in my abilities and support has been a significant source of strength throughout this journey. Thank you for understanding my occasional salty disposition and reminding me to take breaks and enjoy the beauty of the surrounding seascape. I want to thank my interview participants; your voices are the sirens that guided me back to writing when work and other obligations kept me away. My heartfelt thanks to my lighthouse, Nicole Journal, who always keeps me on course. I am grateful to Dr. Mary Thaler, Dr. Aleshia Allert, Dr. Isabel Hostettler-Moreno, Dr. Trudi Garratt-Ward, and Augustus Bruender; I would still be adrift without you all.

Lastly, I must thank my husband, Roger, and my daughter, Aurora. You are my anchor and my little mermaid. Because of your untiring support and sacrifices, I can ride this final wave to completion. You have kept me afloat when the seas were too rough and anchored me when I felt adrift. I know that with your support, I can weather any storm.

## Abstract

Evaluation and evaluators are crucial to implementing evidence-based policy and practice. However, in global education policy (GEP), the gap between literature and theory is vast. Using critical policy analysis (CPA) with a multiple-lens approach, I employ Deborah Stone's policy paradox and a decolonial lens to interrogate evaluation practices and evidence-based approaches in the GEP landscape. Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Eastern Caribbean (EC) Small Island Developing States (SIDS), offer two educational landscapes as sites for analysis. The CPA's iterative interpretive analysis approach contributes to the budding GEP field, by applying policy paradoxes through a seascape frame. The thesis seeks to answer the questions: (1) what is the role of the evaluator in GEP, (2) how might decolonial methodologies impact evaluation and evidence generation in GEP, and (3) what are the aid workers' perceptions of the role and usefulness of evaluation for better development practice?

I conducted a thematic analysis on thirty-one data sources, including policies, reports, speeches, statements, and interviews. Three paradoxes described as different parts of an ocean seascape, were pulled from the data. The systemic paradox relates to the structure of GEP, which thwarts Education 2030's stated goal of achieving evidence-based reform through a "data revolution." Donors control over the evaluation practices in GEP and Eastern Caribbean SIDS comprise the second paradox. The third paradox highlights the conceptual disconnect in GEP, whereby deeply entrenched ideas of modernity perpetuating states of coloniality thwart stakeholders' goals of engendering locally led education revolutions. Further research and methods will need to be developed for evaluators in GEP environments to generate meaningful evidence if the international policymaking community continues to support evidence-based approaches.

*Keywords: Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Evidence-based policy, Coloniality, Policymaking, Evaluation*

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and Person of Color
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market
CEPS	Caribbean educational policy space
CPA	Critical policy analysis
CSO	Civil society organizations
CXC	Caribbean Examination Council
EBA	Evidence-based approaches (includes Evidence-based Policymaking, Evidence-informed policymaking, evidence-based practice, and best practices)
EBM	Evidence-Based Medicine
EC	Eastern Caribbean
Education 2030	Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4
EFA	World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GEP	Global Education Policymaking
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOs	International Organizations
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean region
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan
OECS	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
RAM	Rational Actor Model
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDG-4	Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SVG	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

## **Chapter I: Introduction**

The evidence-based approach to policy and practice gained traction in the early 2000s with what Nutley *et al.* (2019) and Boaz *et al.* (2019) call the “what works” movement. In the global education policy (GEP) landscape, evidence-based approaches (EBA) became a cornerstone upon its inclusion in the most recent global education policy, Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Education 2030). The evidence-generators of the GEP field are evaluators or monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialists (Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken, 2012; Fowler, 2015; Mundy *et al.*, 2016). This thesis looks at the role of evaluators in generating and analyzing data within the GEP landscape, focusing on experts working with or within education programs run by international organizations (IOs) in the Global South. Through aid worker perspectives, the thesis investigates the evaluators’ contributions to evidence-based approaches in GEP and the benefits practical decolonizing methodologies could provide to the field.

The lack of literature in evaluation in GEP and policy studies complicates researching the topic. Therefore, any research in this area must draw on other literatures to fill that gap, especially those aligned with critical stances as is foundational in GEP (Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken, 2012). This thesis approaches building research in the GEP field through an iterative, multi-lens approach that centers on the voices and experiences of aid workers in the Global South. Additionally, aligned with a critical policy analysis (CPA) approach in education studies, a historical analysis of the international, regional, and national landscapes gives context to the policies and people impacted by them. Through this original approach, this thesis provides a connection to policy studies’ methodological tools to continue to build GEP as a field (e.g., employing policy paradox through the metaphor of a wave and practical application of the decolonial lens).

### **Context and Background**

To understand the current GEP landscape, one must know the historical giving patterns of the Global North to the Global South. Decades of colonialism, conditional aid packages of the 1980s, international development agendas from 1990 onwards, and the many iterations of global education policies shape the current GEP landscape. This section briefly examines that history, which I provide a more detailed account of in Chapter II: Historical Analysis of the Caribbean Education Policy Space.

The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), or highly prescribed development aid packages, were the predominant aid packages offered as international aid in the 1980s. SAPs were bilateral aid offered to developing nations by international organizations and industrialized nations in the Global North to emerging economies in the Global South. By the end of the 1990s, however, increasing evidence suggested that SAPs were correlated with higher levels of indebtedness and could not demonstrate credible gains to justify continued support (McAfee, 1991; Easterly, 2007; Fowler, 2015). The SAPs became infamously known as conditional or tied-aid because of the often-unrelated restrictions countries had to meet to secure the funding packages (e.g., government budget austerity was required to receive education funding) (Clay, Geddes and Natali, 2009). As support for the bilateral top-down prescriptions evident in SAPs fell out of favor, support for multilateral multi-stakeholder agreements between IOs and the Global South grew.

International representatives from each nation-state and various organizations united diverse voices, experiences, and agendas to define the most pressing global issues (e.g., poverty, education, health, and wellness). They set the first global agenda for development, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs defined universal primary education as a goal for all countries to achieve within the next decade. In 1990, representatives from countries around the globe, policy actors, and education specialists held the first World Education Forum in Jomtien, Thailand. Attendees wrote and adopted the first universal education policy framework, the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (EFA) (UNESCO, 1990).

Representatives from all policy arenas, including typically excluded members from the Global South and civil society organizations (CSOs), were in attendance. However, IOs who had prescribed policies and evaluated the SAPs the decade before remained the lead agencies in GEP. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), an international IO, hosted the first World Education Forum and continues to lead all GEP discussions today. The IO also coordinates global education statistics, producing a multi-stakeholder annual report --- the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report (UNESCO, 2015a). The GEM report is the premier authority on evaluation information regarding education programs in the Global South. Through member countries' self-reporting, UNESCO collects, analyzes, and reports educational impact data, defining the successes and failures of educational programs across the GEP landscape.

Similarly, the World Bank, an international organization and primary funder of SAPs, also plays a significant role in GEP as the number one financier of global education programs. The IO achieved this status through its Fast Track Initiative and later through the Global Partnership for Education organization. The Global Partnership for Education estimates it provides nearly US\$18 billion in education aid spending in the Global South yearly (World Bank, 2014).

In 2015, the international community re-engineered the MDGs as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and UNESCO hosted a new World Education Forum in Incheon, South Korea. At Incheon, participants defined the Education 2030 policy framework (UNESCO, 2015a), which guides all GEP programming today. Global policy frameworks like EFA have become so entrenched, influencing all parts of education policymaking and practice, that they become institutions. North (1991, p. 98) defined institutions as insurmountable rules or policies, including “both informal (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct) and formal rules (constitutions, laws, and property rights).” Through these institutions, international agendas and their IO counterparts control education priorities, funding, and means of evaluation within the GEP environment. Shahjahan (2011) claims this control potentially reproduces forms of coloniality.

Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (2011) describe coloniality, a form of modernity, as institutionalizing Western ideas as hegemonic and the control of knowledge production through gatekeeping. Research that describes or discounts prior colonized, Indigenous, or non-European voices, knowledge, and experiences as alternative or non-academic in favor of Western perspectives effectively “others” their perspectives (University of Bristol, 2023). The coloniality of GEP happens through the international agendas where the Global North uses soft power (Nye, 1990) to gain support or buy-in from the Global South to codify its Western vision of “development” (Faundez, 2016) and civilize the undeveloped South (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods, 2004). For example, Kempner and Jurema (2002) describe the World Bank’s effort to standardize international education systems to make them comparable. However, the authors problematize the World Bank’s standardized definition of a successful education system as a replication of the Western education systems and coloniality.

Decolonization and coloniality perspectives offer a previously unexplored external lens through which to critique the GEP and international aid landscapes, with their short-term project-based nature, and dependency on bilateral and multilateral aid agreements where donors define critical evaluation elements

(i.e., data collection, methodology, and dissemination) (Jules, 2008; Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken, 2012; Fowler, 2015). Through multiple lenses, like decolonization, this thesis contributes to the literature by investigating multiple perspectives of the tied-evaluation environment, where IOs and donors control evaluators' ability to generate and disseminate authentic program or initiative efficacy data by their donor IOs.

While IOs may be trying to decolonize their practice by untying their educational aid and allowing for more local or multi-stakeholder-engaged designs and approaches, Williams and Martin (2019) point out that spreading Western managerial concepts like evidence-based practices, quality improvement, and organizational learning complicates these efforts. Through Western management principles, donors and IOs refocus their control on evaluation and evidence generation through evidence-based (Cairney, 2019), evidence-informed (Nutley *et al.*, 2019), or knowledge-informed (Rossel-Cambier, Olsen and Pourzand, 2007) approaches to policy and program betterment. For example, donors have required GEP policy actors and evaluators to adopt data-driven approaches with their reprioritization of education funds to the tune of US\$359 million in 2021 and 2022 (World Bank, 2023) to other non-educational costs associated with the Coronavirus crisis and the Ukraine war (UNESCO, 2021). To reverse this redistribution, donors have asked Global South education departments and program evaluators to incorporate neoliberal evaluation concepts like the rate of return on educational investments or risk future funding opportunities (UNESCO, 2021).

While research exists that problematizes evidence-based approaches in education policymaking in other locations, these issues remain unexamined at the international development level, and more importantly, the support for using evidence to inform practice and policy continues to grow in GEP. It does so without critically evaluating what evidence is and how it might contribute to coloniality. The risk of defunding is too high not to participate. The most recent global education policy agenda, for example, suggests that the research community, including M&E experts, should not only employ evidence-based approaches but use that evidence to influence policymakers:

- develop policy-relevant research, including action research, to facilitate the achievement of the targets and make knowledge on education available in a usable form for policy-makers;
- develop local and national sustainable capacity for qualitative and quantitative research;
- help chart progress, propose options or solutions, and identify best practices that are innovative, scalable, and transferable (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 59).

Policy studies discourses echo the advice to generate evidence to inform policy, but GEP has not yet problematized the issue. Cairney and Oliver (2017) and Stone (2020a) argue that researchers who leave data

up to interpretation ask for their research to be ignored, misunderstood, or misconstrued and for ineffective policies to be developed. Evaluators are recommended to become policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 1995) or policy advocates (Cairney and Oliver, 2017), where they engage in data storytelling to influence policymaking. However, such demand for evidence-based approaches and data translation services leads to incentivizing counterfeit figures and false reporting and is not in the best interest of global education programming beneficiaries or the global education field (Fowler, 2015; Stewart, 2019)

GEP, evaluation, international development, and policy studies literatures offer foci for evaluation research, including recommendations on organizational evaluation policies (Trochim, 2009; Dillman and Christie, 2016; Christie and Lemire, 2019), organizations' potential uses of evaluation outputs (Serrat, 2009; Cairney and Oliver, 2017), and technical approaches to generating evidence (Gertler *et al.*, 2016; American Evaluation Association, no date). However, research still gives little attention to the tied-evaluation and the systemic issues that restrict evidence generation within Global South education programs. This thesis contributes to that body of knowledge through a CPA of the impact of international education policies on the GEP landscape, focusing on the experience of two Eastern Caribbean (EC) Small Island Developing States (SIDS), employing a decolonial lens, and highlighting beneficiary and aid-worker voices as critical contributions.

### **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

This thesis examines the push toward data-driven education aid in the Global South. The questions guiding this thesis are (a) what is the role of the evaluator in GEP, (b) how might decolonial methodologies impact evaluation and evidence generation in GEP, and (c) what are the aid workers' perceptions of the role and usefulness of evaluation for better development practice?

Historicizing global education aid, one makes explicit the institutions formed, the policy actors' interests served, the beneficiaries, and whose voices, experiences, and knowledge are valued. This critical stance aligns with a decolonial lens (Atkins, 2013) and questions proposed by Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 10), which should guide research on or with Indigenous populations:

Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interest does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?

Most importantly, this research aims to center the conversation around the evidence-generator (e.g., Caribbean and international aid worker) rather than the evidence user (e.g., policymaker). As an approach, this is a unique contribution to GEP and policy studies fields, as it focuses on evaluation rather than the policy decision stage of the policy cycle (Hausman, Mcpherson and Satz, 2016) where there is very little research (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984), which is typically centered on technical applications of evaluation (Christie and Lemire, 2019). By understanding the evaluator's role and contribution to GEP, an opportunity arises to deepen literature, theory-build from new perspectives, and apply rigorous methods in new ways that bring a critical perspective to the field.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This thesis employs critical theory by examining international policies through critical policy analysis. CPA looks at policies at the intersection of power and governance (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010) and is rooted in critical theory. The approach is aligned epistemologically and ontologically with research in the policy studies and global education disciplines that comprise this thesis. A multiple-lens approach, employing Deborah Stone's policy paradox and decolonial lenses, provides alternative perspectives for comparison.

### ***Data and Analysis***

CPA was used to examine interview data, policies, and policy-related documents pertinent to evidence-based policymaking in GEP, specifically around programming initiated to meet the Education 2030 goals. I interviewed six aid workers, including Caribbean and international staff, from various positions (i.e., program managers, education specialists, government advisors, and international organization directors). Participants either worked and lived in EC states or had worked in international development settings in SIDS. The process was iterative and nonlinear, as I intentionally coded and themed interview data before including other policy and policy-related documents. By coding interviews first, I intended to capture and highlight aid workers' voices in a way that would equalize their contribution to that of the external documentation (Bamberger, Rugh and Mabry, 2012; McIntosh and Wright, 2019; Gates *et al.*, 2022).

Young and Reynolds (2017) argue for conducting a historical analysis of the policy landscape as a component of the CPA to locate the policy in a specific time and place. Therefore, Chapter II: Historical Analysis of the Caribbean Education Policy Space provides a historical perspective of the development

trajectories of the EC SIDS contextualizing the policyscape and overcome the complicated nature of multidimensional international development research. The historical lens uses literature, policies, and other policy-related documentation to describe the policy landscape in two island nations.

After coding the interviews and conducting a historical analysis, I conducted the CPA by coding and analyzing the themes of all thirty-one documents, including the six interviews, nine policies (i.e., two international, three regional, and four national policies), and sixteen policy-related documents (i.e., three speeches, five reports, and eight regional and international policy actors' statements).

### ***Multiple Lenses as a Theoretical Framework***

The multiple-lens approach is grounded in policy studies as an adaptive framework allowing researchers to view a specific policy event through distinct epistemological lenses (Cairney, 2007). This thesis employs the multi-focal approach to look at evaluators' role in the GEP environment through two distinct lenses: policy paradox and decolonial.

The policy paradox framework, or what Stone (2002) calls interpretive policy analysis, is aligned with the policy studies' methodologies and critical theory. Supporters of the dominant paradigm in policy studies, the Rational Actor Model (RAM) or what Stone calls the "rationality project" (van Ostaïjen and Shivant, 2015), critique the policy paradox as a theory unable to explain policy decisions objectively. Stone counters this argument by suggesting that policymakers often use moral yardsticks under the guise of objectivism, and the policy paradox brings those to light.

Even today, most policy analysis assumes that once you've made a count of some phenomenon and you present a percentage, say, your number is real. Scholars gloss over what is behind categorizing things that made it possible for you to come up with that number. So, I think what is sometimes disparaged as ontological relativism or postmodern constructionism is in fact a challenge to the dominant way of thinking about policy (van Ostaïjen and Shivant, 2015, p. 130).

Relatedly, Béland (2019) argues that Stone's interpretive policy analysis processes allow researchers to understand policy actors' meaning-making and how that leads to policy action. While this thesis focuses on the evaluation stage of the policymaking process, rather than the policy formulation or adoption phases typically addressed by CPA, the framework recommends understanding policy problems through the paradoxes they present. Stone (2012) presents paradoxes as exemplary spaces where policy actors encounter

and overcome contradictory interests. I have employed the metaphor of a wave and its surrounding seascape to illustrate the paradoxes present in GEP.

Furthermore, the decolonial lens aims to ensure beneficiary inclusion (Teasdale and Ma Rhea, 2000), to identify interrogations of neoliberalization within education (Minoia, 2018), and as a practical approach to epistemologically grounded knowledge (Zavala, 2016). Shahjahan (2011) contends that critiques of multiple lenses suggest that when applied uncritically, it can lead to forms of confirmation bias or repeating colonized power struggles. Therefore, I have applied a practical decolonization approach to employ the decolonial lens as a counter-balance to hegemonic Western ideology, including multiple Caribbean policy actors' voices and sources (e.g., policies, reports, and policy statements). I describe this process and the other lenses in further detail in Chapter IV: Methodology.

### ***Geographic Context***

The Eastern Caribbean SIDS, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, were selected as sites of interest as the two countries have also committed to harmonizing their education policies through regional collaboration (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2016) and they are part of what t. d. jules (2015a)<sup>1</sup> calls a single Caribbean Education Policy Space (CEPS). While the countries are similar, they have unique development histories, making their comparison a potentially compelling contrast.

### **Significance of the Thesis**

As a new field grounded in critical perspectives, GEP requires rigorous and widely accepted critical methodologies, which policy studies have already developed. Secondly, using CPA to develop research on the evaluation stage will fill a gap in the literature researchers have pointed out for decades (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; Hausman, Mcpherson and Satz, 2016). A third contribution made by this thesis' approach is an application where aid workers' and beneficiary voices are centered. Summarily, this thesis contributes to the budding GEP field through expanded applications of rigorous methodologies from policy studies, exemplars of policy analysis in typically tricky landscapes, and practical approaches to decolonial theories.

Roy (2004, para. 4) famously said, "there's really no such thing as the voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard." By including additional voices, I aim to rectify

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. tavis d. jules' name is lowercase by request.

stakeholders' and beneficiaries' lack of visibility and agency, taking a step towards further untying evaluation. By including their voices in academic research, we break away from the assumption that beneficiaries are there to be *researched on* rather than *with* and *for* (Atkins, 2013, my emphasis).

As an evaluator in the GEP field, the significance of this thesis is also personal. I have worked in GEP and international development for almost two decades, and this thesis speaks to myself and my co-workers, the beneficiary groups I work for, and the stakeholder groups I work within. The style and approach I have taken in this thesis are rigorous and academic, but the tone is sometimes narrative and conversational to be respectful and accessible to these different groups (Jones, Shanahan and McBeth, 2014; Béland, 2019; Ertas, 2019) and to be beneficial to the GEP audience (McDavitt *et al.*, 2016). I provide a detailed reflection of my positionality in Chapter IV: Methods, Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity Statement

## **Important Concepts**

Essential concepts inherent to GEP and used throughout this thesis include the **policy cycle** model of policy studies, which describes a five-step process to policymaking: (1) Agenda setting, (2) Policy Formulation, (3) Decision-making, (4) Implementation, and (5) Evaluation. According to Cairney (2019) and Stone (2012), the policy cycle model describes how policies should be made instead of how they are *actually made*. This thesis is most concerned with the last stage of the process: evaluation.

Boaz *et al.* (2019) describe two types of policies governed by evidence-based policymaking: **capital-P and small-p policies**. Capital-P policies include the laws, agendas, and regulations set out by government decision-makers to restrict the public. Small-p policies are less institutionalized guidelines, best practices, or recommendations, “policies that reinterpret central diktats and set a context for local work” (Boaz *et al.*, 2019, p.11). Examples of capital-P policies in GEP include international education agendas, like the SDGs (UN General Assembly, 2015) or Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015a). Regional frameworks, guidelines, and policy recommendations dictating national education policy requirements may fall under capital-P or small-p policy definitions.

**Coloniality**, a central concept throughout this thesis, refers to the default to Western institutions and ideas present in development agendas and aid practices, which might be brought to light by historicizing their origins, epistemologies, and practices (Lundgren and Peacock, 2010). By incorporating typically

othered, and therefore excluded, perspectives of knowledge and experience (Teasdale and Ma Rhea, 2000) and giving attention to colonized power relationships (Shahjahan, 2011), research makes explicit the Western ideas that are institutionalized as universal or inevitable (Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2017), and counter coloniality.

**Neoliberalism**, also described as neoliberal and market-oriented solutions, is a concept that uses economic tenets to solve social problems (Keynes, 2009; Jones, 2012; Friedman, Friedman and Applebaum, 2020). In education, solutions like privatization, school vouchers, school choice, and decentralization, to name a few, are neoliberal concepts that gained traction in the early 2000s (Apple, 2001; Brathwaite, 2016; Ravitch, 2016). The concept is the dominant paradigm in policy studies aligned with the Rational Actor Model. Neoliberalism, especially the economic rationale promoting free-market capitalism and opening borders (physical and metaphorical), is intertwined with colonialism and coloniality in the Global South (Funie, 2015; Cornelissen, 2020).

**Evidence-based approaches** are used in this thesis to describe the process of using data to inform policymaking and establish best practices in the broadest sense. The term closely relates to evidence-informed policymaking (Boaz *et al.*, 2019). While EBA captures a process, the terms evidence-based and data-informed are used synonymously throughout the literatures included in this thesis. The term is often employed in multiple disciplines as a methodology, like evidence-based policymaking and evidence-based medicine (EBM); I detail two examples of this terminology-in-use in Chapter III: Literature Review in the History of Evidence-Based Approaches section.

## Summary

This thesis focuses on evaluation and evidence-based policymaking in the education development sector. It fills a gap in education policy research, where authors have made considerable strides in unraveling the policy development of the Global North (Forrester and Garratt, 2016), but complexity makes describing international decisionmaking and its influences on national decisionmaking difficult. Chapter II: Historical Analysis of the Caribbean Education Policy Space presents a historical perspective locating the Education 2030 policy framework within the Caribbean education policy landscape. Chapter III: Literature Review provides a detailed look at GEP, including the plight of the M&E specialist and evidence-based policy and practices in the field.

Chapter IV: Methodology details this thesis' research design and methodology. Chapter V: Thematic Analysis Findings presents the findings of a CPA on thirty-one documents and outlines three paradoxes present in the literature through a wave metaphor. Chapter IV: Discussion deliberates on the connection of these paradoxes to broader literature and makes recommendations for further research in the GEP field.

## Chapter II: Historical Analysis of the Caribbean Education Policy Space

This chapter contextualizes the Caribbean Education Policy Space, including Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I have intentionally organized this chapter from the micro to macro perspective to center the expertise and policies of the nation-states before describing the regional and international policies that influence them (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). I intend to center the Caribbean voices and perspectives and frame the policy space through this structure. Caribbean histories and voices are typically left out of analyses of the global education policy space, and doing so exemplifies how we can bring those voices and experiences to the forefront of our evaluations.

Young and Reynolds (2017) argue that contextualizing education policies within a socio-historical frame is an essential element of CPA to ground the policy in a specific time and place and make visible the often-hidden assumptions of the researcher. However, such a presentation of “historical facts” cannot be done apolitically or in a value-neutral way (Rizvi, 2007). By presenting a historical perspective of the Caribbean Educational Policy Space (t. d. Jules, 2015a), I am aware that the picture I paint about the landscape is not representative of the whole; it makes value claims on knowledge and experience based on what is included (Rizvi, 2007) and is left out (Roy, 2004). However, I hope that by taking a micro-perspective by framing the policy analysis first through the national perspective and including typically excluded voices and perspectives, I will give a deeper decolonial context to the GEP landscape in the SIDS.

Stone (2020a) claims that metaphors are powerful tools for understanding the evidence in political and policymaking environments. Therefore, influenced by the Multiple Streams theories of Kingdon (1995), where three policy streams converge (i.e., political, policy, and solution), I use an ocean and its waves to describe the EC SIDS education environment. The swell (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2023) or wave build-up represents a policy movement building on an opportune policy window in the policy landscape. During times of momentum, like a wave swell, policy change becomes inevitable (Kingdon, 1995). Alternatively, while jetties may be put in place to limit the damage waves cause, like attempts by IOs to establish institutions (both physical and ideational) to shape the policy landscape, waves endure. They can slowly erode the coastline (or policyscape) or come with the support of the entire policy system and swell to a tsunami striking a devastating blow to the current policy environment.

The first section examines the two Eastern Caribbean SIDS education policy systems and briefly describes the policies selected for the CPA. Contextualization of the regional influences follows, or what

Mettler (2016) calls a polycscape. A section is devoted to looking at the information presented in this chapter through a decolonial lens. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the historical presentation adopting the imagery of the wave. This imagery contributes to the GEP field, which struggles to define the complex landscape but also speaks to the uniqueness of the SIDS experience in the global education landscape.

### **Eastern Caribbean SIDS - Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) are former British colonies, members of the British Commonwealth states, with political and education systems based on the Westminster model (Girvan, 2015). Having gained their independence in the 1970s and 1980s, they are fledgling democracies with colonial histories that have impacted their development trajectories (Winn, 1999). I selected these EC states for the CPA as (1) they are SIDS and therefore are given preferential status in Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015a), (2) they are neighbors with similar demographic and economic situations (World Bank, 2014), and (3) they are both Anglophone countries belonging to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States committed to harmonizing their education policies (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2016). While their similarities facilitate their comparison, their unique development histories, including their political trajectories and experience with colonization, provide an opportunity to compare regional and international influences on like-states.

#### ***Grenada***

Grenada, originally named Camajuya by the Indigenous peoples of the Arawak and Camerhogne and Kalinago (Lamarque, de Arellano and de Arellano, 2019), often called the Isle of Spice, is in the West Indies at the southern point of the Lesser Antilles Island chain. The EC SIDS is a tri-island country comprised of mainland Grenada and islands Carriacou and Petite Martinique, residing approximately 100 miles east of Venezuela (Knight, 2014; Britter, 2023). The country was first settled around the 4<sup>th</sup> century by the Indigenous Arawak tribe and later by the Caribs, who migrated from the Orinoco Valley in South America (Britter, 2023).

For over 1,000 years, the Indigenous population lived on the islands until European settlers attempted to take their land in the early 1600s. While the Indigenous tribes successfully fended off settlement for many years, French colonists eventually took the islands by force in 1649 and systematically

exterminated the Indigenous population (Martin, 2013). Over the next hundred years, the French and British fought over the fertile land, and finally, in 1783, with the Treaty of Paris, the French ceded the islands to the British (Kingdom of Great Britain, Kingdom of France and Spanish Empire, 1763; Britter, 2023). During British colonization, enslaved Africans were brought over to work sugar plantations and would remain under British subjugation until 1833, when slavery fell out of favor in Britain. Ultimately, the country gained independence from British colonization in 1974, being the first Eastern Caribbean nation-state to do so, and it remains part of the British Commonwealth of Nations today.

Grenada is one of three EC SIDS that had a socialist movement, leading to Prime Minister Maurice Bishop and the Marxist-Leninist New Jewel Movement Party deposing Prime Minister Eric Gairy in 1979. After gaining power, Prime Minister Bishop and the New Jewel Movement froze the constitution, promising to rebuild the economy, increase worker and women's rights, and institute free public healthcare and mass education initiatives (Bell, 2008; t. d. Jules, 2015a; 2015b). Dr. Euclid A. Rose, a Caribbean national, described the promotion of mass education to Grenadians as revitalizing, like bringing "the masses from ignorance and a sense of cultural inferiority" (Rose, 2002, as cited in t. d. Jules, 2015b, p. 649). Rose implies that education can free the masses from poverty, but that jubilation would not last long.

After initiating a project to increase tourism and modernize the airport with support from Cuba, political turmoil led to a military coup, public demonstrations, and the execution of Prime Minister Bishop. Shortly after that, the OECS and Jamaica requested intervention by the United States to bring calm to the region. However, without consulting Britain (Grenada was part of the Commonwealth at the time), the U.S. led a highly criticized three-day military invasion into the island (Bell, 2008), causing over a hundred deaths, including twenty-four civilians and injuring more than a thousand. After the U.S. military forcibly removed the Grenadian military from power, British representatives took power until the following year, when the country held elections.

In 2021, the World Bank estimated Grenada's population to be approximately 124,000, of which 91% are Black (World Bank, 2023), coming from former enslaved Africans (Rogoziński, 1994). The other 9% comprises a mix of East Indians, Indigenous peoples (i.e., Arawak and other tribes from the Orinoco Valley), and former British and French settlers (Britter, 2023). Grenada is part of the Global South even though it is an upper-middle-income country (Knight *et al.*, 2021). Lastly, English continues to be the

national language of the tri-island nation-state; However, most consider Patois their native or first language (Britter, 2023).

As a relatively young state celebrating its 50th anniversary of independence in 2024, Grenada's political and development trajectory describes tumultuous beginnings, overcoming revolutions, a military coup, and a US-led military invasion (Rogoziniński, 1994). However, the country is considered a stable democracy in the EC region today.

**Education System in Grenada.** While the country's political unrest caused issues during their liberation, the education system already had a strong beginning, developed during British colonization well before independence (Bacchus, 2006b; 2006a). Miller (2000) suggests that universal primary and secondary education opportunities were available to Grenada's citizens before the 1990s, although the 2002 Education Act formally established the system in its current form (UNESCO, 2023). Additionally, universal secondary education was institutionalized in 2012, in compliance with the regional policy guidance 2012-2021 OECS Education Strategy (Federman, 2017). Since the 2020s, the country has had compulsory education for the primary and secondary years (i.e., 5 to 16 years), which boasts a 94% graduation rate across the islands (Knight, 2014), and universal education opportunities for the pre-primary years (i.e., 3 to 5-year-olds). Additionally, in the last two decades, the country has increased opportunities for Technical and Vocational Education Training institutes and placements in their three tertiary institutions, including colleges and universities (Lewis, Benoit and Lewis, 2020).

Knight *et al.* (2021) also highlight Grenada's Ministry of Education as the country's premier educational policymaking and administrative authority. In addition to the Ministry Officials, Grenada's Ministry of Education employs a Chief of Education Officer who supervises education programming completed by non-state actors in the country (UNESCO, 2021). The country is not free of international or regional influence, however. Knight (2014) suggests that policies like the OECS Education Reform Strategy and the Education 2030 framework influence modern policy action in Grenada.

Another guiding motivator of investment in education in the SIDS, Knight (2014) contends, is that investments in education will translate to sustainable economic and social development for the country. Relatedly, Dr. Didacus Jules (2010), the current Director of the OECS, former educator, and Registrar of the region's educational exam council, employs another neoliberal concept - the rate of return. Jules (2008) argues the return on educational investments is low comparing the cost of educational programs to their

lackluster performance across OECS countries. The evidence, he argues, suggests investment has outpaced achievement (Jules 2008). Among other problematic connections between education and labor market economics, if investment is not necessarily connected to economic advancement, one must call into question the veracity of the neoliberal policy advisors' recommendations or, even more so, the connection of educational investment to market-related outcomes.

There is minimal literature questioning the continued existence of the Westminster education model and English as the primary language of Grenada's education landscape. With their political history, one would expect that a Caribbean or Grenadian system would have been developed. Perhaps the continued connection to the Commonwealth or the development assistance received makes a decolonial education improbable. While there is little research questioning this acceptance, primarily through the GEP lens, research that problematizes the continued support of the model, or rather lack of rejection of Westminster, is typically conducted on the regional level (discussed later in Caribbean Education Policy Space).

**Grenadian Education Policies.** The two Grenadian policies included in the CPA represent a limited view of Grenadian's education policy space. They include Grenada's National Sustainable Development Plan 2020–2035 (NSDP) (Government of Grenada, 2019) and Youth Policy 2003 (Government of Grenada, 2003). I selected these two policies due to the absence of a National Education Plan (Government of Grenada, 2019). The NSDP is the overarching education policy for Grenada and was selected because the UN requires each member state receiving aid to produce a National Development Plan aligned with regional and international policy agendas and priorities (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002). In addition, the plan details evaluation practices around development, providing essential information for the analysis.

For example, Grenada's NSDP describes monitoring and evaluation as an effort that should be participatory and includes multiple stakeholder groups, including the diaspora, to generate buy-in, create accountability structures, and share collective responsibility. Additionally, stakeholder engagement in the NSDP includes consultation, collaboration, buy-in, and ownership as essential for success (Government of Grenada, 2019). In addition, by establishing a participatory results culture, the government aims to establish data information systems that lead to "evidence-based policy formation and evaluation" (Government of Grenada, 2019, p. 126). Finally, through financially and technically supportive partnerships with international development partners, the Government of Grenada aims to build local capacity and institutions for evidence-based approaches in policy and practice. In sum, the NSDP promotes an evidence-based or

results-oriented policy landscape that engages multiple stakeholder groups on the bedrock of collaborative, co-produced research whose results are accessible to all (particularly to the target beneficiaries). The capital-P policy asks IOs to lead this effort and be guided by local knowledge and expertise.

The second policy examined in this thesis is Grenada's Youth Policy 2003, which considers the importance of youth stakeholder engagement. The document did not mention the monitoring, evaluation, or evidence-based approaches it wished to see to assess investments in youth development by the Government of Grenada. While the policy did not refer to evaluation, the youth council did request the government to partner with IOs to support the youth council's agenda and asks to be considered an integral partner in policy creation that impacts the country's youth.

By including both policy documents, I am intentionally centering the national perspective in my dataset. While our goal is not to answer why a specific policy choice was made, by including these voices, I intend to consider whether the international education prescriptions for evaluation and evaluators overshadow the national recommendations or if they are the same.

### ***Saint Vincent and the Grenadines***

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, known initially as Hariouna (Lamarche, de Arellano and de Arellano, 2019; Olton, 2020), is geographically north of Grenada among the southern Lesser Antilles Islands, just off the eastern coast of South America. The Arawak initially settled the islands, followed by Ciboney and Carib Indigenous peoples, who migrated from the Orinoco Valley in South America (Niddrie, Tolson and Fraser, 2023). Saint Vincent's topography, home to the La Soufriere volcano and thick jungles, has been credited with Indigenous peoples' survival, as the mountains and jungles made it easier for Indigenous Kalinago Garifuna to defend against colonists (Olton, 2020). While European settlers colonized many Caribbean islands, the Garifuna could stave off enslavement and complete territorial colonization by Europeans through the 18<sup>th</sup> century. While the British and French fought over the main port in Kingstown, the First Carib War (1772–1773) prevented both countries' settlers in that region from expanding across the island nation. After the Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1787, British interest in gaining a foothold in the region was renewed, and the Second Carib War (1795-1796) broke out (Niddrie, Tolson and Fraser, 2023) between the Indigenous population and the British settlers.

The disputed lineage of the SVG peoples is essential to their oral histories, as it was a primary contention between the locals and the settlers. The Indigenous Kalinago Garifuna people of mixed Indigenous and African ancestry claimed they had settled on the islands before European settlers attempted to colonize them (Olton, 2020). The British settlers, however, claimed that the Garifuna people, having African features, must have escaped passing ships with enslaved populations and, therefore, had no claims to the island (Olton, 2020). After winning the Second Carib War, the British relocated the Indigenous Garifuna outside SVG for fear of revolts and faltering British support for enslavement in the Caribbean colonies (Niddrie, Tolson and Fraser, 2023). However, the British relocation practices led to thousands of Garifuna deaths on Balliceaux Island, described as a “scene of a genocide orchestrated by the British colonial authorities on the Garifuna” (Finneran and Welch, 2020, p. 1). After recognizing the harm the troops were causing, the British settlers relocated the surviving Indigenous peoples to Roatan, an island off the coast of Honduras. Current estimates put the Garifuna population in Honduras at 300,000 (Lawlor and Calí Tzay, 2021), with a worldwide population between 400,000 and 600,000 (Agudelo, 2012).

After almost two centuries of colonization, St Vincent and the Grenadines was the last of the Lesser Antilles to gain independence from British rule in 1979. The country remains part of the British Commonwealth of Nations today. Like Grenada, the country’s population is primarily Black, with minority populations of East Indians and other ethnicities. Also, linguistically, English is accepted as the national language. However, most consider Kalinago their native or first language (Niddrie, Tolson and Fraser, 2023).

While the topography of St. Vincent gave its Indigenous population a reprieve from colonization for a fleeting time, it has also been a force of mass destruction and a hurdle to the country’s development. In the early 1800s and 1900s, La Soufriere eruptions destroyed much of the island and killed many inhabitants. The first eruption that did not cause a single death occurred in 1970. In 2021, La Soufriere erupted amid the COVID-19 pandemic, causing US\$275 million in damage, displacing 20,000 people, and putting 33,000 children out of school for several months (Trebucq, 2021). In addition to volcanic eruptions, St. Vincent and the Grenadines lie directly in the path of the Eastern Trade winds, where tropical storms and hurricanes batter the country, causing increasing financial and environmental damage with estimated little reprieve in the near future (Niddrie, Tolson and Fraser, 2023).

**Education System in SVG.** Comparable to other EC countries' experience, SVG had well-established education systems from British colonization by the time the Millennium Development Goals were set in 1990 (Leacock, 2009). By the 1990s, SVG experienced an "education revolution" (Marks, 2009, p. 57) with increased investment in primary and secondary education and advanced as the other low and middle-income developing countries' education systems.

Marks (2009) contends that with the support of OECS, a regional organization, and the Canadian International Development Agency, an international governmental organization, the country worked towards educational goals influenced by regional and international policies. Leacock (2009, p. 21) argues that the international influence in SVG education policy development is so strong they cannot escape its cries, "the quest for USE [universal secondary education] is usually accompanied by the cry of 'education for all'." Education for All was the first international education policy adopted by the global education community in 1990, described in the SDG 4 and Education 2030.

Jules' (2008) declaration that educational investments have not displayed the expected economic boons also refers to SVG's education system. While the country continues to invest in its education infrastructure and increase academic performance, these efforts have translated to minor economic gains, calling into question the claim that education alone can be a steppingstone out of poverty.

A country with an immensely proud heritage, where the diaspora is known for returning home each year to honor those who died at Balliceaux (Searchlight, 2013), one must question why they continue implementing the Westminster model with English as the primary language, similar to Grenadians. Perhaps it is the continued financial support the international community offers through education aid or the continued connection to the former colonizers through the Commonwealth. This thesis continues to describe the landscape, particularly the other actors, institutions, and ideas contributing to coloniality within this region.

**SVG Education Policies.** The two policies selected for the CPA for SVG were the National Economic and Social Development Plan 2013–2025 (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2013) and SVG's Education Sector Development Plan 2014–2019 (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2014). The Education Sector Plan guides the country's education system and signals priorities to IOs. The sector plan has many of the same foci as the NSDP of Grenada: engaging stakeholders, gaining financial and

technical support from international development actors, and using monitoring and evaluation as a management tool, often for accountability.

While SVG has a national education policy, I included the National Development Plan for SVG to ensure comparability with the policies selected for Grenada. SVG's National Economic and Social Development Plan has been included as part of the resolution for every country to create a National Strategic Development Plan (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002), focusing on discourse on evaluation and education.

### ***Summary of EC SIDS***

Grenada and SVG have distinct development histories, especially considering their cultural identities, colonial histories, and post-independence experiences. However, their educational policies, evidence-based approaches to policy and practice, and evaluation are strikingly similar. In the next section, this thesis delves into the regional historicization and policyscape that make that similarity possible.

### **Caribbean Education Policy Space**

As part of the historical analysis of the EC SIDS countries, it is essential to understand the regional impact other nations might have had on their education policies and systems' development trajectory. The striking similarities of SVG and Grenada's education systems, with their distinct histories, are examples of this importance. By examining policy actors and influences in the Caribbean region, especially for the countries that are part of the regional organizations Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), we see regional influences profoundly impact the nation-states and their education systems. Another reason for adding the regional layer to this historical contextualization is that SIDS typically are under-researched. Finding information about the countries through the regional lens was much easier than identifying verifiable resources about the individual nation-states. This section first examines the CEPS, investigates the policy actors in that arena, and provides a glimpse into the regional policies included in the CPA of Chapter V.

### ***Regional CEPS***

We Caribbean people are a remarkable people. We are African without tribes, European without class; Indian without caste and Chinese without dynasty (Jules, 2009).

Jules (2010, p. 7) describes the Caribbean's education system evolution as a modernization project through "the inherited educational paradigm." During enslavement, education was reserved primarily for the 'planter

class,' with limited opportunities for schooling opening through church and religious proselytization (Jules, 2008). He continues that universal suffrage brought accessible education for EC residents. However, post-emancipation marked the period of national development for the postcolonial state, where mass education could spread across the island states,

a more limited provision of secondary education was to create the managerial strata required for public and private institutional evolution while every limited access to tertiary education would contribute to the professional and intellectual capacity of the emergent nation (Jules, 2008, p. 205).

Dr. Jules, Registrar of the CXC at the time, envisioned that with each level of education provision, EC SIDS residents would be able to reach a new pinnacle of economic advancement. For example, he argued that primary education leads to a general worker class, secondary education provides a service economy, and with mass tertiary education, ECs would reach a knowledge economy (Jules, 2008). However, though post-independence saw EC SIDS highly investing in their education systems through grants and international loans (Miller, 2000) and civil society buy-in, it was without much economic benefit (Jules, 2008).

Immediately after independence marked an economically volatile time in the EC region and for developing nations across the globe (i.e., the Cold War and increased Soviet interest in the Caribbean and favoritism in international markets for prior-Commonwealth products had harmful effects on EC economies). The most pressing issue for the EC was the Structural Adjustment Programs or tied-aid movement that devastated local economies in the name of neoliberalism pushed by the International Financial Institutes (IFIs, i.e., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) (Veltmeyer, 1993; Agarwal and Dipankar, 1999; John, 2021). Umayahara (2006) refers to this development period as the “lost decade,” as the restrictions placed on aid-receiving countries by the IFIs directly correlated to increasing debts and negative investments in education, not the booming economic benefits projected by Western policy advisors. The failures of SAPs led to a halt in the educational expansionism that took place in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region in the 1960s and 1970s (Umayahara, 2006).

According to t. d. jules (2015a), CARICOM countries recognized the failure of the SAP development efforts and their indirect detrimental effect on educational efforts in the Nassau Understanding policy document. CARICOM then decided to take control of the policy formulation within their region, especially around education, setting benchmarks, regional targets, and indicators into a single substantive framework. Adopting a protectionist and regionally collaborative approach (Chang, 2008), CARICOM

member-states focused on coordination and collaboration across all functional areas and solidified the Caribbean into a single policy space or CEPS.

As the EC SIDS achieved universal primary education in the 1990s, their focus from the 2000s onwards has been higher levels of education, harmonizing the education systems of the OECS countries, improving teacher quality, and building sub-regional best practices through the dissemination of lessons learned, among other academic goals (Miller, 2000). However, challenges remained. For example, as international agendas were created, like Education for All, the focus remained on universal primary education, and support for financing for universal secondary or tertiary education remained low (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000; Miller, 2000; Pedro, 2021).

Additionally, Jules (2010) suggested that the EC models of testing and assessment evolved from former colonial systems that tracked and sorted students, which would not be conducive to bringing nation-states to the next level of economic advancement. He maintains that those exogenous forces thwart the modernization of the CEPS, including IOs and neoliberal conceptions pushed through development efforts, trapping Eastern Caribbean countries in a post-colonial inherited education paradigm. He describes a state of coloniality, whether explicitly calling it such.

The shadow of globalization is as long as its grip is strong and it carries within it the potential-if not the intention-by the powerful, to make client-states of the weak and vulnerable, opening them up as markets; assuming once again control factors of production; and reducing them to a state of dependency that compromises their autonomy (Jules, 2020, p. 2).

Jules' response to this external force is a counter-hegemonic call towards harmonization, collaboration, and non-competition. He laments, "we fight harder against each other than against the [IOs and their agendas] that conspire to keep us subjugated" (Jules, 2020, p. 2). Through IOs' influence, primarily through international agendas and policy frameworks like EFA, the international GEP environment has evolved into an institution. The institution has its ideologies, agendas, and means, where it can act contrary to the goals of harmonization and local approaches, which the Eastern Caribbean countries seek to implement.

When EFA, however, becomes a hegemonic construct that constitutes the measure of all educational advancement in developing countries and on the basis of which international aid and lending to education will be prioritized, the initiative becomes a fetter to those countries that have gone beyond the elemental prescriptions of the EFA (Jules, 2008, p. 206).

Ultimately, international forces, by his definition, are "an expression of globalization in education" (Jules, 2010, p. 4) and must be controlled lest their agendas overtake the will of the Caribbean peoples.

agenda for education is established - *not by endogenous imperatives emanating from the developmental direction of small states - but by the paradigms promoted by the multilateral educational and financial institutions* (such as UNESCO, highly recognised western universities, and the World Bank). By virtue of the considerable financial and intellectual capital that they wield, this network is able to determine the trends and the policies that are considered to be acceptable in any given period. *They can exercise undue hegemony on national development plans in education* (Jules, 2008, p. 206, my emphasis).

While not calling out IOs as active participants in coloniality, as Jules implies, Dr. Miller (2000), another established EC policy actor, highlights IOs' agendas as disrupting forces that harm localizing approaches. Examples of the discord between the CEPS and international agendas include the Caribbean SIDS' request at Jomtien for the framework's goals to be set at secondary education, while the international community focused on the primary levels. Jules (2008, p. 206) asserts that the international community's focus on primary rather than secondary education harmed EC SIDS' chances of receiving multi-lateral aid and "undermine[d] the capacity of small states to sustain their educational trajectory."

While the EC SIDS were able to secure bilateral financial support for their education systems through the Canadian government, the requirement to align their priorities with the international agendas and organizations was clear. Jules (2008, p. 4) described the Caribbean frustration with the process as "the essence of the internationalization process is that it leaves little room for small states, in particular, to fashion an educational paradigm that is significantly divergent from the dominant global one."

Since adopting EFA, EC SIDS have aimed to improve their livelihood by investing in education. Their policy frameworks recognized the importance of evidence-based approaches to education. They engaged in outside technical and financial support to achieve their goals (Miller, 2000). However, financial and technical support always came with donors' agendas and expectations (Miller, 2000; Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000) and were typically only short-term solutions based on neoliberal paradigms (Jules, 2010). The World Bank, UNESCO, and other donor agencies, Jules (2010) argues, established themselves as financial and intellectual industrial complexes as they leveraged international agendas and financial support to push their preferred reforms across the EC between 1990 and 2010.

Contrary to the strength of the IFIs and their GEP frameworks, the EC SIDS region unified to harmonize their economic and education policies into a comprehensive policyscape against those claiming to know better (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000). The regional organizations came together to conduct a participatory multi-stakeholder research, including community surveys, engaged teacher working groups,

and community and parent/teacher associations; no other countries or regional groups approached EFA implementation similarly (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000). However, the approach has not been without its complications. The following subsection discussed the EC regional policy actors essential to the field.

### ***Regional Policy Actors***

CEPS regional policy actors include the institutions formed post-independence and engaged in the region's policy creation, recommendation, and evaluation efforts. Caserta (2020) argues that the dominant policy actors in CEPS fill the vacuum left by British rule post-independence to establish new institutions and provide opportunities for collaboration. This section focuses on those institutions that filled that void. They include CARICOM and OECS. A discussion on the rationale for establishing similar systems to the former colonizer is conducted in Decolonial Lenses in GEP later in this chapter.

While some policy actors and nation-states rejected Caribbean integration (Archibald, 1962; Will, 1991), the wave of independence that passed through the EC SIDS in the late 1970s and 1980s led to the newly formed Anglophone Caribbean states signed the Treaty of Basseterre and established an economic union to promote unity, cooperation, and solidarity among its members (Nassar, 2013). Institutions were formed that mimicked the British systems that were removed during independence, including a Caribbean Free Trade Association, offering preferential trade agreements to member states, which has now evolved into CARICOM. The EC has a joint judicial body that ensures collaboration between EC countries, a common currency, a joint military force, and a harmonization approach to policy development (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000). Another example of an organization that was established to fill a colonial void was the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

**Caribbean Community and Common Market.** CARICOM is an inter-governmental organization established in 1973 through the Treaty of Chaguaramas and revised in 2002 to establish a single market and economy between its member states (Caribbean Community Secretariat, 2021).<sup>2</sup> The organization has fifteen member-states and five associate members, which include all Caribbean islands from the Bahamas to Suriname. CARICOM's original purpose was to band together the Anglophone countries of the Caribbean towards economic collaboration, policy learning and harmonization to establish an essential framework for the sub-region's development (Miller, 2000). Policy learning, or convergence (Forrester and Garratt, 2016),

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<sup>2</sup> CARICOM and OECS are run by ministry representatives and therefore are not IOs by this thesis' definition.

among the neighbor states dates to pre-emancipation, where “uncritical international transfer of best practices from elsewhere has been a defining feature of CARICOM members dating back to its colonial heritage of plantation economies” (t.d. Jules, 2015b, p. 311).

With CARICOM’s leadership and guidance from the Advisory Task Force on Education, CEPS developed a regionally harmonized education policy by 1993, which member states adopted into their national education policy systems (Caribbean Community Secretariat, 2021). Using Dale’s (1999) typology of gradualism, t.d. Jules (2015b) asserts that the harmonization of policies in CARICOM in the 1990s and 2000s led to a form of regional gradualism in the EC,

[CEPS] was discursively framed *historically* by the era of ideological pluralism, *legally* by the 2001 Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, substantively by the enactment of the Caribbean Single Market in 2006, and *functionally* through functional cooperation (t.d. Jules, 2015b, p. 307, emphasis in text).

The regional gradualism of CARICOM, through policy enactment, implementation, benchmarks, and outcomes, crystallized the efforts into educational gradualism (t.d. Jules, 2015b, p. 310). This crystallization is significant, as t.d. Jules (2015b, p. 1) argues it impacts “a zero-sum policy reform maneuver that facilitates the creation of predefined educational outcomes.” Through harmonizing education policies, the educational trajectories of CEPS nation-states become pre-determined by policy design and inherited colonial paradigms (Jules, 2008). As additional policy actors become important in CEPS, this interpretation of the region becomes more apparent and explanatory of the similarity between Grenada and SVG’s education systems despite their differences.

**Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.** The OECS was formed in 1981 with the Treaty of Basseterre to establish an inter-governmental organization to increase the quality of life for people in the EC sub-region. The organization’s mission is “to drive and support sustainable development through regional integration, collective action, and development cooperation” (Reliefweb, no date). OECS’s member states comprise the Anglophone EC States (i.e., Monserrat, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, SVG, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia).

Where CARICOM was the first inter-governmental organization in the region, the OECS became a driving force in defining a harmonized education policy for all member states (Knight, 2014). Knight (2014) identifies the Foundation for the Future: the OECS Education Reform Strategy as the start of harmonization practice in the OECS. Miller (2000, p. 36) suggests that through the organization’s aim to engage

stakeholders (i.e., policy actors and beneficiary groups) meaningfully through co-production and as tools for development rather than inputs and outputs, “many governments developed policies that encouraged partnerships, especially from the perspective of broadening financial support for basic education, particularly in circumstances where governments were hard pressed for funds for education.”

While the first regional policy, Foundation for the Future, was not established until 1992, the OECS countries had well-established universal primary education systems by 1990 when UNESCO hosted the Education for All conference. The global education environment requested policy recommendations to define funding opportunities for GEP and the foreseeable future. Miller (2000) argues that the OECS responded with a request for the agenda to focus on secondary education and the engagement of local stakeholders. The EC community suggested focusing on primary education would stall the region’s educational trajectories. However, the final wording of the EFA policy framework focused on primary education systems, and the OECS region’s positive trajectory would stall, and the nation-states would struggle to access funding until the subsequently updated education frameworks were released.

Knight *et al.* (2021, p. 17) argue that most EC SIDS educational policies are designed in collaboration with OECS and CARICOM advisors, “as a member state of both the OECS, and CARICOM, education sector plans and planning is often impacted and informed by the education goals and imperatives of both the OECS and CARICOM.” With education policies being developed and implemented in concert with other nation-states through regionally agreed best practices, Grenada and SVG seem to be in a unique education policy landscape. However, more research into the SIDS-protected class (UNESCO, 2015a) in GEP could prove this to be a widespread practice among smaller states. That topic is beyond the scope of this thesis but an interesting area of potential further scholarship to develop. This next section looks at the regional policies included in CPA in Chapter V.

### ***Regional Education Policies***

The three policies selected for the CPA representing the CEPS are the Caribbean Education Sector Strategy 2020 (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000), the Pillars for Partnership and Progress 2020 (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000), and the updated OECS 2012–2026 Education Sector Strategy (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2016). These three policies have all impacted the national development plans of the EC SIDS. They were all developed to connect regional priorities to international education agendas,

including the Education 2030 framework and the Sustainable Development Goals. While the Foundation for the Future is also an essential policy piece, it aligns with the Millennium Development Goals and is chronologically outside the scope of the CPA.

The Caribbean Education Sector Strategy defines goals for academic achievement and schooling as an approach to socializing and strengthening the collective culture of EC countries (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000). This policy guidance was the first regional push towards non-academic indicators of success and achievement in the region, defining the objective of creating an Ideal Caribbean Person through mass education practices. Additionally, the policy set forth an expectation that projects be appropriate for the location, long-term, aligned with national priorities, and based on prior experience. Successful M&E would gauge whether new programs met these goals: “Monitoring and evaluation of projects in partnership with clients and other partners will be essential to the realization of project objectives and long-term educational goals” (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000, p. 42).

The second policy, Pillars for Partnership and Progress (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000), was the second iteration of the Foundation for the Future (Miller *et al.*, 1990), both prepared by Dr. Errol Miller. The Pillars for Partnership and Progress made a vital contribution in moving CEPS towards evidence-based approaches by requiring a focus on research for informed decision-making, “involving the paradigm shift in the education to knowledge production and requiring applied research, flexibility in curriculum design, innovation in instructional delivery, multi and interdisciplinary approaches to learning” (Jules, 2008, p. 210). The final policy included, as representative of CEPS, is the OECS 2012–2026 Education Strategy (OECS, 2016). It is the current education policy framework guiding the EC SIDS in 2023.

All three policies aimed to limit the projectized nature of international support, or what Miller (2000) called “ad-hocracy.” The authors favored long-term solutions, where M&E teams evaluated and disseminated those findings for all ECs to learn from, a “planned long-term approach with the built-in capacity for research, evaluation of progress and the ability to make needed adjustments” (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000, p. 13).

### ***Summary of CEPS***

CEPS countries may have varied histories, but they have created a policyscape focusing on collective goals, harmonization, and learning. Their similarities may be due to harmonization or inherited

colonized paradigms; however, their differences might lie in what Forrester and Garratt (2016) suggest: the differences in how they decide rather than what they decide. With the creation of CARICOM and OECS, the regional organizations coordinate support and donations from IOs to not repeat the lessons learned during the SAP era, which I describe next.

### **The International Landscape from the Convention to Education 2030**

One must examine the international actors and policies framing the GEP landscape to contextualize Grenada, SVG, and CEPS further. This section examines the international development strategies and their respective education policy frameworks, including EFA, the Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, and Education 2030. Once the policies are situated, I offer a discussion on the global policy actors that play a role in shaping and funding education programs around the globe.

#### ***Education for All and Millennium Development Goals***

In 1990, in Jomtien, Thailand, international education policy actors met to discuss the state of global education and lay out goals to commit the world to providing education for all. The conference was called the World Conference on Education for All, and it culminated in a policy document all member states signed that became widely known as EFA (UN, 2023b). The decision to hold a world education conference arose from the movement for child rights with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1989). UNESCO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) emerged as the leading child development agencies with mandates to run global education programs in the Global South. Both organizations pushed their member states to commit to supporting universal primary education and “massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade” (United Nations Children's Fund, 2023), which they aimed to achieve by 2000. However, even more than that, the desire for a conference on the state of global education was welcomed by the collective need for educators and education experts to control the policies of international institutions promoted in developing states. Until 1990, most education aid was bilateral (between one nation-state and a donor), creating a vicious cycle of countries in need being guided by unregulated IFIs with untested ideas about the most effective educational interventions.

The objectives of EFA were (a) increasing net enrollment in primary schools, (b) identifying the total number of students completing all primary years, and (c) increasing literacy rates of both male and female populations of 15 to 24-year-olds (Bruns, Filmer and Patrinos, 2011). The EFA framework had three

iterations after the international community accepted the first global policy guiding education between 1990 and 2015. The international community, including Global South stakeholders, was included in developing each iteration through consultation and collaboration.

Responding to intense criticism by international education experts and developing countries like the ECs, the second round of EFA added “quality” as an essential element of education provision. Nevertheless, Knight (2014) points out that even in subsequent policy iterations, EFA left essential policy definitions like universal secondary education up to nation-states to define. While one would assume that universal means comprehensive or offered to all children of age, the language is intentionally left vague, making a comparison of countries that are allowed to self-report almost impossible and IO giving and program interventions unregulated.

The Millennium Development Goals envelopment of EFA language codified the education policy priorities. The MDGs were established in 2000 by the United Nations and its member states as the first unifying development agenda to focus on eradicating poverty through a coordinated international community effort (UN, 2015). It was also the first international agenda that put education at the forefront, declaring universal education an essential ingredient to a “developed” nation-state (UN, 2023b).

While most countries met the EFA goals with satisfactory progress, at the end of 2015, more than sixty million children in the Global South still did not attend or have access to primary school (UNESCO, 2021). In addition to failing to meet enrollment rates, critics of EFA argued that the indicators of success set up a self-fulfilling prophecy only to get children into school and did not motivate member countries to provide them with adequate schooling (i.e., qualified teachers, school supplies, safe school environments, among others) (Gershberg, Gonzalez and Meade, 2012). Therefore, the number of students enrolled in school may have increased exponentially, but that did not reflect similar learning opportunities for all those in attendance. This concern about quality education is repeated today, as 80% of the 617 million children attending primary school in developing countries did not meet primary year proficiency standards (UNESCO, 2018). By 2019, the GEM reported that EFA efforts from 2000 to 2015 successfully increased primary school enrollment, particularly for girls, yet had no noticeable increase in “quality” schooling based on all educational indicators (UNESCO, 2018).

More than US\$2 billion is spent annually on education aid in the Global South through multilateral aid, yet there are still over 60 million primary school-aged children out of school, and only 70% of children are developmentally on track (UNESCO, 2018).

An estimated 147 million children missed more than half of their in-person instruction over the past two years. As a result, this generation of children could lose a combined total of \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings (in current value) (United Nations, 2022, p. 34).

With the mounting evidence that education efforts are faltering, one must wonder where the evidence-informed policy and practice are helping this system. The following section examines the SDGs and Education 2030 as the newest policies shaping the GEP landscape.

### ***SDG 4 and Education 2030***

The international community established the Sustainable Development Goals when the MDGs ended. The SDGs aimed at achieving the MDG goals that were not accomplished in the first go-round by moving the goalposts to alleviate poverty but *also* reduce inequality, the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, and increase peace and justice globally (UN, 2023a, emphasis added to highlight the new elements of Education 2030). Education remained a top priority to the international community as the fourth SDG goal, “Goal 4: Quality Education” (SDG 4). SDG 4 also moved the educational goalposts from universal primary education to universal quality primary and secondary education. The policy guidance also included recommendations on increasing opportunities for all citizens’ early childhood education and tertiary education.

The Incheon Declaration and SDG 4 – Education 2030 Framework for Action, commonly called Education 2030, clarified the SDG-4 goals. The policy defines the global education priorities for member states, GEP policy actors, organizations, and funders. While Education 2030 is technically a small-p policy document, it functions as a capital-P policy as states seeking international funding must align their national education strategies or development priorities to it (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002).

Education 2030 promotes evidence-based approaches by increasing localized data collection, sharing, and management efforts, “We resolve to develop comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation systems in order to generate sound evidence for policy formulation and the management of education systems as well as to ensure accountability”(UNESCO, 2015a, p. 11). By developing national monitoring

and evaluation systems, the hope is that information will translate into real education progress through evidence-based policymaking.

Building on the lessons of EFA and the MDGs, states should invest in and scale up innovative, evidence-based and cost-effective approaches that enable all individuals to gain access to, participate in, learn through and complete a quality education, with a special focus on those who are the hardest to reach in all contexts (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 31).

To achieve the M&E goal of a “data revolution,” the Education 2030 framework recommended funding and support be offered to countries to build such systems “according to the countries’ needs and priorities” (UNESCO, 2015a, p.10). The language around building that data revolution recognizes that no one country can do it alone, and the Global South must receive support from outside entities to reach their goals.

As part of the World Education Forum convention, the framework recommends that UNESCO remain a primary partner in policy development, collect relevant country-specific data, and produce annual statistical reports. Additionally, Education 2030 recommends that the World Bank and its education arm, the Global Partnership for Education, continue to lead all global education programming and function as the funding arm, “recognizing the Global Partnership for Education as a multi-stakeholder financing platform for education to support the implementation of the agenda according to the needs and priorities of countries, we recommend that it be part of this future global coordination mechanism” (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 10).

This next section investigates those organizational policy actors in GEP, namely UNESCO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). I look at how their influence has led to the shape of the current GEP system and pay particular attention to the SAP period between 1980 and 1990, which led to the development of the EFA policy and a 180-degree turn away from bilateral financial support to multilateral support.

### ***Global Policy Actors and Coalitions***

A depiction of the GEP landscape would not be complete without discussing the organization leading the charge for education reform across the globe, UNESCO, and the IFIs funding a substantial portion of education programs. While UNICEF is also a prominent global policy actor, the organization primarily implements education programs, whereas UNESCO and the World Bank lead the policy development and decision-making in the GEP field.

**UNESCO.** UNESCO was one of the first UN sister agencies to be formed after World War II, specifically to restore education systems after the war (UNESCO, 2023). The organization was established

in 1945 and has since been a leader in the GEP landscape as the host of the World Education conferences where each global education agenda has been set (i.e., EFA and Education 2030). Additionally, the organization was instrumental in the passage of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which gave children rights that all but a handful of nation-states have adopted into their constitutions (UN General Assembly, 1966). Lastly, the organization hosts a statistical database in which nation-states self-report education statistics annually inform the Global Education Monitor report.

UNESCO does not complete global education programming; implementing agencies like UNICEF, who partner with local civil society organizations, turn policies into action. Instead, UNESCO focuses on supporting educational advancements and framing the agenda, policy problems, and issues facing GEP each year. Five UNESCO reports are included in the CPA of Chapter V to give context to the region and the environment around evaluation practice. These reports were commissioned and produced by UNESCO, including an evaluation to look critically at EFA's impacts in Latin America and the Caribbean (Miller *et al.*, 1990) and four others written by the Global Evaluation Monitor report team.

**World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education.** Self-described as the financial and technical implementer of every major area of development in the Global South (World Bank, 2023), the World Bank immensely influences UN and IO programming and government efforts in GEP. For example, over the last three years, the World Bank invested US\$3.8 billion in education-related programming around the globe, which includes “the development and implementation of education plans in developing countries and the dissemination of knowledge and best practices in education at the global and regional levels,” which includes programming for the new Education 2030 framework (World Bank, 2023).

The World Bank, sometimes called the Bank, established its education prowess through its Fast Track Initiative, which evolved into the Global Partnership for Education, and has since grown into the largest multi-stakeholder agency (Menashy, 2017) and funder of the global education sector (Global Partnership for Education, 2022). Since 2002, the organization has contributed to every significant international policy and continues to fund projects in the EC region through its Global Partnerships for Education or regional banks.

Global Partnerships for Education is also one of the leading promoters of evidence-based practices in GEP. For example, all projects or programs funded by Global Partnerships for Education must complete an impact assessment (Gertler *et al.*, 2016). Critics, like Klees (2012, p. 50), however, argue that the Bank's

focus on evidence-based approaches only applies to the evidence they believe aligns with their ideological perspectives, “the World Bank prides itself on being evidence- and research-based, but it is not. Its premises and conclusions are based on ideology, not evidence.” Klees contends that the World Bank promotes a neoliberal constitution to all its loan and grant beneficiaries, and because it has a monopoly in funding GEP programs, that ideology spreads rampant. As an organization that guides M&E practice in GEP, the Bank, Klees (2012, p.1) argues, makes its funding and requirements for reporting supreme: “With its periodic strategy reports and a virtual juggernaut of research done internal to the World Bank or financed by it, it decides on the global directions for education policy, backed by grant and loan money that ensures countries follow those directions.”

Additionally, Kempner and Jurema (2002) argue that the education programs funded by the World Bank are neither locally nor nationally specific and disregard each country’s knowledge and local experience. Harris, Jones and Adams (2016) indicate that the Bank's policy diffusion, or borrowing, effectively ignores cultural and contextual differences, all in the name of pursuing academic achievement and system performance. Furthermore, Rizvi (2007, p. 257) supports the conclusion that the Bank establishes coloniality “through global diffusion of Western ideas, thinking about education has become almost universal, dominated by a set of imperial assumptions concerning economic progress, with notions of human capital and development becoming part of a broader discourse of capitalist triumphalism.” The GEP landscape has established hegemonic institutions created by globalization and the spread of Western concepts and structures, which create coloniality in the Global South.

**SAPs and the International Monetary Fund.** While the World Bank and UNESCO are currently the leaders in GEP programming and policy, the International Monetary Fund and the SAPs of years past are essential parts of GEP history that cannot go unexamined. The IMF is an international financial institution that provides global grants and loans for education funding. The organization’s mission is to provide loans and grants to the Global South, indirectly influencing education policy and programming for its 189 member countries.

In the 1980s, the IMF and the World Bank set out to provide bilateral funding to the Global South through conditional aid packages called Structural Adjustment Programs, more infamously known as “tied-aid” (McAfee, 1991; Chabbott, 2007). SAP loans were often called tied-aid because of the conditions they placed on the loanee to secure the funding, often distinctly unrelated to the grant area. For example,

education aid often had to follow strict trade and economic liberalization procedures (i.e., adopt budget austerity rules, open trade barriers, and invest a more sizable portion of their GDP in education) to secure loan funds (Chang, 2008). The SAPs aimed to increase the loan recipient's country's fiscal stability, economic growth, and global competitiveness on top of achieving their intended purpose. The underlying theory was that by requiring the emerging economy to commit to Western neoliberal economic policies (i.e., lower trade barriers, increased exports, international financial investment, budget austerity, among others), the impacts of their investment would be exponential, leading to catch-up growth of the Global South to industrialized counterparts in the Global North (Chang, 2008). However, this growth did not come to fruition. Indeed, budget austerity and other neoliberalizing practices have been blamed for deflating levels of national expenditure on education (Rowden, 2011). For example, by 2011, more than 40% of developing countries had cut education spending due to the stringent loan repayment requirements set by the IMF (UNESCO, 2011).

SAPs are often criticized for enabling government corruption and mismanagement and causing high rates of indebtedness in developing economies (Fowler, 2015). Weisbrot (2001, p. 3) describes the IMF and the Bank's practices at that time as a form of creditor's cartel, where their policies brought either deleterious or minor change to the countries who needed it most, "The power of the IMF to decide the most important macroeconomic policies for dozens of countries is not written in its charter or anywhere else. It results from an informal arrangement between the IMF, the Bank, the G-7 governments, and other creditors, which puts the IMF at the head of creditors' cartel."

While the international GEP landscape has moved from bilateral loans into a multi-stakeholder environment, conditional loan arrangements remain prevalent. Considering the World Bank has a monopoly over GEP grants, as do the IMF, and the regional Banks over development loans, these IOs' authority to influence education systems in the Global South is akin to what Nye (1990) calls soft power. The IFIs can establish rules and policy trajectories that countries desperate for financial support have no way of rejecting as they have little other means to achieve their educational goals.

Moreover, the financial institutions are often criticized as serving the powerful interests of the Global North, citing the organizations' boards comprised of 50% or more representatives from G-7 countries or residents of the Global North. The managing directors have also always been Western citizens (Rowden, 2011).

As long as the IMF remains the major enforcer of policies that block meaningful public investment in education systems or the hiring of the necessary numbers of well trained and well paid teachers and administrators, then education advocates can be counted on to continue criticizing the IMF for undermining domestic capacities for education financing (Rowden, 2011, p. 15).

In the end, Rowden (2011) discusses the criticism of the IFIs and their conditional programming as ongoing until their practices change. This next section takes up the decolonial lens from a historical perspective.

### **Decolonial Lenses in GEP**

This thesis employs a coloniality lens and decolonization as a theoretical frame. While I cannot leave behind my Western paradigmatic perspective, to do this faithfully, I aim to shine a light on that paradigm to highlight areas where my implied assumptions become explicit, and coloniality is exposed. In international development and GEP, researchers discuss concepts like decolonization and coloniality within globalization and neoliberalism frames. However, Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 36) say, “decolonization is not an ‘and’. It is an elsewhere,” meaning the road to decolonization cannot exist within the current frame of our modern world where coloniality persists; a decolonial frame must be established where power, knowledge and being are relinquished back to the Indigenous or native population. Therefore, my most significant contribution to the field is by including historical analysis and highlighting often ignored layers within that field (i.e., national and regional perspectives).

In GEP, it is not enough for the World Bank to fund programs it believes will further educational achievement, which Kempner and Jurema (2002) suggest are often prescriptive approaches that paint all education systems with a single brushstroke. The local population must envision, implement, and own education systems. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) asked post-colonial African nation-states whether there is a myth of decolonization and an illusion of freedom. For EC SIDS, the question is whether the education policy of nation-states is free to develop their frame of reference (centered on their own experiences and ways of knowing) or whether GEP prescriptions will force them to adopt the Western educational perspective. If they could build their education systems and inform their policy choices with locally produced evidence, does coloniality exist, or is it a by-product of allowing international education aid? As Jules (2010) points out, EC SIDS struggles with reforming the inherited colonial realities that is their education system.

From a decolonial perspective, one must ask why a former colonized state would continue to perpetuate the education system installed by its colonizers. The better question is, however, how could they not? IFIs and international institutions monopolize the GEP donor and policymaking landscape. These institutions operate under a neo-liberalization principle, whether intentionally or not. They continue perpetuating coloniality by not using locally developed solutions, co-produced and participatory research designs, and center the donor rather than the target beneficiary group in everything they do. The system does not allow EC SIDS to develop its forms of education. To decolonize, they would have to exit the international development funding paradigm, but, like Tuck and Yang (2012) elsewhere, in EC SIDS, there is no “elsewhere.” The GEP landscape has left them no other option.

Another point of contention between the modernity position and a decolonial frame is that neoliberalism’s intractability makes it an institution so deeply entrenched that even those wishing to critique it have a challenging time doing so without invoking rationality. Most of the critiques presented in the last section (e.g., improvement to the student’s proficiency or enrollment has stagnated) continue to be grounded in concepts of rationality and objective “truths.”

With this example, we can see the irony in engaging in rationality conversations, as with the decolonial perspective, I ought to step away from modernity into a non-coloniality perspective. However, as Audre Lorde (2007, p. 110) once said, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” when applied to decolonial work, suggests that one cannot employ a decolonial standpoint while they are situated in a Western hegemonic rationality perspective. Decolonial perspectives require a new standpoint, which Western-educated scholars struggle to achieve, but must attempt to deploy and “dismantle” the development house built on Western hegemonic development frames.

### **Summary of the Historical Analysis**

Grenada and SVG were ready for investments in universal secondary education before the Education for All policy was passed in the 1990s. As they waited for the international community to catch up to their level of development, they struggled against tied-aid with austerity requirements and irrelevant international education agendas that limited their access to funds and had to seek bilateral support to continue their educational trajectories. The countries had to ride the waves of what the international community and their funding organizations offered. The EC SIDS instead began to work together, prioritizing collaboration and

policy harmonization of their education policies and uniting their voices through CARICOM and OECS. Through their uniting, they became a more significant wave that the international community could no longer ignore. By Education 2030, SIDS gained preferential treatment, with the GEP environment acknowledging their unique development trajectories. It is too early to know whether this has translated into tangible adjustment to policy for the countries and what programs are developed and funded, but we can say there is no fundamental shift in how we approach the evaluation around GEP for these areas.

Within this metaphor, evaluators exist in all parts of the wave as informers to policymakers at the crest of the wave and in the undercurrent, learning from the successes and failures and bringing that back to be part of the swell for future change. However, at the same time, the international, regional, financial, and managerial forces of GEP can overwhelm the evaluator's ability to provide meaningful evidence, merely following the trajectory of the wave without having any impact or getting swept up in the riptides of new initiatives and political forces.

### **Chapter III: Literature Review**

With the recent promotion of evidence-based or data-informed approaches in GEP, evaluators have moved from an objective observer role to a policy advisor who adjudicates and translates “what works” in global education to decision-makers (Boaz *et al.*, 2019; Cairney, 2019). As GEP is an emerging field, this literature review aims to fill significant gaps in the literature on evaluation and evidence generation (Serrat, 2009; Fowler, 2015; Verger, Novelli and Hülya Altinyelken, 2018), supplementing from evaluation, international development, and policy studies disciplines. Literature published over the last ten years (i.e., 2010 to 2023) has been included based on the newest push towards evidence-based approaches in policymaking examined in this chapter.

This chapter details the GEP literature, focusing on the push toward EBA, evidence, and the role of the evaluator in the field. A significant gap in the literature exists around global education practice and policymaking due to the environment’s complex nature, especially around essential areas like evaluation, evidence generation, or evidence-informed practice. Therefore, I draw literature from multiple disciplines to fill these gaps. Due to this, an essential contribution this thesis makes is bridging these disciplines and filling these gaps. However, while this literature review provides a general evaluation perspective in GEP, more research is needed to refine the field. Additionally, I make space to examine the evaluators and evidence’s role in potentially perpetuating coloniality through established global institutions erected to meet the goals of EBA. The following section delves into evidence-based approaches in GEP, followed by a look at the evaluator's role, with a concluding section reflecting decoloniality in the sector.

#### **Evidence-Based Approaches in GEP**

Evidence-based policy and practice have become standard in the GEP landscape with the expectation that actions be grounded in already proven successes. This conception captured the international development community around 2000 and continues to spread through GEP today. This section discusses the history of evidence-based approaches in GEP and provides definitions for evidence producers and users in the field. The outputs of evidence-generating activities and how the evaluation process impacts GEP are also discussed.

### *History of Evidence-Based Approaches*

Policy advisors adopted evidence-based policy as a managerial practice in around 2000 as a best practice for policymaking and program design (Young and Philipps, 2013; Cairney, 2019). Evidence-based policymaking dictates that policies ought to be designed by best practices and an understanding of “what works” (Boaz *et al.*, 2019). The effort arose from policy advisors' collective desire to move beyond opinion-based policymaking towards more scientific and unbiased policy solutions (Young and Philipps, 2013).

Craft and Howlett (2013) suggest that policymakers saw early evidence-based efforts as apolitical technocratic activities, where objective evidence-producing activities would create facts that could override beliefs. Boaz *et al.* (2019) suggest that theorists based this approach on evidence-based medicine (EBM), a natural sciences theory. In EBM, a singular actor, or a team of doctors, would collect and analyze all relevant patient data to recommend an intervention. Then, the final decision regarding the intervention was made in concert with the patient (Cairney and Oliver, 2017). The simplicity of EBM is that it includes all relevant stakeholders in a clear-cut technocratic decision-making activity akin to the scientific method. For social scientists, EBM offered a simplified framework for data-driven decision-making. Supporters of adopting the evidence-based approach in the social sciences, or what became known as evidence-based policymaking, believed the technocratic approach could help predict policymaking, explain decision-making rationale, and support the development of best practices (Boaz *et al.*, 2019).

Young and Phillipps (2013) argue that criticism and dissent of the technique only emerged in the 2010s, especially dissent, which highlighted the glaring divisions between the differences in research communities and the needs between EBM and evidence-based policymaking. For example, EBM identifies solutions for a single individual, whereas evidence-based policymaking solutions impact large groups or whole societies. Similarly, EBM is rooted in the natural sciences and employs a positivistic view of knowledge creation. Researchers can uncover objective truths in positivism, specifically through rigorous research methods like Random Controlled Trials (Cairney and Oliver, 2017). On the other hand, data-driven policymaking is rooted in the social sciences, which moved away from positivistic epistemologies towards a post-positivistic interpretative turn (Fairclough, 1992; 2013; Boaz *et al.*, 2019). Boaz *et al.* (2019) claim that evidence-based approaches hold a contested view of “truth” and “evidence,” which researchers often derive through non-linear knowledge seeking,

What counts as good evidence is more contested, policy change tends to be viewed as at least as relevant as practice change, and the research journey is often more iterative and occurs within heavily constrained resources (Boaz *et al.*, 2019, p. 9).

Post-interpretative turn epistemologies, like evidence-based policymaking, require social scientists to acknowledge and value alternative ways of knowing and understanding reality as socially constructed (Chabbott, 2007; Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Christie and Lemire (2019) suggest the theory-praxis gap is to blame for researchers' misalignment between approach, epistemologies, or ontologies, as researchers and the research community rarely prioritize outputs that align theory and practice.

Furthermore, evidence produced with EBM approaches is often generated for individual decision-makers or to inform best practices in the medical field and rarely for policymaking. In contrast, Cairney and Oliver (2017) suggest that social scientists often complete research to inform and influence policymaking, for which the methods of EBM would be ill-suited. Contrary to the prevailing assumption that evidence-based approaches to policymaking came out of adopting the cross-discipline EBM, researchers argue that using data to inform decision-making is older than EBM and dates back to the early 1930s (Baron, 2018; Boaz *et al.*, 2019). However, Young and Philipps (2013) counter that evidence-based policymaking is interpreted as a model representing evidence as objective facts, which aligns the theory with EBM, irrespective of which came first.

By the 2000s, support for the “what works” approach spread across policy, development, and education research communities (Davies *et al.*, 2000; Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Baron, 2018; Boaz *et al.*, 2019) and has remained strong throughout the last two decades. Baron (2018), a policy advisor and staunch supporter of EBA, argues that data-driven approaches were so prevalent in the United States by 2000 that the Department of Education formed the Institution of Education Sciences to function as the Department’s research arm to continue to promote evidence-based approaches nationally. Access to funding was also limited to institutions that could provide evidence of the success or impact of their intended intervention, which as a practice has continued to the 2020s (Baron, 2018).

Similarly, in international development environments, research is commissioned for institutional learning, accountability, or policy choice legitimization (Serrat, 2009; Fowler, 2015). Fowler (2015) argues that while each type of evidence generation has its uses and purposes, data is rarely presented as cause-effect solutions that help build a best practice for education programming in developing contexts, an idea explored further in this chapter.

However, even the staunchest supporters like Baron (2018, p. 47) admit that education impact assessments rarely lead to statistically significant results or improvements, “as expected, a number of the funded interventions were found to produce small or not positive effects, as is true whenever rigorous evaluations are carried out.” In this case, one has to wonder why an evidence-based approach is employed if data does not (and is not expected to) highlight what works.

Contrary to equating evidence to fact, Nelson and Campbell (2017) suggest that evidence-based practice has evolved into evidence-informed or scientifically guided practices (Young and Philipps, 2013). However, Cairney (2019) argues that policymakers and government’s shift in thinking has been slow to follow suit after investing considerable resources in adopting evidence-based approaches. In the 2010s, support for an objective scientific approach to policymaking waned (Boaz *et al.*, 2019), “evidence is just one of a number of factors that influence educational decisions, with educators needing to apply professional judgment, rather than being driven solely by research evidence or data” (Nelson and Campbell, 2017, p. 128). Ultimately, researchers conclude that employing evidence without professional discernment is poor judgment:

Evidence does not substitute for a continuing need to adjudicate between differing sets of values (for example, on what matters), and there is an on-going need to exercise judgments that draw on experience and expertise alongside evidence (Boaz *et al.*, 2019, 6).

Additionally, data without context is inferior data.

By extension, Beer (2016b) argues that decision-makers who quantify problems and alternatives through metric-based values decide based on harmful interpretations of data. He argues that adopting these metric-based behaviors extends neoliberalism, where the ‘model of the market’ invades the personal and emotional realms (Beer, 2016a). From these discussions, there is no clear division in the discourses, but a fumbling of the idea that evidence-based, informed, or driven approaches are useful if accessible to policymakers and evaluators.

If evidence is not an objective fact but information that requires discernment, then a shift from evidence-based to data-driven or evidence-informed is required. Policymaking requires a data translator, which the evaluator is often called upon to play. The following section delves deeper into evidence-based approaches in GEP by discussing the definition of evidence, including what counts and should be counted.

### ***Evidence: What Counts and Should be Counted?***

Considering the importance of evidence for policymaking and decision-making in GEP, it is essential to understand what evidence is and how we determine what to count. Generally, evaluators generate data through all modalities (e.g., journal articles, books, IO reports, impact assessments, and policy briefs). Data inherently makes value claims on ways of knowing and whose voice and experience matter, based on the researcher or evaluator's standpoint.<sup>3</sup> This chapter describes how evidence used in policymaking and practice is operationalized as policy advice and can aid organizational learning, be a tool for accountability, or legitimize policy choices in GEP.

**Definition of Evidence.** Data and information deemed evidence are often assumed to be an output of rigorous research or evaluations and are used synonymously as incontrovertible facts (Young and Philipps, 2013). Equating evidence with objective truths assumes a positivistic epistemology, more aligned with EBM than evidence-based approaches to policymaking. Evidence-based policymaking in GEP is meant to have taken an interpretive turn away from the International Political Economy theoretical frame of GEP (Verger, Novelli and Hülya Altinyelken, 2018) or rationality in policy studies (Schwartz and Meltzer, 2019).

Craft and Howlett (2013) suggest that only when facts influence a position does that data elevate to "evidence." Accepting Craft and Howlett's definition, data operationalized to inform policymaking or best practice becomes evidence in GEP, irrespective of its level of objectivity. This perspective aligns more closely with social science's interpretation of data, which displays as value-laden, steeped in claims about whose voice, experience (Stone, 2020a), and ways of knowing are valuable (Boaz *et al.*, 2019). Stone's (2020a, p. 34) description of data is aligned with this definition, as she argues that even seemingly objective practices (i.e., counting, assigning value, and categorizing) are profoundly subjective, and numbers are "always accessory to purpose."

Considering this limitation, Stone (2020a) argues that evaluators must consider who is in the room when collecting data, including whose voices are being elevated and whose lives will be impacted when data is disseminated. Contrary to the natural sciences, where it is enough to count people without the additional context, policy analysts and other evaluators risk misrepresenting their data as objective when it is biased and rife with uncritiqued power imbalances,

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<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, this thesis will call those who conduct research or M&E activities in GEP "evaluators."

Being in the room isn't always enough, so here's another way to find out whether a measure accords with reality: ask the people whose lives you're measuring and those who will be affected by the numbers your measure yields. When they tell you something, listen to them, take them seriously, and include their voices in your measure (Stone, 2020a, p. 27).

Stone (2020a) suggests that evidence itself is a claim to what the evaluators believe counts and should be counted.

Evidence, therefore, is the operationalization of data to inform policy or practice. It has a purpose and an intent and is not apolitical or value-neutral. In GEP environments, donors define the terms of evaluation research, including what data is collected and the production and dissemination practices of the data (Fowler, 2015). As IOs determine how data is translated and deployed, the role of evidence-based approaches in GEP is even more complicated. The following subsection delves into the uses of evidence in GEP, including organizational learning, IO, and donor accountability.

### ***Evaluation's Outputs: Learning and Accountability***

In development, monitoring and evaluation specialists typically employed within or by IOs generate evidence to evaluate programs. Fowler (2015, p. 168) describes monitoring efforts as answering three fundamental program questions: “what has changed; what caused the change; and is the change what was originally intended?” When the international community established the SDGs in 2015, Gertler *et al.* (2016) argued that the World Bank led the charge for evidence-based policymaking and evaluation approaches as part of the push toward aid effectiveness. They continued that those assessments, including impact assessments and evaluations, became required for countries in the Global South to access educational financing. Increasing data collection and reporting mechanisms, from Gertler *et al.*'s (2016) perspective, would induce IOs to meet their programmatic and fiduciary obligations, overall increasing aid effectiveness.

In addition to the complications of implementing data-informed practices in GEP, Fowler (2015) highlights the lack of baselines in the field (i.e., a portrait of people's situation before the intervention), unclear objectives and intended outcomes in project design, and improper evaluation design as additional obstacles to generating meaningful data. These limitations are compounded by constraints on time and funding, making IOs focus on data collection and reporting to donors without answering “what works.” If M&E teams are not able to collect or analyze data in order for it to transform from information to evidence, the analysis of information moves from the evaluator's expert purview to later down the road in

policymaking. Serrat (2009) highlights these conflicting goals and realities, or paradoxes, and suggests that evaluation in IOs serves two purposes: institutional learning and organizational accountability.

**Institutional Learning or Developing Best Practices.** IOs undertaking evidence-generating activities for organizational learning or developing educational and program management best practices are what Fowler (2015) calls ‘action-learning’ IOs. Action-learning IOs, he argues, prioritize evaluations that produce evidence for the development of their staff, informing their beneficiary or constituent groups, formalizing feedback, or codifying best practices, and “encourage questioning; treat error and failure as positive information; value self-criticism, systematic reflection, and external challenge; and push boundaries” (Fowler, 2015, p. 172). However, raising capital often complicates IOs' ability to complete evaluation for learning, which causes authors like Christie and Lemire (2019) to lament the glacial speed of translating learning into better practice, or what Freire (1986) calls “praxis.”

Similarly, Fowler (2015) suggests that while learnings can become codified in capital-P policy recommendations for international agendas and/or national policies or become embedded in small-p policies like IO evaluation policies or procedures, their primary purpose is to increase the learning of the organization, competency of staff, and increase their effectiveness at bringing change for their target beneficiary communities. Evaluators who produce data for learning do so without regard to punishment or fear of reprisal.

**Reports for Accountability.** Reports most often generated by GEP implementing agencies are those that highlight program or intervention impact (i.e., who did what), and their primary audience is external funding agencies, governments, or IOs’ regional or headquarters offices (Serrat, 2009; Fowler, 2015; Martin and Williams, 2019). Donors hold these types of reports as instruments of accountability over implementing agencies. While data collection does not need to be a zero-sum game between reporting for accountability over learning, Serrat (2009) suggests reporting is done more often than not at the expense of learning. Martin and Williams (2019) highlight the pull between reports for accountability versus learning with examples of IOs with exponentially higher compliance and auditing budgets than M&E budgets.

Additionally, implementing agencies who fill data gaps for fear of loss of financial support is a well-documented activity (Fowler, 2015), creating an environment rife with “incentive[s] to lie, cheat, and distort” data out of concern for backlash from policymakers or donors (Serrat, 2009, p. 41). Making up figures, as Fowler (2015) and Stone (2020) suggest, is commonplace in international organizations’ M&E practice and

is different from extrapolation or interpolating, where IOs transparently fill data gaps with estimates (Barro and Lee, 1993). The distinction lies in the intent where IOs systematically dodge data collection activities and then forge positive impact factors to pass them off as their own.

However, Fowler (2015) suggests that with the added attention directed at evaluation, most IOs in the GEP landscape decentralized their evaluation departments and engaged external consultants to complete their M&E activities. This meant a loss of local expertise in identifying appropriate methodologies, essential voices to include, or beneficiaries the opportunity to ‘interpret facts’ (Fowler, 2015) from the country-level perspective and incentivized fraudulent reporting (Fowler, 2015; Stewart, 2019; Stone, 2020a).

Stone (2020a) suggests that many IOs and local nonprofits are guilty of “fudging the numbers” to complete reporting requirements when data does not exist. She offers an example of the World Bank's gap-filling practice, where evaluators will use similar countries to fill in data gaps in the Global South, “the World Bank makes up missing data for Country X by lending it other countries' results” (Stone, 2020a, p. 53). Fowler (2015) and Stewart (2019) also argue that IOs engage in poor M&E practice unless held accountable otherwise. Fowler (2015, p. 75) suggests that their data is poor and “at best only fair approximations and at worst numerical misinformation.”

In addition to only having the funding and resources needed for one type of reporting, critics like Fowler (2015) and Serrat (2009, p.45) argue that reports generated for donors rather than target beneficiary groups create a contradictory incentive for IOs,

At the request of shareholders tasked with reporting to political leadership, taxpayers, and citizens, feedback from evaluation studies has often tended to support accountability (and hence provide for control).

Accountability frameworks that hold implementing agencies and evaluators accountable to donors, rather than beneficiary groups, force organizations to care more about the figures than the meaningful impact. In those instances, IOs who wish for program effectiveness and increased impact create a paradoxical evaluation environment where implementing agencies prioritize donor wants over beneficiary needs. Teaching to the test, where school systems fall prey to a race to the bottom through teaching to standardized tests (Ravitch, 2020), is an example of this trap. In 2011, for example, over 100 educators were charged with changing students’ standardized test scores in what is now known as the Atlanta School Cheating Scandal (Dalton, 2015).

Rickinson *et al.* (2017) highlight this issue as they argue that IO reports rarely include othered voices, experiences, or ways of knowing and, therefore, hold IOs accountable to only funders and not the beneficiaries of the program or intervention. Additionally, the authors argue that the majority of reports published are grounded in the same epistemic and methodological stances, which hold colonial biases and standpoints constant, which other authors would argue lead to coloniality, which is aligned with Shahjahan's (2011) argument about the pervasiveness of coloniality.

Edwards (2012b; 2012a; 2018) argues that externally published IO evaluations no longer claim objectivity but make argumentative cases to funding agencies based on their present impact. When development aid was held on conditions set by IOs, often unrelated to the grant objective, the international community called these packages tied-aid. Donors' and IOs' control over evidence-generating activities, reporting, and dissemination practices is so absolute that describing the landscape as tied-evaluation is not a stretch by any imagination.

Fowler (2015) recommends participatory or co-produced evaluations considering the power imbalances between IOs and their target beneficiary groups, moving away from reports where beneficiaries “merely repeat what the [IOs] want to hear out of respect or due to a cultural aversion to displease” (Fowler, 2015, p. 170). Such evaluations, Fowler argues, should be produced with the beneficiary group as the intended audience and highlight how the IO will hold themselves accountable for the successes or failures of the program documented in the report. Through more co-produced methods like Fowler describes, Stewart (2019) argues that evaluators can help heal past exploitative development and research practices that have led to continued coloniality.

Doucet (2019, p. 3) argues for redefining usefulness as a form of participatory evidence, “how well research evidence communicates the lived experiences of marginalized groups so that the understanding of the problem and its response is more likely to be impactful to the community in the ways the community itself would want.” Where the national, regional, and international policies call for such participatory M&E practices (see Chapter II), the control of the international policy actors, institutions, and donor agendas are so influential evaluators in the GEP environment struggle to implement them. As Béland (2019, p. 367) put it, the “policy legacies and formal institutional rules” make it impossible to pass participatory created policies at the nation-state level and get them funded by the regional and then international community.

The goal might be to continue along the evidence-based path but focus on evidence-based culturally responsive practices (Heppner and Heppner, 2021), locally developed solutions, and locally developed evaluations. Once evaluators translate data, giving meaning to the information collected, and file their reports, data is transformed into “evidence.” The following section deals with how that evidence is used in policymaking by investigating its users and influencers.

### **Evaluators and Policy Actors in GEP**

Boaz *et al.* (2019) call evidence-generators the shapers of evidence, dividing users and producers of evidence. However, that clear division becomes entangled when looking at recommendations for evaluation specialists in IO settings, particularly in GEP, where global agendas recommend evaluators become policy activists or entrepreneurs for impactful programs (I present examples of this in Chapter V, Systemic Paradox

Intended evidence operators include policy actors and policymakers in GEP evaluation departments, yet there is no clear division between these persons and an evaluator in the GEP field.

#### ***Evaluators as Evidence Generators and Policy Actors***

Evaluation specialists in international organizations can hold any position (i.e., local or national staff, international staff or external consultants) so long as they are engaged in data collection and reporting activities. Most organizations have their own M&E departments and specialists on staff or preferred external organizations that consult for needed assessments (Fowler, 2015). Lipsky (2010) describes those implementing and evaluating policies as the Street Level Bureaucrats of the policy cycle.

Capital-P and small-p policies happen *to* the bureaucrats, including evaluators, as donors prescribe evaluation methods and outputs. Unlike researchers who can evaluate, draw conclusions, and select journals or publications to disseminate their ideas, evidence producers in GEP M&E departments are significantly constrained. This thesis does not argue that all research is unrestricted but reiterates the previous section's conclusions that evaluators function in a tied-evaluation environment that limits their agency at work.

**Evaluators as Policy Actors.** Policy actors are persons who engage in the policy process. However, the term typically describes someone attempting to influence policymaking or the decision-making stage of the policy process. Trochim (2009) and Cairney (2019) argue that evaluators should use their data to influence policymaking. Their justification for this is evaluators' concern about how the information they generate is being interpreted and used without their influence (Boaz *et al.*, 2019). The authors argue that

evaluators could directly engage policy decision-makers or establish advocacy coalitions with policy entrepreneurs (a term coined by Kingdon (1995) to describe someone who looks for the perfect opportunity to advocate for their preferred alternative). Forrester and Garratt (2019, p.321) describe policy entrepreneurs as those who are able to establish ‘what works’ and, through their “unique set of knowledge, experiences, contacts, motivations and so on, could serve to influence the development of policy in a particular way.” Through these engagements, evaluators could better influence the evidence-based policy and practice pipeline, subsequently increasing their ability to disseminate findings and frame policy problems and solutions that may lead to more optimal outcomes.

In order to best influence how decision-makers understand data and engage in evidence-based policymaking, Cairney and Oliver (2017) recommend evidence producers (1) become experts in the policy system, (2) learn “where the action is,” and (3) build coalitions with policy entrepreneurs or knowledge brokers who know how to persuade policymakers. The authors argue that researchers' singular focus on publishing without concern with how that information is translated or operationalized in policymaking is shortsighted; they argue that producers must actively participate in informing policy and practice, especially by making their data digestible for policymakers.

The perception that evaluators, or that generating evidence, should also participate in the policymaking process is not problematized in how it might bias researchers or see evaluators with an agenda. On the contrary, Verger (2018) suggests that engaged M&E teams of IOs already function as knowledge brokers or data translators to policymakers. He provides an example of the World Bank and its Global Partnership for Education, which has established a technocratic pool of education experts who are often offered in place of funding to Global South countries to help establish and improve education systems or who reframe, promote, and provide neoliberal policy solutions to those in need, taking “already-existing policy practices, relabel[ing] them and sell[ing] them around” (Verger *et al.*, 2018, p. 17). By being the world’s leader in education experts, the World Bank can cherry-pick preferred policy solutions, and knowledge brokers can use “evidence” as a legitimizing frame (Jules, 2008).

Irrespective of the role that evaluators take, whether it is one of objective evidence generator, policy legitimizer, or donor-directed data collector and reporter, there is very little data suggesting that policymakers in GEP use evidence in their process of designing policy or best practice (White, 2009;

Stewart, 2019). This next section examines policy and decision-makers as advocates for evidence-based approaches and supposed evidence users.

### ***Policy and Decision-Makers: Evidence Users***

In EBA, there is an assumption that decision-makers use the information available to them to select the alternative that would bring about their intended outcome. This assumption posits that decisions will not be swayed by opinion but based on fact and would be considered the most crucial piece of evidence in their analyses.

Though policy makers (and much of the citizenry) may publicly affirm the belief that ‘evidence’ should be **the** principal consideration in public policy decision-making, such proclamations provide no guarantee that the decision-making process will reflect that belief (Young and Philipps, 2013, p. 20, emphasis in text).

This subsection examines policymakers and decision-makers in the IO landscape and then inspects how they engage with data and evidence for evidence-based policymaking.

**Capital-P and Small-P Policymakers.** Capital-P policymakers are government officials, ministry officials, or IO representatives who can sign international agreements. Small-p policymakers are typically the administrators charged with implementing the capital-P policies. Below both policymakers lie the Street Level Bureaucrats of GEP (e.g., program managers and evaluators)(Lipsky, 2010). We know these policymakers' decision-making process is more complex than simply choosing the best alternative based on the available evidence (Ostrom, 2012; Lemke and Tarko, 2021). Depending on their specific policy system, capital-P policymakers have many actors, interests, and influences they must weigh before deciding. An example of capital-P policy in GEP is the Education 2030 policy agenda described in SDG 4 and Education 2030

**Evidence in use by Policymakers.** Nutley *et al.* (2019) suggest that policy analysts acknowledge that evidence is only one factor considered in policymaking and not necessarily the most important one. Boaz *et al.* (2019, p.4) suggest that while evidence may not be the most crucial influence, it can be influential and beneficial, “a growing recognition that evidence alone is unlikely to dictate the direction of policy or practice but can, nonetheless, play an important influencing role alongside other forms of knowledge.” Similarly, Cairney (2019, p. 37) suggests that stories and persuasive arguments are more influential to policymakers than evidence, “evidence is rarely conclusive enough to remove uncertainty, so persuasion, argument, and narrative (rather than facts and analysis) are the key tools used by policy participants to

address ambiguity.” The author asserts that decision-makers are often persuaded by stories that speak to their biases and standpoints and justify pre-determined policy or practice choices. However, in the previous sections, I argued that data becomes evidence only when it is operationalized or used for a purpose, which can take the form of storytelling. Therefore, while data does not influence a decisionmaker alone, data translated into evidence through metaphor or storytelling is a compelling factor in decision-making; the impact on evidence-based approaches is a lowered focus on evidence and heightened attention to how policymakers use data.

One complication to policymakers accepting evidence-based approaches is that nation-states are rarely influenced by evidence not generated in their own country (Cairney, 2019; Stewart, 2019). Another hurdle that evidence must scale to influence policymaking is accessibility. Craft and Howlett (2013) claim that policymakers find accessible data more persuasive, irrespective of its production location. Compounding the issue is that IOs prefer aggregated evidence for their ability to generalize (i.e., a neoliberal concept of economies-of-scale) (Stewart 2019). IOs “scale up” their educational interventions by disseminating generalized findings across multiple areas without incurring additional research costs. Therefore, rigorous and informative data can be generated for the GEP environment. One that influences IOs to seek to implement this project widely across GEP landscapes, but the national policymakers would find it difficult to accept because it was not generated locally.

Ultimately, as Cairney (2019, p. 22) argues, “evidence alone is never sufficient to win the day: evidence may not even be necessary for major policy change, and it is certainly not sufficient.” Policymakers are influenced by data that is meaningful to them, and rarely because it meets a rational hierarchy of evidence, as seen in the natural sciences (Cairney, 2019; Cairney and Oliver, 2017). Cairney and Oliver (2017) suggest that policymakers do not use evidence solely for picking a perfect problem-solution coupling in what they refer to as an evidence-policy gap. The gap occurs when information is not readily accessible during decision-making periods, or it is unintelligible for decision-makers to operationalize. In these cases, Stewart (2019) argues that data becomes less valuable and useful as a piece of the decision-making process.

***Policy-Based Evidence: Legitimization.*** Cairney (2019) suggests that views of EBA typically fall into one of two categories: supporters who believe in the idealism of evidence-driven practice and policy choices and pessimists who see evidence as legitimizing policy choices. Cairney (2019) and Young and Philipps (2013) argue that EBA critics point out that evidence is sometimes explicitly generated to legitimize policymakers' pre-determined policy choices. For example, Wiseman and Davidson (2018, p. 19) describe those in power as those who define what evidence is legitimate in the education sector, "There is a trend in educational governance that suggests that those who control which knowledge or policy is legitimate are those who govern."

The critique of using evidence to inform policymaking goes beyond asking evaluators to design research specifically to legitimize a policy choice, which Cairney (2019) argues is also to signal modernity (Wiseman and Davidson, 2018). Evidence is sometimes used as a scapegoat for poor program design or implementation (Young and Phillipps, 2013, p. 10), with "the standard argument being that those choices were directed (if not demanded) by 'the evidence'."

### ***Summary of Evaluators and Policy Actors in GEP***

This section defines evidence in GEP as data operationalized for policymaking. The data presented can highlight a specific need or problem, display a potential solution, and exemplify how a problem–solution coupling would be the best alternative to select. This definition is aligned with the prior two sections, where I described data as transforming into evidence when it becomes useful and, in GEP, used primarily to report for accountability. This next section examines how these report types, evidence generated, and evaluator roles inherently conflict with decolonial approaches.

### **Evidence-Based Approaches and Decolonization**

This chapter highlights the inescapable rationality project, perpetuating coloniality for the Global South in GEP. Continuing with a multi-lens approach, I offer another look at the conclusions of this chapter through a decolonial lens. I outline the decolonial lens by framing questions about who controls and benefits from the function and outputs of evaluation in GEP. Recalling Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) guiding questions for working with the Indigenous (or in this case, Caribbean) population (see Decolonial Lens and Coloniality for Tuhiwai Smith's questions), this chapter is intentional about answering those questions, including whom evaluation serves, whom it will benefit, who controls its design, scope, and dissemination practices?

Through a practical decolonial lens, the theory is applied as an approach to inclusion, making space for typically othered voices, and as an example for application in future GEP evaluations. Through the examples provided in this historical analysis, one sees evidence-based approaches used as a neoliberal tool operationalized by IOs to collect data with prescribed methods and rarely disseminated findings. These evaluations are often conducted at the expense of participatory or co-produced research that values local actors' voices, knowledge, and experience (Rickinson *et al.*, 2017) and perpetuates previous systems of oppression and coloniality. While EBA does not have to be engaged in such a way, it often is (Fowler, 2015; Serrat, 2019). Data, then, is characterized as a neoliberal tool for the rationality project.

I have also argued that with evaluation literature continuing to focus on developing technocratic best practices, data is ignored at the expense of signaling an informed organization (Boaz *et al.*, 2019) and is rarely used in policy decision-making (Stewart, 2019). Stewart (2019) suggests that evidence use would increase in policymaking in international development if evaluations were completed at the local level, funded at the program outset, the results were more accessible to different stakeholder groups, and institutional learning was prioritized. Fowler's (2015) recommendation for foundations to function as Action-learning IOs aligns with Stewart's recommendation, where the targeted beneficiary group participates in the evaluation process. These suggestions would move research closer to decolonial research away from research and evaluation on groups of people with and for their communities (Atkins, 2013).

Policymakers' problem-solution coupling will look drastically different if they are informed by reports explicitly written for donors versus co-produced research with beneficiary communities. Through an environment of tied-evaluation, evaluators lack the power to analyze or disseminate their findings, and the GEP environment continues to grow into an education industry built on top-down solutions pushed by Western perspectives of quality education. Fowler (2015) and Stewart (2019) suggest that GEP must heal past exploitative development and colonized research practices through participatory research methods to move towards decolonization and away from coloniality. I frame the decolonial lens by highlighting the tied nature of evaluation.

## **Summary**

This chapter builds the concept of data-driven, evidence-informed policy and practice in GEP. What is clear is that evidence is data operationalized, sometimes without a user or a purpose, which leaves the role

of the evaluator and evidence in EBA unclear. Chapter V: Thematic Analysis Findings examines the landscape, further highlighting the aid workers, Caribbean policy actors, and policy perspectives providing more clarity to this study's research questions.

## **Chapter IV: Methodology**

This study uses a critical policy analysis to examine the evaluator's role in policymaking in global education environments. Due to the complexity of the international development field, there is a significant gap in the literature around education policymaking and little to no information around evaluation, evidence generation, or evidence-informed practice in development contexts. By filling the gap in the GEP literature with literature from education, international development, and policy studies, this thesis lays the foundation to problematize EBA in environments where non-stakeholders control evaluation practice. Rather than applying policy frameworks to assess justifications for policymakers' decisions retroactively, this thesis presents the aid workers' and beneficiaries' perspectives while analyzing policy and policy-related documents relating to the international, regional, and national education policy landscapes. Through a multiple-lens approach, employing Stone's policy paradox and a decolonial lens, I explore the Caribbean Education Policy Space and identify whose voices, knowledge, and experiences are elevated in the GEP literature. By employing critical theory with CPA, a method aligned epistemologically, methodologically, and ontologically across the diverse literatures included in this thesis, this thesis makes several methodological contributions to the emerging GEP field.

### **Research Questions**

The questions guiding my research are (a) what is the role of the evaluator in GEP, (b) how might decolonial methodologies impact evaluation and evidence generation in GEP, and (c) what are the aid workers' perceptions of the role and usefulness of evaluation for better development practice?

### **Research Paradigm and Design**

I employ a critical theory research paradigm in this thesis, the predominant research paradigm in GEP (Verger, Novelli and Hülya Altinyelken, 2018). Critical theory requires researchers to reflect on the power dynamics inherent in social constructs, especially knowledge production and language (Fairclough, 2013; Soulsby, 2020). The theory is aligned epistemologically with GEP, international development, and policy studies and methodologically with CPA (Taylor, 1997; Diem et al., 2014; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Young and Diem, 2017). This subsection describes how this thesis employs critical theory through a CPA and multi-lens approach, grounded in workers' voices, beneficiaries' experiences, and many policy perspectives from international, regional, and local policy actors and institutions. Employing a multiple-lens

perspective from policy studies to GEP, several viewpoints are presented, compared, and contrasted to provide varying standpoints of the policy environment. The distinct voices (i.e., international, regional, and national policy actors, international organization representative statements, and policies and reports) frame the CEPS policy environment from a macro, meso and micro perspective.

### ***Policy Analysis to Critical Policy Analysis***

Policy analysis examines a policy event (e.g., identification of the policy problem, potential solutions, politicking for a specific problem/solution coupling, and the decision) and the actors, institutions, and ideas involved (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003; Schwartz and Meltzer, 2019). However, policy studies theories are too limited to describe complex policy systems (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003; Cairney, 2007) like GEP. Policy researchers, including Young and Reynolds (2017) and Cairney and Oliver (2017), suggest that policy analysis is also deeply rooted in economic rationale and, therefore, limited to positivistic interpretations. The conceptual limitations also extend into decolonial theories; for example, Zajda (2017) argues that coloniality is perpetuated and codified through the institutionalization (North, 1991) of Western concepts of knowledge and truth as hegemonic. To move away from the positivistic stronghold, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) suggest that policy research moves towards post-positivistic interpretations and employs critical theories, which consider social circumstances or CPA.

When added to policy analysis, this critical element is similar to what Fairclough (1992) identified as a ‘cultural’ or ‘ideational’ turn in political science, in which analysts have begun to acknowledge the interpretive, not only the explanatory power of policy analysis. CPA moves past the limitations of policy studies theories, looks at policies at the intersection of power and governance (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010), and is rooted in critical theory. Researchers often describe the CPA approach as interpreting what policy says versus what it does (Stone, 2002; Diem *et al.*, 2014; Cahill, 2015), which is often lacking in other policy analysis theories. This original thesis applies the method to the evaluation stage, its actors, and outputs rather than the policy itself through historicizing the policy landscape and employing a multi-lens approach, clarified in the following subsections.

### ***Multiple Lenses as a Theoretical Framework***

A multiple-lens approach requires researchers to describe a policy event through different theoretical positions to determine whether they would come to the same conclusion about its policy adoption (Allison

and Zelikow, 1999; Cairney, 2007; Hood Cattaneo, 2018). The approach engages multiple theoretical models as tools to analyze a specific case. Cairney (2007, p. 46) suggested the value of the multiple lens approach is its helpfulness to policy analysts with limited time to analyze an infinite amount of information, “employing more than one model does not solve this problem, but it does highlight a series of perspectives through which to view the same phenomenon” (Cairney, 2007, p. 46).

Young and Reynolds (2017) suggest that CPA requires a multi-lens approach, where researchers can interrogate issues relating to reality, ideologies, equality/equity, and inclusion/exclusion. However, Shahjahan (2011) warns that without attention, employing different lenses does not necessarily highlight a difference in epistemologies or standpoints. He continues that using multiple theories grounded in the same positivistic perspectives can lead to overgeneralizing too little data (Shahjahan, 2011), or what is known as a hasty generalization fallacy (Woods, 2004). In response to Shahjahan’s (2011) assertion that simply using multiple lenses is not a multifocal approach, I employ Stone’s (2002; 2012) policy paradox and a decolonial lens. The policy paradox framework is grounded in politics and policy studies research and does not commit to a specific epistemological grounding. The decolonial lens moves past a post-positivist perspective into constructivism, aligning with the literature and my researcher positionality detailed in the Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity Statement

The following subsections define these frames as part of the lenses used in the CPA.

**Policy Paradox.** Stone's (2012) policy paradox rejects what Stone calls the “rationality project” of the Rational Actor Model, a theory in political economy and policy studies. While not committed to a specific epistemology, the framework is primarily used in research that embraces critical positivism or post-positivist epistemology with a subjective ontology (Jones, Shanahan and McBeth, 2014). In contrast to RAM, Stone’s theory is built after the ideational turn (Béland, 2019) and describes policymaking as a messy and contradictory process (van Ostaijen and Shivant, 2015).

Policymaking, Stone (2012) argues, is the iterative process of naming, categorizing, and framing the goals, problems, and solutions in the polis. Unlike RAM's typical economic marketplace, the polis is a figurative socio-cultural policy space where policymaking happens. Policymakers in the polis face paradoxical choices, where the action available will not lead to the intended outcomes.

Paradoxes are nothing but trouble. They violate the most elementary principle of logic: Something cannot be two different things at once. Two contradictory interpretations cannot both be true. A paradox is just such an impossible situation, and political life is full of them (Stone, 2002, p. 1).

As policymakers give meaning and value to evidence, paradoxes emerge. Pollans (2019, p. 279) suggests that the easiest paradoxes to identify are those where the solutions selected are “incongruous with the problem it is meant to solve.”

Evaluators inform policy and best-practice generation through the discursive tools (i.e., symbols, numbers, metaphors, or analogies) they use to generate evidence, including writing reports, providing policy guidance, or recommending best practices (Cairney and Oliver, 2017; Heppner and Heppner, 2021). Pollans (2019, p. 2) suggests that the assumption that evidence is an objective and value-neutral activity complicates the evaluator’s practice because “information is never perfect; facts are selected and spun.”

The CPA in this thesis uses the policy paradox as an interpretive analysis to grapple with the multi-layered landscape of GEP and to guide the analysis of naming, categorizing, and framing that policy actors use around evidence-based approaches and evaluation in GEP at this specific time, space, and through this author’s distinct lens.

**Decolonial Lens and Coloniality.** Coloniality, as defined by Quijano (2007), describes the lasting effects of colonization, including institutions and ideas, which linger even after the colonizing entity has left. Fúnez (2022) recommends that researchers interrogate their positionalities and the Modern-Colonial World System, or modernity, by asking questions about whose knowledge and institutions we accept as natural and interrogate inherent power structures. Through this introspection, Mignolo (2011) argues that we might recognize coloniality from the Western hegemonic lens, the dominant paradigm of most researchers. Ultimately, those who reject the modernity lens and opt for a perspective exploring coloniality acknowledge our current institutions as having racialized hierarchies that perpetuate epistemological injustice and imbalanced power structures and exclude Indigenous and typically othered populations from acknowledged forms of knowing, being, and creating (University of Bristol, 2023).

In sum, a decolonial lens in research problematizes coloniality or the assumption of Western conceptions as standard. Using a decolonial lens, researchers should ask about their literature and the outputs (i.e., articles, books, reports) they produce, “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interest does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will

carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 10).

Thompson (2012) suggests that we may not overcome the stranglehold of coloniality over research by asking and answering these questions, but we make our blank spots explicit.

A decolonial lens also helps provide alternative interpretations to historical analysis and includes typically excluded voices in deconstructions of histories. Inclusion can be completed by purposefully containing the voices and experiences of those whom research is conducted *on, with, or for* (Atkins, 2013) and giving their voices, ways of knowing, and experiences equal weight to the traditionally acceptable perspectives. The decolonial lens is applied in Chapter II by centering the national actors’ voices and policies before detailing the regional and international policies, institutions, and actors influencing their policymaking and practice to achieve a centering of local and typically excluded voices.

This thesis also employed a decolonial lens in the thematic analysis and CPA by developing a coding scheme from the participant interview data. I then coded all other policy and policy-related documents to that schema. The coding schema functioned as a scaffold that helped ensure aid workers’ perspectives and beneficiary experiences were foundational and not overshadowed by the inclusion of other policy and policy-related texts and discourses. Lastly, where possible, the local actor's experiences and voices were separated to highlight the decolonial perspective (i.e., a distinct decolonial section in Chapter III- Evidence-Based Approaches and Decolonization

, centering the national perspectives before regional and international policies in Chapter II, and highlighting Caribbean and international voices in Chapter V - Centering Aid Worker’s Perspectives through the Interview Participation Data

By focusing on the inclusion of Caribbean research, reports, and voices and highlighting areas of coloniality within GEP evaluation (i.e., international influences impacting evaluation through the macro, meso, and micro policy systems), this thesis moves past reactionary and into the practice of decolonial theory within evaluation.

### **Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity Statement**

I am one of the aid workers and evaluators I speak to and about in my thesis, constantly struggling with the competing logic of “best practices” and “doing good.” While these may not seem like contradictory ideas, the paradox emerges as sometimes best practices are rooted in coloniality and can cause harm to

communities that we aim to support. I am a cis white settler female born to an upper, then lower-middle-class family in Southern California. I have always been guided by an enthusiastic displeasure of injustice and inequality, which led me to humanitarian law, where I completed a Master of Law focusing on international development. I worked through college and graduate school teaching English as a Second Language, and after completing my law degree, I combined my academic and professional backgrounds working in youth entrepreneurship at the United Nations.

In almost two decades since, I have lived and worked in six countries, working with local, regional, and international non-profit organizations focused on bettering the livelihoods of the less fortunate through projects in youth and community development. Having lived and worked in development areas, I value championing bottom-up approaches to development that engage and empower beneficiaries. I believe education is a means out of poverty but must be coupled with community engagement and programs supporting quality livelihoods to succeed, which is a position I developed after gaining a professional certification as a Community Development Specialist.

My epistemology, or way of understanding how we learn, is constructivist. Holding a constructivist epistemology, I am driven to learn from all situations, and more so through the lens of the beneficiaries with whom I work. I am also pulled toward research that centers on othered voices and experiences, leading me to engage in critical theory. It also aligns with my iterative approach to selecting and analyzing the thirty-one documents included in the CPA. My experience in international development, community development, law, education, evaluation, and policy advising led me to the CPA design. However, I desired to include a decolonial lens often missing in GEP evaluative work, which led me to including the coloniality perspective. Overall, I explicitly took an iterative approach because of my constructivist epistemology and desire to unlearn commonly accepted beliefs in international development (i.e., coloniality), which finalized the methodological design.

### ***Reflexivity***

I practiced reflexivity while writing this thesis through a self-critical approach by questioning “how knowledge about [beneficiaries] is generated and, further, how relations of power operate in this process” (D’Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez, 2007, p. 75). I accomplished this by not claiming my research is objective, by journaling (Janesick, 1998; Thorpe, 2004; Martin-Cuellar, 2018) and speaking with a diverse,

multicultural group of critical colleagues on topics related to colonialism, racism, and gender equality as a form of triangulation (Janesick, 1998).

It is imperative that as a researcher, I am explicit about how I practiced reflexivity, specifically to unlearn (Grisold, Kaiser and Hafner, 2017) the white savior/western colonial settler mindset that comes with Western education and humanitarian aid work (Easterly, 2007; Bandyopadhyay, 2019). The decolonial lens requires a reflexivity of the researcher, one that acknowledges inherent privileges (Minoia, 2018). Reflexivity is especially important for non-Indigenous or non-locals in the areas where I conduct my research (Rix, Barclay and Wilson, 2014; Mao *et al.*, 2016).

Through the reflexive practice described above, I have worked towards acknowledging my positionality by (a) being explicit about incorporating non-White international voices, including Caribbean interview participants, authors, and policy actors, and (b) distinguishing the international and Caribbean interview participant voices to ensure any other documents or the international perspectives are not overshadowing them. I have benefited by elevating Caribbean voices, reflecting, journaling, and engaging with EC SIDS residents and policy actors. However, I have more importantly contributed to practical research that (a) incorporates typically othered voices and experiences in GEP and (b) other disciplines' methods aligned with GEP, which I believe is even more critical.

### **Geographic Region**

The Eastern Caribbean Small Island Developing States, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines were selected as sites of interest because the UN has given special attention to SIDS for development (UNESCO, 2015a). Additionally, they are geographic neighbors and have committed to harmonizing their education policies to allow seamless migration between the two nations (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2016). While the two countries have made efforts to work collectively towards development, they have unique development histories (i.e., the French and British colonized Grenada almost a hundred years earlier than St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada experienced a socialist revolution that led to a rejection of Western hegemonic institutions (Lewis, Benoit and Lewis, 2020)). Their differences made a compelling case for comparing them through CPA and are explored more in Chapter II: Historical Analysis of the Caribbean Education Policy Space.

## Participants

Six aid workers shared their experiences with program management evidence-based approaches (see Interviewing Process for selection). I interviewed each aid worker for 60 minutes with a semi-structured interview protocol, covering diverse topics, including education, policymaking, and EBA, guided by their experience. I anonymized all participants' names and locations at their request. Each participant selected a self-chosen pseudonym, and their organizations and general locations were anonymized to provide anonymity (i.e., [location] or [IO] is used in place when the participants named their organization or country they work in) at their request. Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger (2015) provide a detailed analysis of the usefulness of anonymity as default confidentiality and the surrounding discourses but confirm the importance of anonymizing information when requested by participants. Anonymity is essential in EC SIDS, as IOs often only have between one and 20 staff members, and the risk of professional repercussions if identified is high.

### *Participant Backgrounds*

All participants identified as women. One man offered to participate yet could not due to COVID-19 complications. Half were women of color, born and raised in the areas where they worked. Four had experience within the Eastern Caribbean policy system; all had experience in SIDS and had worked in an advisory role in policymaking at some point. As non-profit workers, they all have experience in each project lifecycle, from securing funding to the final project report, including impact evaluations and project reporting. Each also had experience with the “what works” agenda and evidence-based approaches in practice and policymaking through engaging in developing best practices, implementing best practices, or writing policies for establishing best practices.

**Table 1.**

*Participants’ Pseudonyms, Race, Work Status, and Role in GEP*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Caribbean or International Staff</b>	<b>Role in GEP</b>
OJ	BIPOC	Caribbean	Non-profit Leader & Education Policy Advisor
Star	BIPOC	Caribbean	Youth Non-profit Leader
Rose	BIPOC	Caribbean	Educator and Policy Advisor
Miranda	White	International	Educator and Evaluator
Alice	White	International (10+ years in SIDS)	Director and Head of Agency
Justice	White	International (10+ years in region)	Educator and Evaluator

*Note: Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC)*

OJ runs a non-profit advising government official policy in her region. She practices evidence-based approaches and advocates for increased partnerships between community organizations and the government. Star is a rising youth ambassador in the Eastern Caribbean, advancing education equality in some of the Small Island Developing States. She also runs a collaborative non-profit with her colleagues where they advise the ministry on many youth and education topics and is well versed in EBA. Rose is an educator, researcher, and advisor to the Ministry of Education in her region. Miranda is an educator and evaluation expert who works with Indigenous populations. She has experience with education program quality improvement and reporting in small and large non-profits around the globe. Alice is a seasoned aid worker with decades of experience establishing nations' development projects, including more than ten years of experience in her current country. While working through C-suite management positions up to regional Vice-President, she has experience in program management, quality improvement, and policymaking. Justice is an international aid worker who migrated to the Eastern Caribbean over a decade ago and has gained management experience in education projects in her area. She is on loan from an IO to advise the Ministry of Education on practice standards and conducts program evaluations to establish best practices within the country.

I include aid workers' voices as much as possible to highlight their words, knowledge, and experiences in GEP (Young and Diem, 2017; 2018). In addition to interviewing six aid workers about their experience with EBA in global education programs, I have analyzed international, regional, and national policy and policy-related documents in CEPS. The following section details these additional data.

## **Data Collected**

Critical policy analysis with a historical analysis requires reviewing original policy texts, relevant information about the policy creation process, and socio-historical information about the policy process (Fairclough, 2013; Young and Reynolds, 2017). The historical analysis provides a socio-historical contextualization of the policy landscape through thick descriptions (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The secondary data collected to inform the approach were policy documents particular to the Eastern Caribbean region, or CEPS, including strategic plans, regional policy guidelines, news articles, journal articles, books, statements, documentaries, recorded speeches, and publicly available transcripts. Chapter V: Thematic

Analysis Findings presents the findings of a thematic analysis of the six interviews and twenty-five policy and policy-related documents (totaling 31 documents).

### ***Policies***

I included nine policy documents as part of the CPA. Table 2 describes each policy document. The policies included two international agendas: Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly, 2015) and Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2015a)). Additionally, I included three regional policy frameworks to frame the Caribbean Education Policy Space: the Pillars for Partnership and Progress (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000), the Caribbean Education Sector Strategy 2020 (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000), and the OECS' Education Sector Strategy 2016-2026 (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2016)). Lastly, I included four national policies, two from each country, which describe education policy in the area. The two policies from Grenada were the National Sustainable Development Plan 2020-2025 (Government of Grenada, 2019) and the National Youth Policy 2003 (Government of Grenada, 2003). The final two policies from St. Vincent and the Grenadines included the National Economic and Social Development Plan 2013-2025 (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2013) and Education Sector Policy 2014-2019 (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2014).

**Table 2.***Policies Included in the CPA*

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Citation &amp; Commissioning Agency</b>	<b>Publication Title</b>
<b>Global Policies</b>	2015	United Nations General Assembly (2015)	Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
	2015	UNESCO (2015b)	Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4
<b>Regional Policies</b>	2000	Jules, Miller and Armstrong (2000) – Commissioned by the World Bank	Caribbean Education Sector Strategy Vision 2020
	2000	Miller, Jules and Thomas (2000) – Commissioned by the OECS	Pillars for Partnership and Progress
	2016	Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (2016)	Education Sector Strategy 2012-2026
<b>National Policies</b>	2010	Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2013)	St. Vincent and the Grenadines National Economic and Social Development Plan 2013-2025
	2014	Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2014)	Education Sector Development Plan St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2014-2019
	2003	Government of Grenada (2003)	National Youth Policy 2003
	2019	Government of Grenada (2019)	National Sustainable Development Plan 2020-2035

***Policy-Related Documents: Statements and Reports***

I identified and included five UNESCO reports and eleven policy actor statements for the CPA. Table 3 details each of these reports and statements. The policy-related documents included a speech and statements by Dr. Didacus Jules, Head of the OECS (Jules, 2008; 2010; 2020a; 2020b), statements by international and regional World Bank representatives (Kim, 2020; Burunciuc, 2021), UNESCO leaders (Pedro, 2021) and regional Ministers of Education (Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2014; 2017; 2022). Five UNESCO-commissioned reports on the state of the CEPS were included (Miller, 2000; UNESCO, 2015b; 2015c; 2018; 2021).

**Table 3.***Reports and Statements Included in the CPA*

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Citation &amp; Commissioning Agency</b>	<b>Publication Title</b>
<b>Reports</b>	2000	Miller (2000) & International Steering Committee for Education for All UNESCO	Education For All in the Caribbean in the 1990s Retrospect And Prospect
	2022	UNESCO (2021)	Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/2022: Non-state actors in education. Who chooses? Who loses?
	2022	ECLAC, UNESCO and UNICEF (2022)	Education in Latin America and the Caribbean at a Crossroads: Regional Monitoring Report SDG 4 – Education 2030
	2015	UNESCO (2015a)	Regional Overview: Latin America and the Caribbean
	2015	UNESCO (2015c)	Small Island Developing States Overview
<b>Statements</b>	2008	Jules (2008)	Rethinking Education for the Caribbean: A Radical Approach
	2010	Jules (2010) & CXC	Rethinking Education in the Caribbean
	2014	Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean (2014)	Education for All in Latin America and the Caribbean: Assessment of Progress and Post-2015 Challenges
	2017	Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean (2017)	Declaration of Buenos Aires
	2019	Jules (2019) & OECS	Remarks by the Director General of the OECS, Dr. Didacus Jules, on the 38th Anniversary of the Independence of Antigua and Barbuda
	No date	Jules (no date) & OECS	Fragmentation in the Face of Globalisation
	2020	Jules (2020) & OECS	Remarks by the Director General of the OECS, Dr. Didacus Jules, 5th Council of Education Ministers Meeting
	2020	Kim (2020) & World Bank Group	The New Horizon in Education: From Access to Quality - Speech given at the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea
	2021	Burunciuc (2021) & World Bank in Latin America, and the Caribbean	An Investment in Education Can Fuel the Caribbean's Growth
	2021	Pedro (2021) & UNESCO Institute in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean	Time to Embed Higher Education into the International Education Agenda
2022	Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean (2022)	Declaration of Buenos Aires	

Sections focusing on evaluation, evidence generation, dissemination, and education policy/policymaking were given special attention, especially within the policy and reports, as they were several hundred pages long. I selected parts of the reports relating to evaluation and education, mainly from the introduction, education chapters, and monitoring and evaluation sections. The coding and themes presented, therefore, are not exhaustive. The thirty-one documents represent a limited set of themes

explicitly focused on evaluation and evidence generation. For example, there is a genuine presence of globalization concepts, gender parity, and a push of neoliberal solutions for GEP programming throughout many policies; however, the policies and policy-related documents rarely discuss these concepts concerning evaluation or EBA. While this is an interesting gap to explore further, their disconnect from the evaluation made their interrogation outside the scope of this thesis. I only included policy and policy-related documents published after 2000 to focus on GEP's push toward EBA. Education policies adopted before the “what works” movement in the early 2000s are not included in the scope, including the Foundation for the Future policy guidelines for the Caribbean Region (Miller *et al.*, 1990).

### ***Interviewing Process***

Interviews were conducted over the phone and WhatsApp in the fall of 2021 due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and poor telecommunications infrastructure in many EC SIDS. I utilized a snowball sampling approach to identify participants (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022), as identifying potential candidates through social media, emailing, and cold-calling proved unsuccessful. Once I identified a potential participant, I asked each to identify others interested.

Before interviewing, I piloted different questions that would help build rapport and delve into evidence-based practices most efficiently with Caribbean and international development experts. The interviews were audio-recorded, and I took notes throughout the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014) and stored them on an encrypted drive during transcription. No field notes or video recordings were collected. I interviewed each aid worker for 60 minutes, covering diverse topics, including education, policymaking, and EBA, guided by their interests and experience. The interviews were semi-structured discussions to ensure their voices remained centered (Taylor, 1997) and additionally to establish their experience in the field (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022) as part of *doing rapport* building (Duncombe and Jessop, 2012).

I transcribed the interview with the support of Otter.ai, doing two pass-throughs for corrections, formatting, anonymizing, and pseudonymizing participants' information. As a part of member checking, the transcripts were provided to the interviewees to check for accuracy and confirmation (Marshall, Rossman and Blanco, 2022). Once confirmed, I uploaded the transcripts to NVivo, an established Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software for coding and analysis, which aids the researcher in handling substantial

amounts of data (Zamawe, 2015). In the next section, I clarify the coding and theming process of the thematic analysis of the CPA.

## **Data Analysis**

Using Allison and Zelikow's (1999) policy studies' foundational work, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, as a guide, I conducted a constructivist iterative policy landscape analysis to understand education policy in CEPS. The landscape is analyzed through multiple lenses, offering a deeper understanding of the policy environment, including influences by policy actors and ideas in the field. While Allison and Zelikow focus on applying theoretical frames to the policy event to explain policy decisions retroactively, I approach the CEPS policy analysis through the evaluation stage. Through evaluation, I focus on how evidence influences policymaking and policymaking influences the structure and dissemination of evaluation rather than the decision itself.

I conducted multiple rounds of coding and theming all interviews, policy, and policy-related data until finalizing a group of themes that exhibit central paradoxes within GEP in CEPS (see Appendix I – Final Coding and Themes).

### ***Coding and Thematic Analysis***

After data was collected, the analysis took place in five phases, based on Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to thematic analysis and aligned with Saldaña's (2016) approach to coding qualitative research.

The six phases of a thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2022), include:

- Phase 1 – Data Familiarization and Writing Familiarization Notes
- Phase 2 – Systematic Data Coding
- Phase 3 – Generating Initial Themes from Coded and Collated Data
- Phase 4 – Developing and Reviewing Themes
- Phase 5 – Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes
- Phase 6 – Writing the Report (Meehan, 2021)

The phases were not linear but iterative and coding used inductive approaches to make sense of the data. Thus, the process was inductive, iterative, and nonlinear (Marshall *et al.*, 2022), as I intentionally coded and themed interview data and voices from the region before including international policy actors and policy documents. Codes functioned as identifiers of essential and recurring information, first as short-hand terminology (i.e., education, evaluation, international development) and later grouped into categories of common characteristics (Saldaña, 2016).

**Phase 1 – Data Familiarization and Writing Familiarization Notes.** Familiarization with the data started during the data collection phase and continued through interview transcription. During the literature review, I identified core policies and literature for the historical analysis and CPA (Young and Reynolds, 2017) and requested the most recent policy documents from the Ministries of Education of nation-states and regional offices in the EC. Throughout my literature review, I kept a journal of notes that I coded as part of analytic memos and a reflective journal (Braun and Clarke, 2022), which helped guide me through the coding process in Phase 3. After completing the interviews and pausing (Patel, 2016), I searched the research to ensure I had the most recently published information about CEPS before coding. I included additional literature, and a second round of data collection followed. Once all information was collected, I added interview transcripts, policy, and policy-related documents to EndNote, a referencing software, and then imported the resources to NVivo.

**Phase 2 – Systematic Data Coding.** Phase two moved from data familiarization to subsequent rounds of coding, which Saldaña (2016) calls primary-cycle coding. As part of the first coding round, I coded the participant data with thematic, In Vivo, and evaluative coding techniques. With each iterative coding round, I grouped codes into thematic categories but did not condense the codes to ensure regrouping would be possible in future rounds. This process relied heavily on definitions of coding and process by Saldaña (2016) and theming by Braun and Clarke (2022) and Meehan (2021).

Before entering codes into NVivo software, I compared the codes used throughout the literature review. For example, “harmonization” to describe policy diffusion practices in the EC was used to code collaborative policy approaches in the policy documents. After manual coding, I entered the codes for the interview and policy actors’ speeches and statements in NVivo. I used that coding scheme to auto-code the rest of the policy and policy-related documents. I then completed two rounds of adjusting and manually coding the policy and policy-related documents in NVivo. By coding the policies and policy-related documents after the interviews and statements, I gave weight to the voices of policy actors over the policies in my coding schema (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022; Meehan, 2021).

I designed conceptual maps throughout this process to visualize the coding connections and relevance, which Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest are essential tools in thematic analysis. Once I had entered all codes, but before the first round of categorization was complete, I debriefed with colleagues, available interview participants, and expert researchers on my process and the codes I used to ensure

accuracy as part of my interrater verification process described further in section Trustworthiness and Authenticity.

**Phase 3- Generating Initial Themes from Coded and Collated Data.** Phase three coding consisted of what Saldaña (2016) calls secondary-cycle coding, where patterns and themes are identified, and codes are organized into interpretive concepts (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The criteria for theming were (a) relevance to the thesis (i.e., related to evaluation, evidence, policymaking, global/regional/national education policy and practice, and post- and decolonial foci) and (b) ideas presented by Caribbean participants, and (c) repetition (i.e., how often it was discussed). I coded the policy and policy-related documents using the codes and topic summaries developed from the interviews. Additionally, the second coding round included my analytic memos and reflective journal, my interview notes, and notes from informed conversations with development experts completed while undertaking this thesis. Grouping potential themes into topic summaries (Braun and Clarke, 2022), I presented them to participants and other critical friends to ensure accuracy. Finally, I completed another round of coding in NVivo that grouped codes into said themes.

**Phase 4 – Developing and Reviewing Themes.** The interview data and policy documents were compared and prepared for final analysis (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). I utilized concept maps often during this phase to iteratively organize the inductive codes and their topic summaries into codes. Two potential categories emerged presenting paradoxes relating to GEP employing EBA.

**Phase 5 – Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes.** Phase five of coding involved using the iterative findings from the interviews, policy-related documents, and policy documents to triangulate emergent patterns. I paid particular attention to the data's actors, ideas, and institutions reflected in my final analysis (Diem *et al.*, 2014). After pausing, which Patel (2016) suggests is necessary when seeking knowledge and researching through a decolonizing lens, I finalized three representative categories as themes. In defining the themes, their concepts were easier to identify. See the final coding figures in Appendix I – Final Coding and Themes.

**Phase 6 – Writing the Report, presented in the Findings Chapter.** Phase 6 included writing up the final themes of Phase 5 into Chapter V: Thematic Analysis Findings. While writing the report, I left the themes intact and reflected on what was missing and not discussed within the themes; while not exhaustive, those topics are included in the section Gaps in the Themes Presented.

### ***Coding Frequencies***

Stone (2020a) argues that it is equally important to understand what counts (i.e., what data is), as well as the process of counting (i.e., how data is counted). Applying this concept to my study, I utilize the coding frequency tool offered by NVivo as an alternative perspective. Coding frequencies relate to the number of references connected to a specific code (Radivojevic, 2023), and analyzing frequencies allows users to quantify text and visualize data more clearly. Stone (2020b) argues that data visualization is becoming an essential part of storytelling in policy analysis; quantifying qualitative data allows us to visualize, describe, and analyze the data from alternative perspectives. The quantification of the code is not as important as the ability to present that information visually, which helps translate and engage users who might otherwise find data inaccessible. A final section of Chapter V, Coding by Numbers – the Coding Frequencies looks at the coding frequencies of each theme and sub-theme disaggregated by document type and speaker (i.e., Caribbean vs. international policy actors). I normalized the coding frequencies of this CPA by using percentages rather than absolute reference figures.

### ***Thematic Analysis and Coding Conclusion***

After familiarizing myself with the data and selecting the necessary policy-related and policy documents (Phase 1), I translated and manually coded the interview data, conducting member checking and controlling my codes against previously developed codes from the literature (Phase 2). After multiple rounds of controlling coding with expert colleagues, a first coding scheme was generated based on participant interviews (Phase 3), then adjusted after two rounds of coding policy-related and policy documents with the support of concept and thematic maps. By developing a coding schema from the participant interviews, controlling against the local policy actor statements, I centered the aid worker and Caribbean voices within the thematic framework (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022; Kvale and Brinkmann, 1996). I eliminated codes unrelated to EBA, evaluators, and GEP, highlighted codes specific to only Caribbean participants, and created a first round of potential thematic categories (Phase 4). I consulted participants and experts in international development to ensure agreement by providing feedback at each stage of the coding process, category and theme development, and consultation throughout the writing process. The final theming (Phase 5) came after a pause (Patel, 2016), and I reconsidered my themes through a decolonial lens, taking time to consider additional perspectives, assessing my blank spots (Thompson, 2012; Wagner, 1993), and asking the

questions posed by Tuhiwai Smith to counter coloniality (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) (see Decolonial Lens and Coloniality section for questions). In Phase 5, I also utilized NVivo's auto-coding feature, with my previous codes and new themes, as a guide to auto-code all interview, policy, and policy-related documents to ensure coding was standardized across all documents to ensure the validity of coding (Meehan, 2021). During the write-up of the themes in my thesis (Phase 6), I consulted IO and Caribbean experts and reflected on how to understand the presented information, to which the wave metaphor was adopted.

## **Ethical Issues**

I identified interview participants through a snowball sampling method and offered multiple opportunities to opt out of participation throughout the interview, data transcribing, and data coding process. The participants had no personal or professional obligations to participate in the study. Additionally, before participating in the semi-structured interviews, I secured ethical approval from my university and informed consent from each participant (see Appendix II – Ethical Approval).

I engaged participants throughout the transcription, coding, theming, and write-up process to ensure consent, offer opportunities to exit the process, and, as a measure of decoloniality, ensure their voices and experiences were represented with fidelity. Providing participants with this opportunity is a form of member checking (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022; Merriam *et al.*, 2016). I provided an additional layer of confidentiality by allowing participants to choose their pseudonyms and control their anonymized data, following Saunders *et al.* (2015) guidance.

Additional considerations around presenting a decolonial method are how the framing of the research, questions, participation, and shaping of that interpretation is in the hands of the White researcher. I engaged with decolonial scholars and referenced the Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics (Decoloniality Europe, 2013) to ensure I am considering my position in the colonial power matrix as a Western researcher depicting typically excluded persons (Castillo, Rubis and Pattathu, 2023). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I struggled with this constantly and engaged EC SIDS professionals as part of my interrater reliability process to ensure that the limitations from my Western perspective did not limit the codes I chose, the themes I landed on, and my interpretation of events (see Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity Statement).

This study adopted an interpretivist and interpretive approach as a contribution to the field, as I intended to work through decades of neoliberal conditioning to faithfully be able to present a frame of the Caribbean perspective. Decoloniality was only one of the lenses used, as I have much unlearning to do to deploy a decolonial lens. However, it is critical to exemplify that the tool does not have to be done in lieu of other methodological tools but can be used as a counterbalance to other GEP research.

### **Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

This thesis took various measures to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research, including member checking, snowball sampling, and increased confidentiality practices, which I described in the last section. By engaging participants thoroughly, interrater verification and building a coding scheme based on participants' voices that informed the coding practice of the rest of the dataset established dependability and confirmability, making the data easier to verify with outside control. I consider the reliability of the coding schema a part of data triangulation. Lastly, while COVID-19 was a significant factor in how I was able to design, undertake, and ultimately analyze the information presented in this thesis, it also offered me pauses (Patel, 2016) or opportunities to walk away, reflect, and then return to the data through a different lens. As Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) and Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest, pauses can also be seen as an alternative type of triangulation called crystallization, where researchers can check the veracity of their claims through different lenses after an extended period.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Engaging in a thematic analysis approach creates an inherent risk of the research not being reproducible or generalizable. However, the multi-lens approach I took in this thesis, where all policy levels provided (a) multiple lenses to view the data, (b) several primary and secondary data sources to verify the data, and (c) a well-documented research process, I have overcome this hurdle. Additionally, while the interview sample size was small, it included persons from the EC region and others working outside the region in SIDS in general, which could increase generalizability. While I believe the thesis, in its format, may provide generalizable conclusions for SIDS, I question generalizability as an essential purpose for evaluation in GEP. Additionally, the lack of research that exists on developing contexts and global education programs and international influence in them, on them, and the soft power they yield on evaluation is deficient. To overcome this hurdle, I used as many perspectives as I could to analyze the current

environment. However with any critical policy analysis, this thesis can and should only represent but one perspective and position, at one specific time.

A hurdle my thesis had to overcome was the inherent limitation of an outsider researching a group of people rather than from the inside (Bukamal, 2022). While I have worked in SIDS and am an insider in GEP, not having connections or experience in the region and conducting research from outside the region, my process was complicated by an outsider positionality. I committed to making my research biases and blank spots explicit using a multiple-lens approach with a decolonial lens. By engaging typically othered voices and experiences, I aimed to edgewalk between the etic and emic spaces, as defined by Beals, Kidman and Funaki (2020). Through my research perspective, or etic, the thesis was grounded in a familiar framework with my chosen questions. However, participant interviews and policy actors' statements provide the emic perspective.

COVID-19 restrictions also meant that my access to essential participants, policies, and policy-related documents for review was restricted to what was publicly available, since movement restrictions kept many outside of the Eastern Caribbean region. However, this is often the position from which many external evaluators conduct their evaluations (e.g., home-based with only publicly available information), and I have overcome this by aiming to conduct research from a more participatory approach that centers a community of voices, aiming for research *for* rather than *on* the EC SID region (Atkins, 2013). I aimed to achieve this by including as much documentation as possible and centering the local voices, including participants and local and regional policy actors' speeches and statements.

## **Chapter V: Thematic Analysis Findings**

This chapter presents the findings of a thematic analysis conducted on interview data, policies, and policy-related documents specific to evaluation in the GEP landscape as part of a critical policy analysis approach. Chapter VI: Discussion analyzes the information presented in this chapter. The thematic analysis area of focus is two EC SIDS, Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. I have employed a multiple-lens approach, which allows me to evaluate the selected text and discourse through two distinct lenses and establish themes to interpret findings. Stone's (2002; 2012) policy paradox and decolonial theory are the two lenses employed.

After multiple iterative rounds of coding the interview, policy, and policy-related text, I began to identify categories. I coded the interview data and Caribbean policy statements first, which allowed me to develop a schema with common terminology and areas of foci. I then applied this schema to all other documents. This process ensured that all codes developed were grounded in aid workers or local experience and voices, a requirement for a decolonial lens. Once I coded all 31 data sources, I identified three paradoxes in the data, guided by the policy paradox framework, suggesting contradictions in all policy choices. Lastly, by employing NVivo coding software, I identified coding frequencies, which helped me create a hierarchy of sub-themes in each overarching theme (more details on the exact coding process are detailed in the Coding and Thematic Analysis).

This chapter presents the findings of the coding, theming, and data analysis process. The paradoxes are presented first, along with their sub-themes, foregrounding the voices of the participants and policy actors, giving a thick description of the policy landscape (Denzin, 2001; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). These sections are followed by an overall analysis of coding frequency data, disaggregated by document type (i.e., interview/participant, statements, policies, and reports), to engage with the text through its function (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). I analyze the patterns and gaps of the disaggregated data through a coding frequency analysis presented at the end of this chapter.

### **Systemic Paradox**

The first theme comprises four sub-themes that describe GEP's institutional barriers, which limit the evaluator's ability to generate and collect meaningful evidence and counter the UN's evaluative overall goal of achieving a data revolution. The paradox speaks to the systemic issues of evaluating and designing

policies at international, regional, and national scales. I discuss these barriers in each sub-theme and relate to (1.1) the government's capacity to fund and evaluate their national education systems, (1.2) the lack of genuine stakeholder engagement, (1.3) accountability frameworks, (1.4) funding and agenda issues relating to outside organizations involvement in national education systems.

Overall, the systemic paradox relates to the GEP community's collective call to engender a "data revolution," the pursuit of a data-driven agenda-setting and policymaking approach. Data usage for policy or practice has many names, like data-driven, impact-driven, or evidence-based. To amplify that approach into a revolution, the UN asked the IO community to generate meaningful data and employ it in all facets of development work, and that goal is at the heart of the systemic paradox, where it conflicts with the status quo institutions and barriers already in place.

The collection, analysis, and use of data will be further strengthened by encouraging a 'data revolution' ... to address current data gaps, agencies need to improve coordination, including strengthening existing inter-agency groups and establishing new ones, to develop harmonized methodologies for deriving common estimates based on available data, while developing new comparative data sources as necessary (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 65).

In 2015, the United Nations called for a data revolution that would encourage use of multiple sources and enable inclusion of aspects previously neglected in global monitoring, such as equity. In recent years, the GEM Report has focused on ways to make more efficient and effective use of information from multiple survey sources to support SDG 4 monitoring (UNESCO, 2021, p. 218).

The concept of a data revolution trickled down to regional policy plans, which can be seen in the education strategy policy documents outlining the essential elements of a databank to store lessons learned to share for informed decision-making across the EC SIDS.

Such a collaborative approach to school governance will result in evaluation utilising reflective practice and external reviews, coupled with the building of robust data and knowledge management systems for decision making. This should be made a priority. (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2016, p. 31).

The systemic paradox is most intricately connected to the first research question: what is the role of the evaluator in GEP? We understand evaluation and the evaluator's stance within the GEP environment through these four sub-themes. Just like looking at the sea from the shore, this paradox lays out the foundation of the GEP seascape.

### ***Sub-theme 1.1: Supportive & Financially Independent Government***

The first sub-theme (1.1) relates to issues around the ability of governments to design, implement, and fund their educational systems without the support of outside donors or IOs. The discussions captured in this theme center around the government, its focus, priorities, and its ability to support its national education system. The focus of the discussions on the government is what makes it distinct from sub-theme 1.4, which speaks to the challenges of funding hurdles and competing agendas of governments and IOs. While government independence is not explicitly related to GEP, evaluation, or decolonial methodologies, the government's ability to function without exogenous influence was linked to the perception of their ability to conduct meaningful evaluations, develop effective education policies, and control IOs within their borders.

The policy document text related to 1.1 focused primarily on governments and their responsibility and needed leadership to fund national education systems, programs, and interventions and establish partnerships to achieve those goals.

We affirm that the fundamental responsibility for successfully implementing this agenda lies with governments... Education is a public good, of which the state is the duty bearer (UNESCO, 2015a, pp. 6 and 28).

In contrast, statements focused more on the skills, relationships, and partnerships necessary for a robust education system grounded in international frameworks and part of a comprehensive approach to development. An example of this is from the regional policy framework set out by the Latin American and Caribbean Ministers of Education, where they ground the priorities of national education systems in the international education policy, Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015a), and global development framework, SDGs (UN General Assembly, 2015).

Education is an essential condition for peace, sustainable development, socioeconomic growth, decent jobs, gender equality, prevention of discrimination in all its forms, responsible citizenship, health, and well-being. As such, we recognize the responsibility of the States and the key role that education plays as a catalyst of sustainable development and instrument for the enactment of the other SDGs by 2030 (Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2022, p. 1).

Interview participants also discussed the government's role in sustainably running national education systems, but their attention was primarily focused on the role of government champions or supporters to effect positive policy change.

What we find works best, as I think anywhere else, will be to have a champion in the government who you can rely on to get certain map plans passed. Or, to get some of your agendas pushed, if you need to present things to cabinet (OJ, 2021).

The participants also highlighted the barriers to effecting policy, irrespective of the strength of their data, in SIDS, including the bottlenecks in small governments, technology challenges, and lack of sharing information. Star (2021), for example, stated, “we have a government that does the bare minimum for students, and for education, [education] is not a priority at all.” The barriers to developing solid relationships and effecting change include siloed government departments, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and financial constraints that limit the government’s ability to invest in education opportunities. These barriers were seen as impediments to controlling evaluation within GEP programming.

### ***Sub-theme 1.2: Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable***

Many of the documents in the CPA discussed stakeholder engagement or the concept that local beneficiaries and actors take part in the design, implementation, or evaluation of GEP policies, interventions, or programs. The consensus among the policy and policy-related documents was that stakeholder engagement is essential to the success of education systems, but the policy actors’ statements and interviews countered that with their frustrations about that engagement seeming hollow and performative.

The examples drawn from the policy documents demand that stakeholders and civil society members be engaged in all parts of the GEP process, including evaluation and data collection with phrases like “collaborative partnership” and “participatory governance.”

All countries and all stakeholders, *acting in collaborative partnership*, will implement this plan...As we embark on *this collective journey*, we pledge that no one will be left behind... We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity (UN General Assembly, 2015, pp. 1 - 2, my emphasis).

We are determined to establish legal and policy frameworks that promote accountability and transparency as well as *participatory governance and coordinated partnerships* at all levels and across sectors, and to uphold the right to participation of all stakeholders...Planning, implementation and monitoring can benefit from the support of strong, multifaceted partnerships that bring together all key actors...Civil society Organizations (CSOs)... need to be *engaged and involved at all stages, from planning through to monitoring and evaluation, with their participation institutionalized and guaranteed* (UNESCO, 2015a, pp. 9 and 58, my emphasis).

Stakeholders, like civil society organizations, are depicted in the policies as playing a crucial role as evidence-based policy advocates, “undertaking evidence-based advocacy, scrutinizing spending and ensuring transparency in education governance and budgeting” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 58). M&E specialists, too, are

stakeholders whose role it is to generate and disseminate meaningful local research and then function as data translators to policymakers:

The **research community** has an important contribution to make in education development in general and policy dialogue in particular. It can: (1) develop policy-relevant research, including action research, to facilitate the achievement of the targets, and make knowledge on education available in a useable form for policy-makers; (2) develop local and national sustainable capacity for qualitative and quantitative research; (3) help chart progress, propose options or solutions and identify best practices that are innovative, scalable and transferable (UNESCO, 2015, p. 59, emphasis in text).

While the regional policies also support an engaged stakeholder population, they define stakeholders not by their participation within the system but by their support for government action. The OECS (2016, p. 25) education policy states, “stakeholder involvement and buy-in are paramount for the successful implementation of this strategy.” SVG and Grenada both conducted significant public consultations to develop their education policies. Stakeholder engagement, in these instances, is defined by consultation and buy-in, creating a “sense of ownership” and not necessarily real or meaningful ownership.

Accordingly, consultations were held throughout St. Vincent and the Grenadines and with Vincentians in major regional and international cities, thereby providing extensive opportunities for Vincentians at every level to make an input. This *provided citizens with a voice in the development process, an approach which it was felt would lead to greater “buy-in” and a sense of ownership* (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2013, p. 11, my emphasis).

A public consultation framework and communication strategy were developed... The objectives were to: (a) inform and educate the public about the National Plan; (b) encourage, enthuse and enable all segments of the society to express their views and contribute their ideas for the Plan’s formulation; (c) stir the public’s passion to pursue the Plan successfully; and (d) promote buy-in and country ownership of the Plan (Government of Grenada, 2019, p. 3).

These policies highlight a trend of regional and international policies focusing on stakeholder responsibility, whereas local policies focus on incorporating more stakeholder feedback. These definitions of engagement directly contrast policy actors’ description of engagement, which focuses less on all stakeholders’ responsibilities to meet the GEP goals than on areas where stakeholder needs and voices can be incorporated.

Education reform is literally everybody’s business... *Partnership is mandatory* as a result of the interests of the large number of stakeholders involved with the education enterprise... Each *stakeholder group must actively participate in the reform process in order to ensure that its vital interests are included in considerations of decision-making* that charts the course of the reforms... the management and administration of education should be characterized by (b)road representation and participation in the decision making bodies and processes (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000, pp. 11 and 40, my emphasis).

The local actors' conclusion is more aligned with the interview participants' take on stakeholder engagement and aligns with the locally engaging policies, where the focus is on stakeholders' desire for democratic governance and frustration with performative engagement and token representation.

We do feel like a lot of time [our policy recommendations are] not really heeded...they are now trying to include a youth representative at tables on where these discussions are being had... So that we can "influence the decision." *But what we found is, it kind of feels more like tokenism...* most of the time, we're kind of just there for good looks...or if it's very unchartered territory for them (like social media) then they want to hear all what we have to say (Star, 2021, my emphasis).

Sometimes they ask for your views, and they collect data, but when the decisions are taken, you don't feel as if, you know, what persons would have voiced was really taken into consideration (Rose, 2021).

While most participants were critical of the government's engaging of all stakeholders, Rose offers a defense for the government's inability to incorporate all solutions offered by everyone:

You can't please all of the people all of the time... you know, [the government is] really trying to seek out ways so that it works well, for most. It won't work well for all...we have to do what works best for most of the people (Rose, 2021).

The sub-theme suggests that stakeholders are essential to GEP; however, they rarely engage in ways that could be considered participatory, co-produced, or power-sharing with decision-makers, and many feel their policy advice or "evidence" is ignored.

### ***Sub-theme 1.3: Government Accountability to Funders vs. Stakeholders & Beneficiaries***

The third sub-theme (1.3) captures the discourses around the government's perceived responsibility to donors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries, primarily through accountability measures. I took examples from regional policy documents, which focused further (43% more) on this sub-theme than the other sub-themes in the systemic paradox. The policies typically describe accountability as the stakeholder's ability to hold governments accountable.

The approach to accountability in a partnership must be that of mutual accountability. Each partner must be accountable to the others and all partners must hold each other to its part of the bargain, so to speak... What is advocated here is a system of *mutual accountability in which Ministries of Education, parents and communities, principals and teachers and their associations, and students hold each other mutually accountable* for the areas for which they have responsibility in the provision of basic education (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000, pp. 12 and 43, my emphasis).

Policy actor statements reiterate that accountability refers to the government's accountability to its stakeholders.

We commit to the strengthening and modernization of the institutional frameworks and governance of educational systems in our countries, so that they may promote accountability and transparency, and strengthen the participation of all partners involved at all levels of the education system (Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2017, p. 4).

However, participants' discourses contradict the descriptions in the policies and policy actor statements.

Participants describe a lack of feedback mechanisms and spaces to critique the government to see this vision as a reality.

We're not even touching on rural areas [who] almost do not have a voice at all (Star, 2021).

There are no legitimate checks on central government power to make sure that the policies are appropriate, well designed and well executed and meeting the needs of the people...the mechanism for them to sort of meaningfully raise those issues and have confidence that someone will address them, because they're part of the system ... I don't know anyone who's doing that well (Alice, 2021).

While the policy documents and actor statements describe the desire for a system where beneficiaries (i.e., the people they serve) hold all others accountable, the participants describe a drastically different environment. The dissension between the vision of the policy documents and statements versus the local actors is present in sub-theme 1.2, as policies describe a hopeful future of mutual accountability, and aid workers and local actors describe a state of GEP where voices are rarely heard.

#### ***Sub-theme 1.4: Outside Influence and Funding Challenges***

The fourth sub-theme focused on the outside agendas and funding that challenge the national government's ability to enact long-term national education plans and its own evaluation methods. Caribbean participants, international and regional policy documents, and reports were the primary contributors to this sub-theme, described in Coding by Numbers – the Coding Frequencies

A statement by the World Bank Group Director suggests that US\$40 billion has been granted to the Global South for education programming over the last 15 years. The programming has been implemented by their organization, the Global Partnership for Education, in over forty-two countries to establish and advance comprehensive primary and secondary education systems.

As the world's largest financier of education, the World Bank Group has invested \$40 billion in this sector over the past 15 years since our commitment in Dakar that no country with a credible plan for universal primary education would go unfunded. Soon after, we helped launch the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative – now the Global Partnership for Education – and have supported 42 countries through it (Kim, 2020).

OJ, a Caribbean program manager from an EC SID state, provided an alternative example to the World Bank's declaration of support to the Global South. She recounted a conference she attended where a World Bank representative was speaking,

I was in Antigua at a big conference... a representative of the World Bank said [that] over the last 20 years they [have given] the Caribbean US\$50 billion. So, me and my friends looked at [each other and] we were like, "you gave *who* \$50 billion? Where did that money go?" .... If you gave three of us US\$50 billion, there will be no poverty in the Caribbean. So, I guess most of it went into contracts and paying back the World Bank, right? (OJ, 2021).

Alice, an IO Director, also highlighted the inconsistencies in reported funding for education programming offered by IOs to the Global South.

I think that they count all the revenue they got, as money that's been invested in this country, when the vast majority never stayed here... they left [the country], I would say, I could argue in many ways, worse off than it was before they came (Alice, 2021).

In addition to counting all the funding offered in the country as support or aid, participants spoke of the conflicting agendas that IOs have with governments and their civil society partners, as IOs "cloak their objectives under development [goals]" (Alice, 2021) when, in actuality, IOs use their influence for diplomacy.

the politics of their position has caused them to compromise best practice... they miss critical opportunities to hold lawmakers to account because ultimately, they don't want to offend their partners... agencies can be well positioned [to make informed political decisions]. But they just, they consistently choose not to use their political capital in that way (Alice, 2021).

Alice's example also speaks to the inability of IOs to hold governments accountable for their development goals because of the conflicts inherent between development objectives and diplomacy priorities. Building on this perspective, Miranda also recounts an education referendum that failed, although it had majority stakeholder support, alluding to the fact that politics and not just funding might play a more significant role in the GEP landscape than the policy documents might suggest. She asks,

how do we get changes from the top down when it's so political and it's so mired in these, you know, when everyone agrees, everyone from the lawmakers to the teachers themselves, to the people in the Department of Education to the MPs all agree on so much of this, but no, like this one part, this political part [thwarts progress] (Miranda, 2021).

A second part of sub-theme 1.4. focuses on the barriers that GEP international policies and IO agendas solidify, making advancement in EC SIDS more challenging. Jules (2010) highlighted the challenge of EC SIDS to push the EFA agenda further past primary education standards, as the goals limited their grant opportunities and other support.

When the EFA, however, becomes a hegemonic construct that constitutes the *measure of all educational advancement in developing countries and on the basis of which international aid and lending to education will be prioritized*, the initiative becomes a fetter to those countries that have gone beyond the elemental prescriptions of the EFA. Caribbean States argued, for example, in 1990 in Jomtien that the concept of basic education around which the EFA revolves – should not be restricted to primary education but should be extended to include secondary education, on the grounds that global trends and the emergence of the knowledge society necessitated a more sophisticated conception of what should constitute a basic education. This was rejected as being too expansive and ultimately too expensive a notion (Jules, 2010, p. 7, my emphasis).

With the codified rules, local organizations and smaller nation-states feel pressured by IOs and international financiers to complete programming aligned with the IOs' mission, not their own.

Even though they might say, “Oh, you know, this is a partnership, you know, we really want to do work on the ground, what do you want?” We really know it's a – I hate to use the B word, which is bullying, but usually, you get bullied from international donors to do what they want to look good to mark off a box – that really doesn't make sense. And then the project is over, nothing gets done. At the same time, you have to write a report that says that US\$5 helped someone's economic lifestyle (OJ, 2021).

As a brand-new country, they didn't have the expertise to establish many of the systems that they needed to establish, they were dependent on donors for that... these players come to the table with, you know, tens of millions of and hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of influence. There aren't many entities in the world that can compete with [that] (Alice, 2021).

Lastly, while donors define the scope of the programming that EC SIDS could apply for, they only offer project-based or short-term programs, which was also a source of contention in the documents.

[Our goal is] to minimize ad-hocracy in education in the OECS and continue to replace it with a planned long-term approach with the built-in capacity for research, evaluation of progress and the ability to make needed adjustments (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000, p. 13).

Participants also echoed their frustration with short-term programming, or what Miller called the ad-hocracy of GEP aid, and lamented their frustration with the short-term nature of the system.

It's great to have like these temporary things, they give a little boost, but if it's not built into the structure of education system, then you know... it disappears (Justice, 2021).

I have observed that some of the changes being made are short lived, this adds frustration. And they are short lived because they were just programs. And it comes across as if you know, certain person is in that position, they have this idea, it's feasible, it's a good idea, right? It's implemented, not always tested, not always tested. And this is very important, but implemented, the person moves on, the program dies.... Like seasons of change and then [the program] just dies out (Rose, 2021).

### ***Summary of the Systemic Paradox***

The GEP landscape has institutional barriers that impede the system's goals of achieving a data revolution and speaks to the research question: What is the role of the evaluator in GEP? Those barriers include (a) governmental challenges in establishing and sustaining a nationwide education system, (b) a conflict between the desired stakeholder engagement and the reality of performative and token engagement practices, (c) accountability frameworks focused on funding rather than beneficiaries, and (d) conflicting funding and agenda issues when outside organizations engage in national education systems. Analyses around the coding frequencies and whether we can learn more by disaggregating the data by document types are presented in Coding by Numbers – the Coding Frequencies.

### **Technical Paradox**

The second theme, technical paradox, has encapsulated discussions on (a) the evaluation process, (b) generating evidence, and (c) sharing and disseminating information for better policy and practice. The three foci are (2.1) the broad support for basing policy and practice on informed decisions but difficulty in collecting meaningful data, (2.2) the usefulness of good monitoring and evaluation practice but the challenges in establishing those departments in GEP environments, and (2.3) where the hurdles of implementing evidence-based practices are discussed. A picture emerged around this theme that suggested donors control the evaluation process, the data generated, and the dissemination practice in GEP landscapes. I describe this donor-controlled environment of GEP as a tied-evaluation.

### ***Sub-theme 2.1: EBA's Importance & Data Limitations***

This sub-theme incorporated text relating to (a) the push for EBA at all policy levels, (b) the frustration of evaluators and policy actors with the difficulty of collecting meaningful evidence, and (c) the importance of sharing and disseminating lessons learned among CEPS. The consensus among all the documentation and interview data was that EBA is essential but challenging to do well. From policies to interview participants, the data-informed practice had full support.

Quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind. Such data is key to decisionmaking[sic] (UN General Assembly, 2015, p. 12).

We resolve to develop comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation systems in order to generate sound evidence for policy formulation and the management of education systems as well as to ensure accountability (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 11).

We are committed to helping countries translate data and evidence into action...using evidence-based frameworks to highlight the policies and institutions that matter most to promote learning for all...Increasingly, our work with countries focuses more strongly on results (Kim, 2020).

Evidence-based policymaking is beneficial, and I think that the country would benefit from it... I can't think of anything negative [about EBA] (Justice, 2021).

Evaluation is crucial. You can't do stuff and then not evaluate it, not reflect, not tweak, and change. That's insane... obviously, robust, and well-thought-through evaluation of programs is crucial (Miranda, 2021).

Evidence-based approaches become scrutinized when the discussion shifts from the theoretical to the practical. After saying she cannot see anything negative with EBA, Justice (2021), a program manager in an IO office, identifies the challenges to collecting data in small island states, a challenge discussed in all document types.

[EBA implementing] maybe the fact that smaller islands ... there's less evidence and regards to what policies might be appropriate for them... Do you want to represent something based on such little data? ... I just found so little data and evidence I had to really utilize research of other countries, and then the question is that culturally relevant, you know? (Justice, 2021).

The pernicious problem of inadequate and inconsistent statistical data posed difficulties for comparative analysis over time and among countries (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000, p. 5).

We don't do enough data analysis... the last record I saw from [5 years ago] ... So it's very hard to get an idea [or] estimation of what's even going on (Star, 2021).

Other issues discussed in sub-theme 2.1 were the challenges with conducting necessary evaluations due to funding restrictions, lack of capacity in the country office, or lack of prioritization by IOs.

I think [evaluation]'s often done very badly, very poorly. And I think it's done poorly in different ways. Like, I think the methodologies are often poor and ... colonial, but I mean, not appropriate to the context of the community that they are in... I think that they are also just done often like sloppily loosey goosey shoddy (Miranda, 2021).

I think it's really telling that if the organizations were truly committed to their development objectives, then they would have much greater ownership and much greater expertise in assessing whether the work that they're doing is effective (Alice, 2021).

Nevertheless, OJ points out that poor evidence does not have to be the norm. She argues for including other knowledge and experience sources and local evidence production to generate "informed assumptions."

If we want to develop, let's say, a 50-year plan for sustainable development in [my country], right, we would have already have [local nonprofit] ... they know when you go to the monitor and you will see the difference. So that in itself gives you a good baseline, to more or less have an informed assumption as to what could happen in the future (OJ, 2021).

Lastly, this sub-theme addresses issues with data dissemination, which donors often control. While policies highlighted the importance of sharing learning with regional partners, participants discussed the struggle to implement this vision.

The challenge for the education system is to *develop mechanisms for acquiring, generating, disseminating, and utilizing knowledge* – in short to play a lead role in the transformation into a learning society. The implication of this whole new paradigm involved applied research, flexibility in [education] (Miller, Jules and Thomas, 2000, p. 8, my emphasis).

For Justice, there are technical and personnel barriers to sharing information in her location, as many offices prefer not to share learnings their offices funded.

Research is done, but having it be accessible to — really not even just the general public, but the people in the ministries...evidence of anything is just really hard to get. And most of them are all outdated if you can find them.... Like, our whole ministry, they have two printers, and they're both [broken] right now. So, you literally have no digital access and no printing, for the whole country... you know, like evidenced based is great in theory, but like getting all the people on board... the other big issue, is ego, like people are very protective of their one little areas and they don't want to share that information (Justice, 2021).

Alice unpacks the idea that ego harms information sharing in an example where she describes an IO whose volunteers work within a Ministry of Education but fear sharing information that harms the ministry's reputation. Ultimately, she recounts, the data that gets shared is often misinformation.

[IO name] has a lot of volunteers, co-located in the Ministry of Education, and [they are], constantly struggling with the fact that their volunteers collect evidence, collect data, and then report back on their project that doesn't match the data of the ministry themselves. That the schools report back to the Ministry of Education...[IO] is continually making amends so that they don't offend the Ministry by disagreeing with them...they're actually involving their own volunteers in fraud and teaching them that the way to behave is to accommodate misinformation as a higher priority than actually truly identifying the problems and crafting reasonable solutions (Alice, 2021).

Rose, a Caribbean educator, and policy advisor suggested that data collected by IOs are not for local staff or national learning. Data is for the IOs, "Those things are put in the annual reports of those big organizations" (Rose, 2021).

### ***Sub-theme 2.2: M&E Importance & Limitations***

Sub-theme 2.2 was coded to talk and text data relating to (a) the control donors and international institutions have over reporting and (b) descriptions of evaluations whose data is used for marketing rather than building best practices. The consensus among all the documentation and interview data was that most data-generating activities were conducted to hold implementing agencies, donors, and governments accountable.

An example of data collection in GEP is the requirement of all UN member states to submit annual education statistics to the UNESCO Statistics Department on Education to inform the publication of the Global Monitoring report.

Countries should seek to improve the quality, levels of disaggregation, and timeliness of reporting to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. We also request that the Education for All Global Monitoring Report be continued as an independent Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report), hosted and published by UNESCO, as the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on the proposed SDG 4 and on education in the other proposed SDGs, within the mechanism to be established to monitor and review the implementation of the proposed SDGs (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 11).

While countries who signed the international framework committed to supplying the education data, GEP stakeholders lament the ever-increasing demand by donors, IOs, and regional and national policy controllers for more data—creating a kind of project or data fatigue among evaluators.

Particularly in the larger countries where there are multiple partners, there is need to critically assess areas where there may be duplication and consequent inefficiencies in the use of staff. This includes the need to stream-line activities to reduce the effects of “*project fatigue*”, which result from the varying guidelines and reporting demands of different agencies (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000, p. xiii, my emphasis).

The necessity to consistently report as a function of auditing or accountability puts policy actors and GEP staff on edge. Participants talked about their frustrations with being unable to speak the truth in reporting for fear of repercussions and losing funding.

I was just writing this report this morning to send off...one of the questions in the report... “What, what evidence do you have to show that conservation will actually happen?” And, I’m like, “Dude, this project is one year! I don’t know [t]hat.” But, you have to say something. And, if you said, [nothing], then is it because you fail? No. Well, you know, a tree doesn’t take a year to grow! (OJ, 2021).

We can get rewarded for being evidence based...[but] *you don’t always get rewarded for integrity* and honesty, and those sorts of things...my utopian vision of evaluation ... is to know what we did well and to learn from it... there can’t be ramifications (Miranda, 2021, my emphasis).

When evaluation is based on auditing and holding implementing agencies accountable and not on improving practice, evidence-based practice succeeds at a cost. As Miranda points out, sometimes that cost is honesty or integrity, which questions whether the evidence is worth it. Ultimately, there were no negative attitudes towards M&E practices or evidence-based approaches, except to say they are not prioritized enough.

### ***Sub-theme 2.3: EBA Implementation Hurdles***

This third sub-theme (2.3) comprises text that focuses on how donors, IOs, or governments prioritized data-driven decision-making, but also when there was frustration that EBA was stated as a goal but not funded or otherwise prioritized. In the policy documents, this is often exemplified in stating that M&E practices of IOs were part of managerial best practices but not a specific goal or objective. Not setting M&E as a goal often means funding is not specified for the activity, as it is assumed to be part of an implementing organization's best practice. The hurdle, therefore, is the lack of funding and prioritization by IOs of monitoring and evaluation activities, which lead to poor data and dissemination practices, exemplified in the first two sub-themes of this paradox. Policy and policy-related documents focus primarily on the lack of data available to conduct informed decision-making, where interview participants provided examples of getting support to conduct meaningful data collection.

I've always said, as soon as the donors make something a priority, the [IO] community will step up because they're chasing funds... [IOs] won't do it unless the donors have demonstrated that it's a critical – you know – something that they'll be critically assessed on. And then they'll invest in it (Alice, 2021).

Alice recounts a story of working for an IO who funded an education program in SIDS, and she asked the implementing partner about their progress. She asked the implementing partner whether they were achieving their organizational mission, which was not explicitly related to the education project (i.e., the project focused on establishing libraries, but the partner's mission was around early literacy). She recounts the conversation as:

Implementing Agency Representative (IAR): Well, we don't ask those questions, because no one's asked us to do it. The donors didn't ask us.

Alice: You have a literacy program, and you've invested in mobile libraries.... where's the measurement of whether the kids actually improved their reading?

IAR: We didn't have to report on that.

Alice: But that's the intent of the program.

IAR: But, but that's not what the donor asked for.

Alice: Don't you care? Don't you care if what you're doing is working?

Alice answered her question, though, recounting that “surprisingly, a lot of them don’t” (Alice, 2021).

Aligned with this example, OJ suggests that implementing partners who lack the skills to push back against donor requests are those without power in the GEP system.

I think, also, the reason why donors continue to do what they do in the region is because they don’t get push back. And what I tell people, ‘Listen, they want to look good too. Without you, there is no them. And everybody wants to say they’re doing philanthropy work. So, if you push back, then they will have to take stock, or tell them you don’t want their money.’ You know, that’s your best negotiating position is to walk away and mean it (OJ, 2021).

Policy texts highlight the importance of evidence-based, data-informed, or even informed assumptions. The challenge comes from the poor application of EBA, the inferior quality of collected data, and the lack of prioritization and adequate funding by IOs highlighted in this sub-theme.

### ***Summary of Technical Paradox***

Tied-evaluation complicates EBA through the donor controlling the data generation process and dissemination. The technical paradox theme looked at the conflicts between the goals of conducting quality evaluation practices, with the limitations placed on evaluators by donors and the GEP field requirements (i.e., annual reporting to UNESCO and conducting impact assessments). This theme, through varied perspectives of the interview participants, touches on the third research question: what are the aid workers’ perceptions of the role and usefulness of evaluation for better development practice?

### **Conceptual Paradox**

The conceptual paradox comprises the conflicts between coloniality and the local, communal approaches to GEP the EC SIDS wishes to implement. Two sub-themes represent conflicting perspectives: (3.1) where policy diffusion through a harmonization and shared learning strategy is promoted regionally, and (3.2) which represents the discussions around neoliberalism, market-based solutions, and continued coloniality in GEP. The issues presented in this theme link to my second research question: How might decolonial methodologies impact evaluation and evidence generation in the global education policy landscape?

### ***Sub-theme 3.1: Local, Collaborative, & Harmonizing Approaches***

Sub-theme 3.1 encapsulates discourses related to local approaches, collaborative efforts of policy harmonization, and funding through local means rather than through IOs. The consensus across all

documents is that (a) local approaches while challenging, are preferred to top-down prescriptive solutions; (b) policy diffusion and harmonization are critical to GEP in the EC SIDS; and (c) government and IO collaboration across the EC region would enable shared learning and resources for Caribbean peoples.

As evidence-based approaches were overwhelmingly supported across the documents in the CPA, so was the idea that local solutions, resources, and stakeholders are at the heart of international policy agendas and regional works.

System strengthening should also draw on *South–South and triangular collaboration* and sharing of best practices, adapted to country and regional contexts (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 32, my emphasis).

[local approaches] anchor Caribbean children in the cultural traditions of the region and build self-esteem through the appreciation of national and regional religious and social festivals, literary works, art improving the mechanisms to effectively transmit and disseminate knowledge (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000, p. xvi).

That recommendation to develop localized approaches, collaborating, and building strong partnerships across the region becomes problematic, however, when governments must adhere to the global vision and agenda of GEP and IOs to receive funding or technical support.

*Governments are expected to translate global targets into achievable national targets* based on their education priorities, national development strategies and plans, the ways their education systems are organized, their institutional capacity and the availability of resources (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 35, my emphasis).

The support for local approaches continued through the participant interview data, especially about the role and purpose of education and specific interventions in GEP that would fit in EC SIDS.

Most places [in these communities] are like, ‘*yea, if the curriculum actually looked like what we want it to look like, it would make our students successful*’ outside of this, like in the kind of colonial world, but it would also mean that they learned land skills, and they were fluent in our language, and they had high mental health, and they were, you know, we’re hunting and fishing and transmitting our culture’ (Miranda, 2021, my emphasis).

[Engaging in local solutions is a] discussion youth leaders have on a regular basis. There needs to be educational reform, a lot of things on our syllabi [are not] even relevant to the Caribbean. Our own history and heritage and culture is not being taught. That doesn’t make sense. We’re taught English like it’s our first language. It’s not. We speak French dialect...There’s no consideration given to young people’s mental health, which is extremely important in this era...there should be spaces, study spaces where kids can gather data...we don’t have internet cafes, we don’t have libraries...Our first language is technically Creole, which is a French dialect, we have a Creole dictionary that hasn’t been updated since Jesus was a boy (Star, 2021, my emphasis).

However, the reality of how IOs and governments implement this objective of a communal, engaged, and locally adapted vision to GEP participants highlighted their discontent with the lack of representation and funding for said approaches.

*The people who are really either benefiting or not benefiting aren't sitting at the table. Yeah, we're too centralized, we're too, one size fits all – we're too, “we need to go to scale,” and we're kind of forgetting what's being lost to go find a scale, because not everyone has the same problem. And not every solution fits the same situation (Alice, 2021, my emphasis).*

*when you rely on funding from international organizations, it means that whatever their mandate is, whatever the US says, whatever the UN says, and whatever Germany says, is rarely watched – gets translated to you, and most of the times is not really your reality on the ground... Yea, I'm over it. I'm over it long. I wish that my funding was coming from the continent of Africa, so I could do exactly what I need to do... My mindset has always been – let me just be very clear – Black. So, I approach things in a very non-capitalistic way. So I take – I strain and use for the community (OJ, 2021, my emphasis).*

Harmonization of policy agendas through diffusion and copying was also prevalent throughout all the documents and participant discussions. Through harmonizing practices, the EC SIDS saw a path to strengthen its standing in an international field with competing actors, institutions, and educational visions.

[Collective efforts] should build on existing partnerships, frameworks, and effective mechanisms, as well as new ones forged *to ensure strong regional collaboration, cooperation, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the education agenda....* Inclusive and efficient regional coordination will focus on such aspects as data collection and monitoring, including *peer reviews among countries; mutual learning and exchange of good practices; policy-making; dialogue and partnerships with all relevant partners* (UNESCO, 2015, p. 60-61, my emphasis).

While the support for harmonization was strong, the concern that implementing such policies would be difficult to achieve was also uniform among local policy actors and participants.

But its most daunting challenge would be the culture change necessary – the paradigm shift away from institutional, insular, and egoistic competitiveness to trusting collaboration (Jules, 2017, p. 4).

The UN started it off – they were horrible. And individual bilaterals follow suit, they often compete with each other, to the detriment of the needs of the country (Alice, 2021).

I think one is miscommunication. Again, we don't sell ourselves properly. So sometimes, we on the same page, but we don't know it (OJ, 2021).

Participants offered potential solutions to the challenges of coordinating policies and learnings across a regional space, including increasing partnership and stakeholder engagement opportunities.

I think [IOs] in the [EC] region, rather than everyone working by themselves, could work on an umbrella that have different branches, because the region is very small. And, rather than 100 [IOs] competing for the same pot of funding, we'll have one or two big [IOs] that have the track record apply for that grant. And then, and then distributed to the [IOs] who are doing work in different areas that is in gender, youth, whatever that is happening. So therefore, you have a more coordinated effort in the activities that you implemented, and you have a better, you have better results, because then you're not duplicating things that have been done (OJ, 2021, my emphasis).

So, I think, rather than create partnerships with government, I think [government and IOs] see each other as enemies. And that's not how it should be. Because without the [IOs], a lot of work that is happening on the ground, in many of the communities across the Caribbean will not happen (OJ, 2021).

Finally, the push towards local approaches lacked discussion on countering modernity or coloniality. While there were small references to decolonization, the focus remained on collaboration and coordinating activities to harmonize regional education policies. Interview participants also focused on the positive aspects of local approaches rather than analyzing or challenging coloniality.

### ***Sub-theme 3.2: Neoliberal Solutions & Limitations***

Sub-theme 3.2 encompasses all coding relating to neoliberalism and market approaches to GEP, decolonization, or coloniality. For example, using the rate of return on investments or the need for labor market improvements to invest more in education was coded within this sub-theme. Findings around this sub-theme were that most documents exhibited (a) profoundly entrenched value of rationality or neoliberalism in determining worth in GEP and (b) market-based solutions were go-to solutions in GEP evaluation. The policies and policy-related documents, including actor statements, focus on rational values in determining the “evidence” of success in GEP. Through these neoliberal approaches, if only implied, EBA uses data to justify or attack policy choices.

In implementing [Education 2030], the focus should be on *efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of education systems*.... As well as ensure that robust, timely and accessible data are available...to strengthen education systems, disseminate knowledge, provide access to information, promote quality and effective learning, and deliver services more efficiently (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 31, my emphasis).

Such a consensus emerges from the international community's commitment to enforcing the right to education and draws on the *evidence of the rate of return of universal basic education*. This primary emphasis has situated higher education in the margins of the international policy debates about development (Pedro, 2021, my emphasis).

Participants also discussed neoliberalism, its solutions, and its limitations, including focusing on performance-driven evaluations connected to funding.

[We ask] do you want us to put a strategy that reflects the needs of the country? Or are you telling us that we should make a strategy that reflects how you plan to give us money? (Alice, 2021).

you certainly wouldn't want to be like, "well, oh, if you have students fail, you'll get more money" ... it is those capitalist dilemmas of the kinds of incentives that get created by funding [GEP]... I definitely know someone [in community] who would just register all the kids of the community, and then be like, "that's our attendance and we get funding that way, because it's, like, per head" ... I blame capitalism (Miranda, 2021).

Evidence and data were described as tools to accomplish neoliberal agendas, or as Jules (2008) described them, data is the "empirical realities" presented in GEP. These empirical realities are the operationalization of data to evidence as policy advice, defining the policy environment through numbers. This reality becomes a barrier to achieving the overall goals of sub-theme 3.1 and is the primary contention in the conceptual paradox.

### ***Summary of CPA Themes as Systemic, Technical, and Conceptual Paradoxes***

I pulled three primary themes out of the CPA data. The first, systemic paradox, focused on the big-picture issues of GEP and data-driven approaches. The paradox presented itself with a system that aimed to achieve a data revolution but struggled to overcome institutional barriers to implement that vision. A key finding was that policy documents typically describe stakeholders' responsibility to help fulfill the global education goals, while in contrast, reports, statements, and participants highlighted the government's failures to engage civil society stakeholders in GEP action and evaluation meaningfully.

The second theme, the technical paradox, focused primarily on the discord in tied-evaluation environments where donors constrict evidence-generating activities, and evaluators feel powerless in GEP settings. A primary finding was broad support for evidence-based practice across aid workers and policies; no document doubted its importance. However, M&E practices and data quality are inadequate for informing policymaking, and IOs do not fund or prioritize their processes enough.

The final theme, conceptual paradox, deals with the conflicting discourses in the text around regional harmonization and coloniality. Key findings highlighted the clash between ideology and empirical realities (i.e., data-informed policymaking), especially when disaggregating the codes by data type. This chapter's last section relates to the coding frequencies of the themes and sub-themes. Through these frequencies, I am

able to provide weight and context to the values presented in the thematic analysis by analyzing coding through (a) document type and (b) speaker.

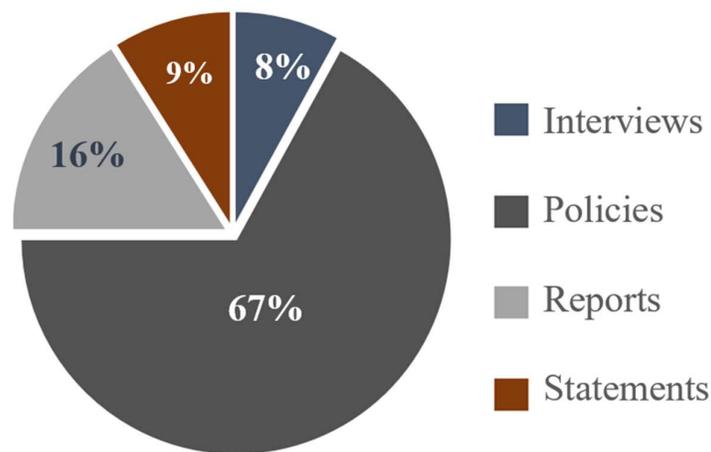
### **Coding by Numbers – the Coding Frequencies**

Disaggregating the data across the three paradoxes, one can see which types of documents talked about which theme and identify any divergences not present in the above findings. As part of the thematic analysis, I aim to engage with the text through its function (Glaser and Strauss, 2017), which provides deeper contextualization for the CEPS and an alternative lens to analyze the CPA. Appendix I – Final Coding and Themes presents the complete coding dataset.

One way to ensure that the coding of each type of document is relative to the other was to use percentages instead of absolute figures. For example, the nine policies comprised the majority of coding references (67%), with the five reports and eleven statements making up less than a quarter (16% and 9%), respectively (see Figure 1). Absolute figures would have overshadowed the interview data, which only amounted to 8% of all coded references.

**Figure 1.**

*Percentage of Coding by Document Type*



Coding relating to the systemic paradox represented approximately 46% of all coding references. Similarly, the technical paradox represented 31%, and the conceptual paradox represented 23% of coding references. Table 4 details the average coding references by paradox and the four document types.

**Table 4.**

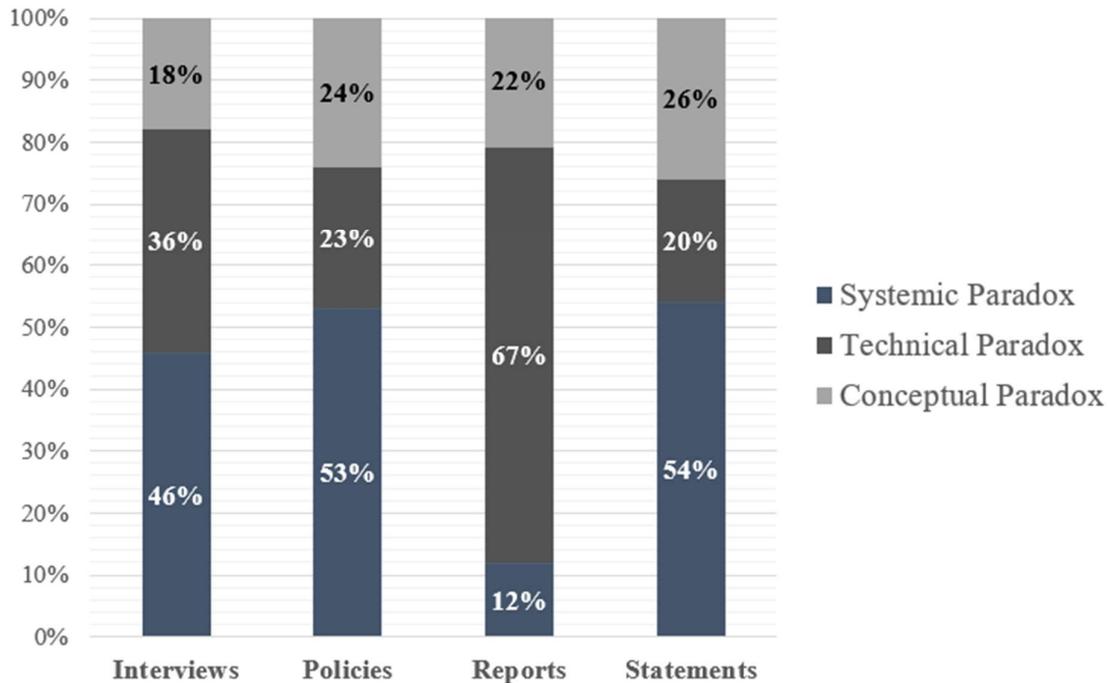
*Themes as a Percentage of Coding References for Different Document Types*

Themes	Average	Interviews	Policies	Reports	Statements
<b>Systemic Paradox</b>	46%	46%	53%	12%	54%
<b>Technical Paradox</b>	31%	36%	23%	67%	20%
<b>Conceptual Paradox</b>	23%	18%	24%	22%	26%

All document types, except reports, had a similar average-to-paradox coding ratio (e.g., the interviews were coded to the systemic paradox 46% of the time, like the average coding rate). The five reports included in the CPA were published by UNESCO, based on evaluations and nation-state self-reported data, and were relevant to the EC SID. They focused more on the second theme, the technical paradox, than any other document type. Figure 2 highlights this imbalance.

**Figure 2.**

*Percentage of Coding References by Document Type*



Compared to the average of all data sources, reports were twice as likely to be coded to the technical paradox and only a quarter as likely to be coded to the systemic paradox. Considering that reports are descriptions of policy environments through numerical data and prescribed evaluation practices in GEP, this hyper-focus is

not without bias. The overall data highlights the importance of the systemic paradox, with the highest number of coding references, with the technical and conceptual paradoxes coming in second and third place.

Before disaggregating the data by document type, I looked closely at the interview participant data to present the aid worker and Caribbean perspective. This analysis speaks to the third research question: what are the aid workers' perceptions of the role and usefulness of evaluation for better development practice?

***Centering Aid Worker’s Perspectives through the Interview Participation Data***

Thematically, the interview data closely resembled the average figures presented in Table 4. However, I identified meaningful distinctions (over 10% differences) in coding the technical and conceptual paradoxes. These included the interview data, coded at a 16% higher rate than the average data set (36% versus 31% respectively) to the technical paradox and 22% lower (18% less) to the conceptual paradox.

**Table 5.**

*Themes and Sub-Themes Average and Interview/Participant*

<b>Themes and Sub-themes</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Inter-views</b>	<b>+/-</b>
<b>1. Systemic Paradox</b>			
1.1. Supportive & Financially Independent Government	25%	38%	+52%
1.2. Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable	47%	29%	-38%
1.3. Government Accountability to Funders vs. Stakeholders & Beneficiaries	14%	12%	-14%
1.4. Outside Influence and Funding Challenges	14%	20%	+43%
<b>2. Technical Paradox</b>			
2.1. EBA's Importance & Data Limitations	52%	54%	+4%
2.2. M&E Importance & Limitations	27%	28%	+4%
2.3. EBA Implementation Hurdles	21%	17%	-19%
<b>3. Conceptual Paradox</b>			
3.1. Local, Collaborative, & Harmonizing Approaches	71%	81%	14%
3.2. Neoliberal Solutions & Limitations	29%	19%	-34%

These divergences are also present when comparing the interview dataset by sub-themes presented in Table 5, which presents the interview data by each sub-theme, compared to the average of the coding references. For example, in sub-theme 1.1, interview participants found 1.1 52% more important than the average

dataset. Findings explicitly related to each theme grouping (i.e., systemic paradox as one theme group) follow.

**Interview Participants Discuss Systemic Paradox Sub-Themes.** Within the systemic paradox, interview participants focused more on two sub-themes than the average of the complete dataset (i.e., sub-theme 1.1 Supportive & Financially Independent Government had 52% more coding references, and 1.4. Outside Influence and Funding Challenges represented by 43% more coding than the average). While sub-theme 1.1 inclusion in the paradox remains unchallenged by this information, knowing that sub-theme 1.4 was significantly more critical than the average of the coding scheme suggested is an important finding. While sub-theme 1.4 may have fewer coding references, its importance to interview participants and ensuring their voices remained central was instrumental to its inclusion. If I had taken only those themes that were represented with higher numerical frequencies than the others, I might not have included this theme. Similarly, the other two sub-themes, 1.2 and 1.3, had 38% and 14% less coding than the average, respectively, suggesting that interview participants placed less importance on these two sub-themes than were represented in the complete data set.

**Interview Participants Discuss Technical Paradox Sub-Themes.** Within the technical paradox, sub-themes 2.1 EBA's Importance & Data Limitations and 2.2 M&E Importance & Limitations have a nominal increase in coding (4% increase for each) compared to the average of the complete dataset. In contrast, the third sub-theme, 2.3 EBA Implementation Hurdles, had 19% less coding than the average of the complete dataset. The lower frequency for these sub-themes suggests that the importance of the technical paradox was on par with all other policy and policy-related documents. Considering these figures, the technical paradox is less integral to the participant interview data than other themes.

**Interview Participants Discuss Conceptual Paradox Sub-Themes.** The interview data presented 14% more coding for sub-theme 3.1. Local approaches, funds, and engaging stakeholders than the average of the complete data set. Additionally, sub-theme 3.2 Neoliberal solutions were significantly less represented, with 32% less coding than the average of the complete dataset. The distinctions in this sub-theme suggest that interview participants found local approaches (and implied decolonization and counter coloniality) a more critical discussion point than neoliberalism, which is also a finding presented in the first half of this chapter.

### Summary of Centering Aid Worker’s Perspectives through the Interview Participation Data.

Overall, interview participants focused on the systemic and conceptual paradoxes, paying less attention to the technical paradox. Their voices were central in the inclusion of sub-theme 1.4. around pull IOs funding and agendas have in the GEP environment, especially around evaluation and the importance of local and harmonizing approaches in sub-theme 3.1 supported by their coding frequencies.

### *Distinguishing Caribbean Voices from International Staff Perspectives*

This section examines the interview data as part of a multiple-perspective decolonial lens to highlight and make space for Caribbean voices. Table 6 compares the coding frequencies of Caribbean interview participants to those of international interview participants.

**Table 6.**

*Themes and Sub-Themes of Caribbean Interview Participants Compared to International Aid Workers*

<b>Themes and Sub-themes</b>	<b>International Average</b>	<b>Caribbean Average</b>	<b>Caribbean More/Less</b>
<b>1. Systemic Paradox</b>			
1.1 Supportive & Financially Independent Government	39%	38%	-3%
1.2 Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable	29%	29%	-1%
1.3 Government Accountability to Funders vs. Stakeholders & Beneficiaries	14%	11%	-24%
1.4 Outside Influence and Funding Challenges	18%	23%	27%
<b>2. Technical Paradox</b>			
2.1 EBA's Importance & Data Limitations	59%	48%	-17%
2.2 M&E Importance & Limitations	26%	32%	22%
2.3 EBA Implementation Hurdles	15%	20%	29%
<b>3. Conceptual Paradox</b>			
3.1 Local, Collaborative, & Harmonizing Approaches	71%	91%	27%
3.2 Neoliberal Solutions & Limitations	29%	9%	-67%

There are notable differences (over 10%) in four sub-themes that present meaningful challenges to understanding the interview data as one set (i.e., sub-themes 1.4, 2.2, 2.3, and 3.1 have significantly larger coding references for Caribbean aid workers than their international counterparts).

Findings include local participants discussing Outside Influence and Funding Challenges in GEP (sub-theme 1.4) 27% more than the international workers, which speaks to the importance of sub-theme 1.4. from the decolonial perspective. The averaging of the overall dataset discounted sub-themes 2.2 and 2.3, where Caribbean participants placed a higher value than international aid workers (15-20% more). Lastly, sub-theme 3.1, which focused on local harmonizing approaches, was 27% more significant to Caribbean participants than international participants. Even more striking is the lack of attention Caribbean participants gave to neoliberal issues (67% less than international workers).

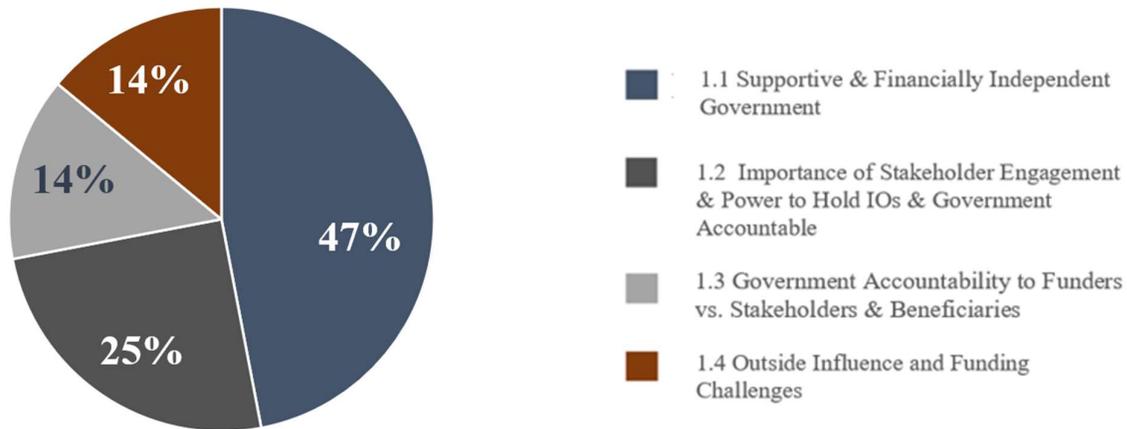
**Summary of Distinguishing Caribbean from International Staff Voices.** Setting a space aside to look at Caribbean voices is essential to employing a decolonial lens. I presented the Caribbean perspective by disaggregating coding frequencies to highlight their voices and where averaging overshadowed their experiences. A key finding in comparing the two participant groups is that Caribbean aid workers prioritize discussions about improving local approaches and harmonizing practices over discussions on neoliberalism or coloniality's impact on their work. Additionally, challenges with M&E practice and evidence-based implementation hurdles, or those empirical realities, are essential to Caribbean aid workers but overshadowed in the complete interview dataset. Lastly, the systemic paradox inclusion of descriptions of IOs' funding and agenda's limiting EBA practices (sub-theme 1.4) continues to remain vital for Caribbean participants, as compared to the overall and complete interview dataset. This next section looks at each theme with its corresponding sub-themes in more detail.

### ***Frequency of Codes in the Systemic Paradox***

The systemic paradox represented a set of grouped codes relating to conducting evaluations in GEP and barriers to achieving the elusive goal of engendering a data revolution. The first part of this chapter highlighted texts that talked about the (a) government's role, (b) stakeholder engagement, (c) accountability frameworks, and challenges with (d) outside funding and agendas by IOs. This subsection dissects the codes by document type to ensure we also engage the text through its function. Figure 3 highlights the coding frequencies for each sub-theme.

**Figure 3.**

*Systemic Paradox Percentages of Sub-Themes*



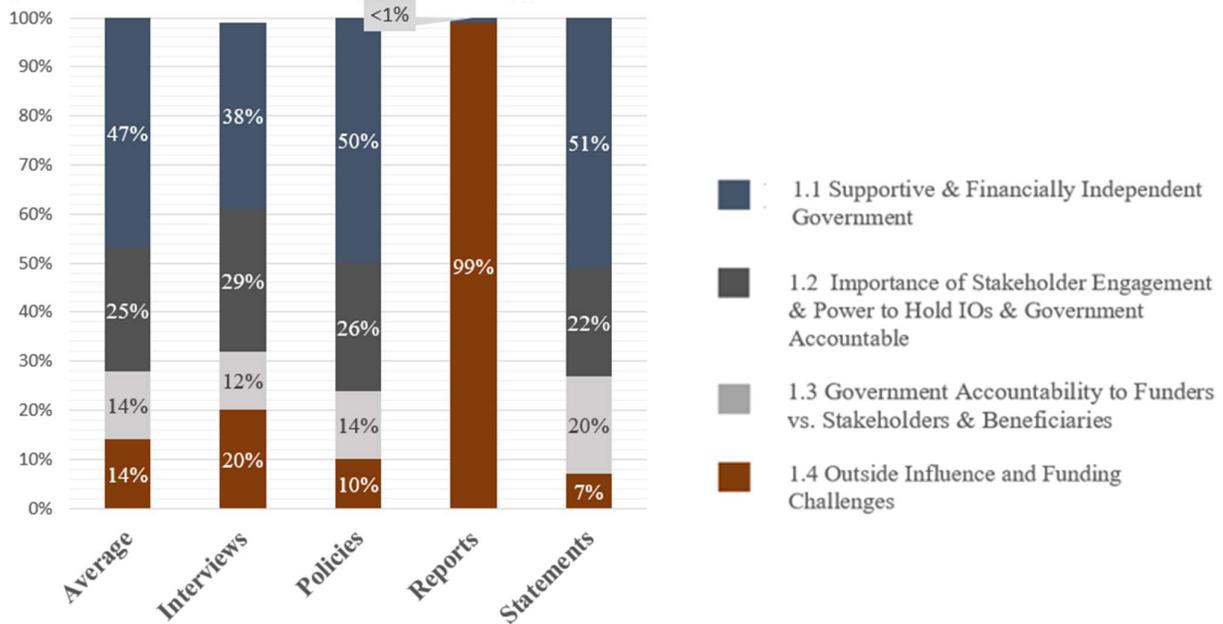
Sub-theme 1.1 represented the government’s dependency on foreign aid versus their capacity to develop and institute a long-term cohesive national education strategy uninfluenced by outside forces, accounting for 47% of the coding references. The second most coded sub-theme is 1.2, describing the potential for stakeholder engagement with a quarter of the coding references (25%), and the final two sub-themes split the last quarter with 14% each.

**Systemic Paradox by Document Type.** The previous section disaggregated interview and Caribbean data, suggesting interview participants found sub-themes 1.1 and 1.4 in higher importance than the average of the complete dataset. The fourth sub-theme (1.4) is notably more critical for Caribbean participants. This section looks at the remaining document types to identify any divergences or notable differences (see Table 2 and Table 3 for a list of policy and policy-related documents included in the thematic analysis).

Figure 4 highlights the coding frequency for each document type to each sub-theme. Overall, the document types are aligned with the average figures, with nominal divergences (less than 10%) for policies and statements, except in sub-theme 1.3, where statements have a 43% higher coding frequency than the average.

**Figure 4.**

*Systemic Paradox Sub-Themes by Document Type*



A notable difference in reports versus other document types is apparent, suggesting that the systemic paradox reports primarily focus on the fourth sub-theme relating to challenges of IO funding and agenda challenges in implementing evaluation practices in GEP. Table 7 offers more context for these discrepancies, suggesting that reports were coded to the fourth sub-theme 607% more or six times higher than the dataset's average.

**Table 7.**

*Coding Frequencies of the Systemic Paradox Sub-Themes for Policies, Reports, and Statements Compared to the Average of the Complete Dataset*

Systemic Paradox Sub-themes	Policies	Reports	Statements
1.1 Supportive & Financially Independent Government	+6%	-98%	+9%
1.2 Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable	+4%	-100%	-12%
1.3 Government Accountability to Funders vs. Stakeholders & Beneficiaries	0%	-100%	+43%
1.4 Outside Influence and Funding Challenges	-29%	+607%	-50%

Once I noticed this significant coding difference, I controlled the reports by removing all coding, reworking the text, engaging external advisors, and manually coding the text with the interview coding schema. The final controlled coding is presented here—one possible reason for the report's hyper fixation with sub-theme 1.4. could be most reports focus on the theme's attention on IOs and GEP-specific activities. Whereas the

other sub-themes in the systemic paradox look at grander concepts of government, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. The fourth theme discusses the challenges with specific policy actors and the challenges they present related more precisely to aid workers and reports. Additionally, we can conclude that without this skewing, the fourth sub-theme would not have had enough coding to be considered a theme which might have overshadowed 1.4s importance to Caribbean voices.

**Systemic Paradox Policy Documents by Geographic Region.** Another area in which we can make space for Caribbean voices is by looking at how their policies align against regional and international policies. Table 8 highlights the coding frequencies per document type, showing notable (more than 10%) distinctions between these geographic locations. The primary difference in this theme’s coding for national policies against the average of the policy dataset was the attention given to sub-theme 1.2, which did not surpass coding about the government’s involvement in GEP (sub-theme 1.1) but was notably higher (19%) than the average figure, suggesting stakeholder engagement plays a more prominent role in national policymaking or is, at the very least, discussed more often in national policies. Table 9 shows sub-theme 1.2 international policy documents with 15% less coding supporting this conclusion.

**Table 8.**

*Coding Frequencies of the Systemic Paradox Sub-Themes for Policies*

<b>Systemic Paradox Sub-themes</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>National</b>
1.1 Supportive & Financially Independent Government	4%	-2%	-2%
1.2 Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable	-15%	-27%	19%
1.3 Government Accountability to Funders vs. Stakeholders & Beneficiaries	7%	50%	-21%
1.4 Outside Influence and Funding Challenges	10%	10%	-10%

Additionally, international policies gave more attention (10% more coding) to sub-theme 1.4 than the other policy documents, and regional policy documents focused on the importance and challenges of accountability, with 50% more coding in that sub-theme than the average dataset. Overall, the systemic policy disaggregated data highlighted reports pulled towards data-specific and implementation realities over perspective descriptions of government, stakeholder, and accountability issues in GEP. However, their attention to outsider funding and agenda influences ensured a place for the fourth sub-theme important to Caribbean voices. Additionally, national policies discussed stakeholder engagement more often than other policy documents, suggesting that the issue is essential to national policy actors.

**Table 9.**

*Systemic Paradox Complete Breakdown of Sub-Themes, including Document Type Breakdown by Policy Actor or Geographic Location*

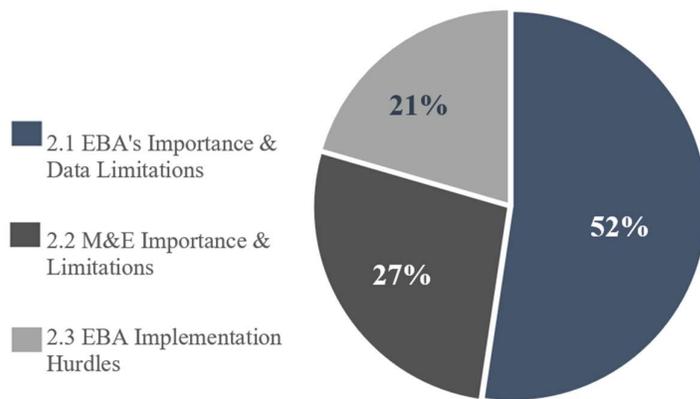
Systemic Paradox Sub-themes	Average of Complete Dataset	Interviews			Policies				Reports	Statements
		Average	International	Caribbean	Average	International	Regional	National		
1.1 Supportive & Financially Independent Government	47%	38%	39%	38%	50%	52%	49%	49%	1%	51%
1.2 Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable	25%	29%	29%	29%	26%	22%	19%	31%	0%	22%
1.3 Government Accountability to Funders vs. Stakeholders & Beneficiaries	14%	12%	14%	11%	14%	15%	21%	11%	0%	20%
1.4 Outside Influence and Funding Challenges	14%	20%	18%	23%	10%	11%	11%	9%	99%	7%

### *Frequency of Codes in the Technical Paradox*

The second most coded theme revolved around the process of evaluation (e.g., data collection, data generation, analysis, reproduction, and dissemination) in GEP settings. The three sub-themes that make up the technical paradox describe an environment of tied-evaluation, akin to tied-aid (see SAPs and the International Monetary Fund for more). Figure 5 presents the coding frequency of the sub-themes.

**Figure 5.**

*Technical Paradox Percentages of Sub-Theme*



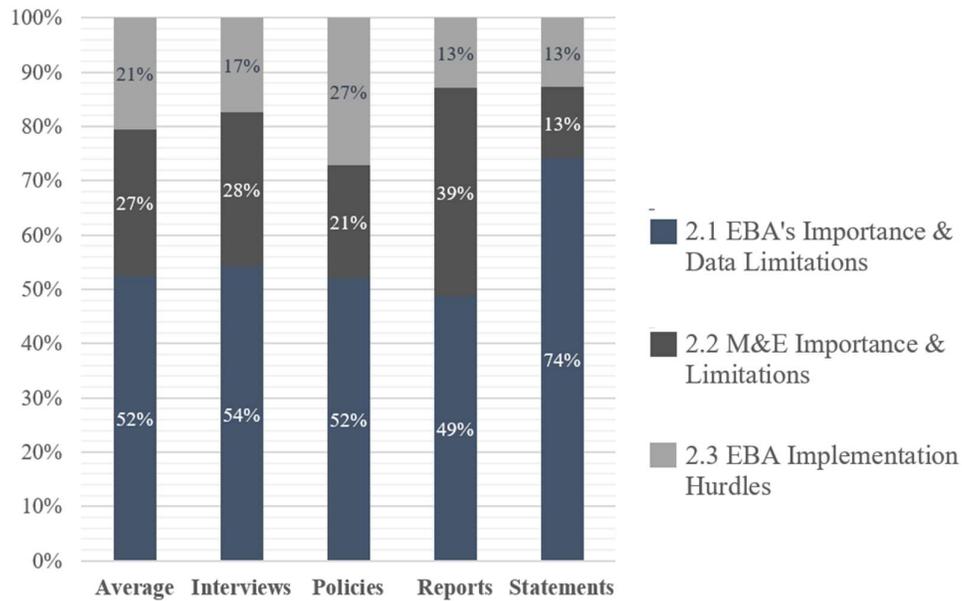
Sub-theme 2.1 reflected the concern for the quality and dissemination of evidence-based approaches, representing the majority (52%) of coding references. Sub-themes 2.2 and 2.3 represented equal parts of the other half of the coding references for the theme (27% and 21%, respectively).

**Technical Paradox by Document Type.** The findings regarding participants' interview data suggested that participants talked about technical issues 16% more than were coded for all other document types. At the sub-theme level, the interviews aligned with the coding frequency of the entire dataset, except for sub-theme 2.3. EBA Implementation Hurdles had 19% less coding for the interviews than the average.

By contrast, Caribbean participants scored 2.2 M&E focuses on reporting for accountability, 13% more than the average, and 2.3 donor's lack of prioritizing evidence, 17% more than all interview averages. The higher coding rates suggest that while technical issues were a primary consideration of participants, they were even more so for local actors. By disaggregating the theme by document types, this section presents divergences and notable differences in the coding frequencies. Table 10 and

Figure 6 highlight the coding frequency for each document type to each sub-theme.

**Figure 6. Technical Paradox Sub-Themes by Document Type**



Comparing the coding division for each document type to the sub-theme, one immediately notices that the skewing reports had vanished in the first paradox. I present meaningful (over 10%) differences in Table 11, where one can see that each document type highlighted a distinct sub-theme.

Policy documents, for example, had 32% more coding references for the implementation hurdles of EBA; Reports favored discussed the importance of M&E and their challenges 47% more than the average dataset; and policy actor statements presented with 42% more coding for declaring EBA importance and identifying data collection and dissemination challenges. One reason for this might be the different ways each document talks about evaluation, with each looking at the process through different perspectives (e.g., its importance overall, the data collection process, or a focus on the hurdles of operationalization of learning).

**Table 10.**

*Technical Paradox Complete Breakdown of Sub-Themes, including Document Type Breakdown by Policy Actor or Geographic Location*

Technical Paradox Sub-themes	Average of Complete Dataset	Interviews			Policies				Reports	Statements
		Average	International	Caribbean	Average	International	Regional	National		
2.1 EBA's Importance & Data Limitations	<b>52%</b>	<b>54%</b>	59%	48%	<b>52%</b>	65%	55%	47%	<b>49%</b>	<b>74%</b>
2.2 M&E Importance & Limitations	<b>27%</b>	<b>28%</b>	26%	32%	<b>21%</b>	19%	20%	39%	<b>39%</b>	<b>13%</b>
2.3 EBA Implementation Hurdles	<b>21%</b>	<b>17%</b>	15%	20%	<b>27%</b>	16%	25%	13%	<b>13%</b>	<b>12%</b>

**Table 11.**

*Coding Frequencies of the Technical Paradox Sub-Themes for Policies, Reports, and Statements Compared to the Average of the Complete Dataset*

<b>Technical Paradox Sub-themes</b>	<b>Policies</b>	<b>Reports</b>	<b>Statements</b>
2.1 EBA's Importance & Data Limitations	-1%	-7%	42%
2.2 M&E Importance & Limitations	-23%	42%	-51%
2.3 EBA Implementation Hurdles	32%	-37%	-38%

**Technical Paradox Policy Documents by Geographic Region.** Continuing with the defined space for policy document examination, leaving explicit room for national policies, Table 12 compares the policy foci disaggregated by geographic region.

**Table 12.**

*Coding Frequencies of the Technical Paradox Sub-Themes for Policies Compared to the Average of all Policy Documents*

<b>Technical Paradox Sub-themes</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>National</b>
2.1 EBA's Importance & Data Limitations	25%	5%	-10%
2.2 M&E Importance & Limitations	-11%	-2%	4%
2.3 EBA Implementation Hurdles	-39%	-8%	-15%

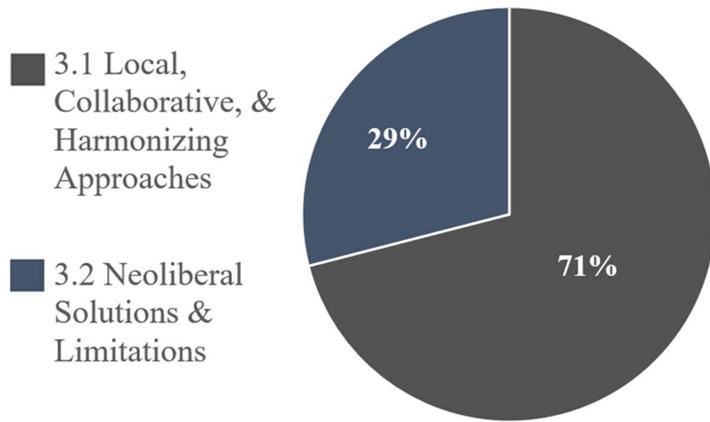
There is a significant difference (more than 20%) between sub-theme focus when looking at international policies compared to national ones, but not for regional ones.

### ***Frequency of Codes in the Conceptual Paradox***

The final theme, the conceptual paradox, highlighted the discontinuity in the policy and policy-related documents where a desire to institute communal and local approaches to GEP comes up against entrenched market-based beliefs. The two sub-themes encapsulated these conflicting ideas, presented in Figure 7, where sub-themes 3.1 incorporates discussions on localized approaches of GEP evaluation, representing 71% of the coding references, and sub-theme 3.2 discusses neoliberal solutions, representing a little over a quarter of the coding (29%). The exponentially higher coding for 3.1 suggests that focusing on goals and objectives across all policy documents, especially concepts around harmonizing policy and cooperative and non-competitive work, is at the forefront of discussions.

**Figure 7.**

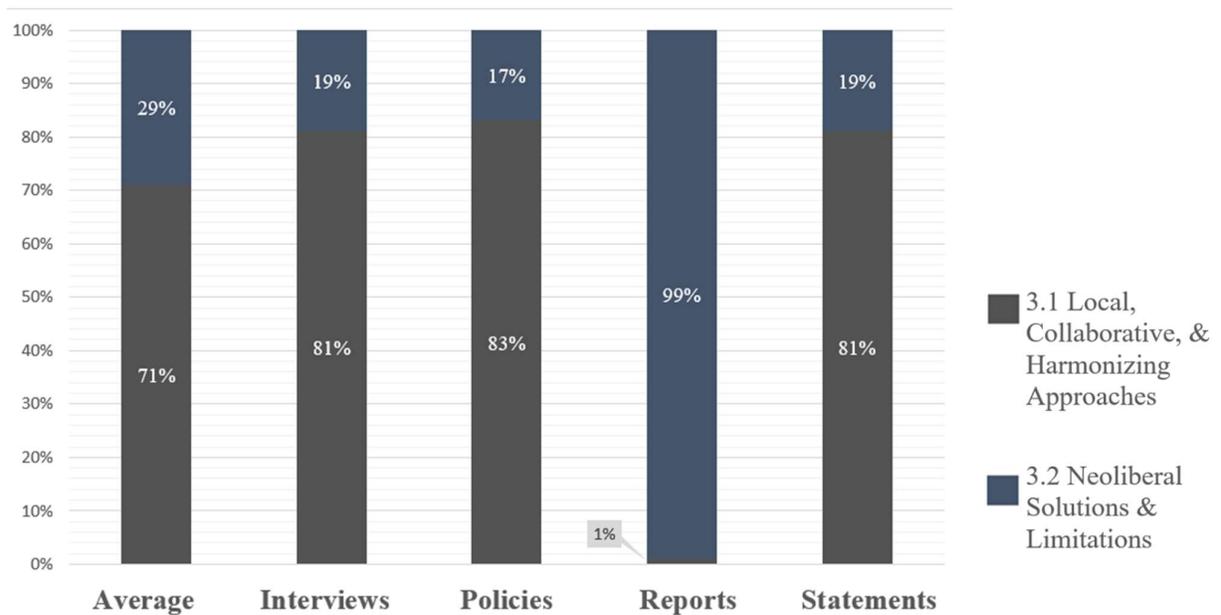
*Conceptual Paradox Percentages of Sub-Themes*



**Conceptual Paradox by Document Type.** The focus of local objectives can be seen, with meaningful distinctions (over 10% coding variance), when disaggregating each document type except for reports. Figure 8 offers an overall picture of the sub-themes by document type, with Table 13 highlighting the entire breakdown of the sub-themes in the conceptual paradox.

**Figure 8.**

*Conceptual Paradox Sub-Themes by Document Type*



**Table 13.**

*Conceptual Paradox Complete Breakdown of Sub-Themes, including Document Type Breakdown by Policy Actor or Geographic Location*

Conceptual Paradox Sub-themes	Average of Complete Dataset	Interviews			Policies				Reports	Statements
		Average	International	Caribbean	Average	International	Regional	National		
3.1 Local, Collaborative, & Harmonizing Approaches	<b>71%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<i>71%</i>	<i>91%</i>	<b>83%</b>	<i>80%</i>	<i>91%</i>	<i>79%</i>	<b>1%</b>	<b>81%</b>
3.2 Neoliberal Solutions & Limitations	<b>29%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<i>29%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<b>17%</b>	<i>20%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>21%</i>	<b>99%</b>	<b>19%</b>

I divided the interviews into this sub-theme, where international aid workers discussed neoliberal solutions 52% more than the average of the interview dataset, and Caribbean participants discussed neoliberalism nominally (less than 10% coding). Interview participants, for example, discussed local approaches 14% more than the average of the complete data set, suggesting meaningful importance to this data group. Recall in the section Centering Aid Worker’s Perspectives through the Interview Participation Data

***Centering Aid Worker’s Perspectives through the Interview Participation Data***

that this distinction was even more meaningful for Caribbean participants who focused on the first sub-theme 12% more than the average of all interviews.

The reports, however, focused on neoliberal solutions, indicating the skewing that was apparent for reporting in the first sub-theme towards implementation priorities is presented again in the third paradox. Reports discussed neoliberal or market-based solutions and neoliberal quality indicators (i.e., efficiency, effectiveness, rate-of-return, cost-benefit-analysis) to describe evaluation practices and processes 241% more often than the average of the complete dataset (see Table 14).

**Table 14.**

*Coding Frequencies of the Conceptual Paradox Sub-Themes for Policies, Reports, and Statements Compared to the Average of the Complete Dataset*

<b>Conceptual Paradox Sub-themes</b>	<b>Policies</b>	<b>Reports</b>	<b>Statements</b>
3.1 Local, Collaborative, & Harmonizing Approaches	17%	-99%	14%
3.2 Neoliberal Solutions & Limitations	-41%	241%	-34%

In fact, if we remove reports from the complete dataset, the neoliberal focus would be a quarter of the coding to less than an eighth (from 29% to 17%).

**Conceptual Paradox Policy Documents by Geographic Region.** For policies, geography splits the policy discussions. International and national policies talked about neoliberal solutions, or their hurdles, 21% and 3% more, respectively than the average of the complete dataset, as presented in Table 15.

**Table 15.**

*Coding Frequencies of the Conceptual Paradox Sub-Themes for Policies Compared to the Average of all Policy Documents*

<b>Conceptual Paradox Sub-themes</b>	<b>International</b>	<b>Regional</b>	<b>National</b>
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3.1 Local, Collaborative, & Harmonizing Approaches	-4%	10%	-5%
3.2 Neoliberal Solutions & Limitations	21%	-47%	23%

National policies' attention on the second sub-theme, relating to neoliberalism, could be because national policies are generally more prescriptive. Their description of evaluation practices details precise neoliberal concepts (i.e., quantifying rate-of-return, cost-benefit-analysis) compared to international policy documents that speak about neoliberalism more conceptually (i.e., prescribing impact assessments).

### ***Coding Frequencies Summary***

As part of a thematic analysis approach, analyzing coding frequencies offers a valuable second look at the themes developed, which speak to the document's function and text. By analyzing the percentage of coding assigned to each paradox, sub-theme, document type, and speaker (i.e., Caribbean versus international), one can see additional incongruities not immediately evident within the themes. For instance, analysis of interview data revealed that Caribbean voices and reports often highlighted different areas of focus (more than 100% more in some cases) than their international aid worker and policy counterparts. Another example of the inconsistencies highlighted in this section is that international policies focused on macro-level issues, whereas national policies focused on micro-level implementation. Lastly, focusing on harmonizing policy approaches and localized GEP practices is a clear priority of all the voices included in this analysis, but considering the strength of neoliberalism in the report skewing more exploration is required.

## Chapter VI: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of an iterative thematic analysis conducted on thirty-one documents related to evidence-based approaches in the Caribbean Education Policy Space as part of a critical policy analysis. The CEPS policy landscape covered two Eastern Caribbean Small Island Developing States (i.e., Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines), regional and international policy actors, and global institutions that impact their education policyspace. The data included six interviews with international and Caribbean education staff, nine policy documents (i.e., two international, three regional, and four national policies), five UNESCO reports, and eleven regional GEP policy actor statements.

Through a policy paradox and decolonial lens, the CPA provides a multiple-lens view of evaluation within the policy landscape to understand the evaluator's role in GEP. The analysis is timely; as the momentum of this evidence-based movement continues to grow, its meaning, scope, and impact remain undefined (Fowler, 2015). The following questions guide the analysis: (1) what is the role of the evaluator in GEP, (2) how might decolonial methodologies impact evaluation and evidence generation in GEP, and (3) what are the aid workers' perceptions of the role and usefulness of evaluation for better development practice?

Fowler (2015) suggests that there is extraordinarily little literature on international development because of its complexity and multi-stakeholder environment. While education policy is a subject that has a deep description (Forrester and Garratt, 2016), applying those lessons within a global landscape without centering globalization is challenging. As global education policy is a new discipline, bridging the gap in the literature with policy studies methods contributes to the development of the domain, with critical theories aligned ontologically and epistemologically, furthering its development. Developing contexts are also often under-researched, and information about their policy histories and trajectories needs to be clarified (Sharma, 2020). Therefore, this thesis uses policy studies, evaluation, and education literature to fill GEP gaps and provides a historical contextualization of the CEPS landscape to frame the EC SIDS — an essential part of CPA (Young and Diem, 2017).

In the thematic analysis presented in Chapter V, I assessed the GEP policyscape through policy paradox and decolonial lenses. The contribution of employing the policy paradox is the application of methodological rigor as accepted in the policy studies field (van Ostaijen and Shivant, 2015), as it allows one to frame a complicated landscape like GEP, which researchers often find elusive (Fowler, 2015; Stewart,

2019). The decolonial lens contributes to the GEP field by including and centering typically othered Caribbean and aid-worker voices. For example, I built a coding schema from the six interviews and applied it to all the other policy documents. Through this application, I aimed to ensure I did not overshadow Caribbean voices by including different policy and policy-related documentation.

Additionally, in analyzing the data, I included an extra step of disaggregating the coding by document type to investigate its function (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Through this analysis, I gave national policy actors (i.e., policies, statements, and reports) space to ensure I aligned their findings with the overall themes. By having and centering these policy actor voices within a CPA, this thesis aims to display a model of completing research *with* rather than research *on* targeted beneficiary communities in international development (Atkins, 2013).

In the thematic analysis, I pulled out three themes that described the disparate layers of the policy landscape relating to the systemic environment, the practical and technical application of evaluation in GEP, and conceptual conflicts within the global policy system. Each theme represented a part of the environment, and I define their conflicts as paradoxes. The systemic paradox, for example, speaks about the conflict of global evaluation goals against the institutional barriers erected within the international development field. The technical paradox relates to the methodological barriers donors erect in generating meaningful evidence to reach the elusive goal of evidence-based practice and policymaking. The final conceptual paradox describes the intractability of the status quo of ideas and how innovative solutions disregard the underlying ideational realities that make change difficult.

As a theory-building contribution to GEP, this thesis builds off Kingdon's Multiple Streams policy analysis theory (Kingdon, 1995), where converging streams make up the policyscape. Rather than streams, I used the wave metaphor to describe GEP's more complex policy landscape, including the beach, underwater seascape, and even the orbital pull of the moon through tides. I chose waves and the ocean environment for their representative nature of SIDS, which have a preferential status in the development sector. For example, the systemic theme represents the ocean and its boundaries (e.g., the land, sea, air, and all artificial structures that influence the ocean, like seawalls or jetties). The environment encompasses all policy actors, organizations, and institutions in GEP. The technical paradox represents the swelling effect of the waves and their forward momentum, depicting policy events. These events are assessed by evaluators, sometimes from atop a wave, the shore, or across oceans. Lastly, the entire seascape that lives under the waves, including the

unrelenting undertow, coral reefs, and the continental slope, represents the intractability and sometimes invisibility of the ideas and institutions comprising the GEP environment described in the conceptual paradox.

### **The Systemic Paradox as the Seascape with its Institutional Barriers to a Data Revolution**

My first research question was, what is the role of the evaluator in GEP? The question came out of purpose and necessity, as I have worked with and been an evaluator in the GEP field and required clarity of my role as evidence-based approaches continue to wash over us with each iteration of international education policy (i.e., EFA to Education 2030). The systemic paradox, the first theme pulled from the text and talk data, speaks to the swelling of the GEP environment around the EBA movement, which captured policymaking departments around the globe in the early 2000s (Young and Philipps, 2013; Nelson and Campbell, 2017). As data-driven approaches became the norm in global education policies and programs, the United Nations called for a data revolution, asking evaluators to contribute meaningfully to policymaking and practice. The systemic paradox captures the conflict between the stated goals of achieving that data revolution and the barriers erected by policy actors, organizations, and institutions within the development field that make achieving that goal improbable.

I offer the seascape as an example of the GEP environment. This first theme represents the entirety of the seascape, with the ocean and its surrounding elements: the jetty barriers that section off each strand of beach, the underwater seascape that influences the way waves move and form, and even the orbital pull of the moon which impacts the tides. Each strand of beach and wave is unique, just like every policy space (i.e., regional, national, or local) and event. Moreover, manufactured structures like jetties, channels, or fabricated coral reefs can form a new ecosystem, just like new agendas, norms, or procedures can limit educational evaluation.

Within this macro-perspective of the seascape, an evaluator's role as impact assessor or data interpreter is inconsequential considering the entire policyspace. Their assessment can only represent a fraction of analysis, a simple glimpse of one wave, and cannot feign to represent knowledge applicable to the entire seascape. Therein lies the contradiction of the systemic paradox: the goal of a data revolution, where evaluators generate meaningful data to inform policy and practice, cannot happen in an environment where evaluation is constricted.

To overcome the limited seascape of data evaluators could produce in program evaluation in the GEP landscape, I conducted a thematic analysis with multiple documents presenting different perspectives within the policyspace (i.e., various policies, statements, and reports from geographically disparate actors). I identified four institutional barriers within the CEPS landscapes that contradict the goal of a data revolution. The barriers include (a) the government's capacity to fund and evaluate its national education systems, (b) the lack of genuine stakeholder engagement, (c) donor focus on accountability frameworks rather than meaningful evaluation practice, and (d) funding and agenda issues relating to outside organizations' involvement in national education systems. Each sub-theme is linked to its counterpart in Chapter V.

### ***Sub-theme 1.1: Supportive & Financially Independent Government***

The most discussed barrier for this paradox focused on the government's role and responsibilities when implementing evidence-based approaches in education systems. The strength and ability of the government to establish and effectively run its national education systems without exogenous support and influence was the primary concern for all documents included. Governments perceived as having financial fortitude, competency, and internal capacity were described as capable of functioning unencumbered by international organizations. The common thought was that exogenous funding came with strings attached, which forced governments to align their educational priorities and evaluation practices to the donor's specifications.

Policy actors' statements and interview participants recommended that the government focus on internal assets and national resources before engaging outside entities to sustain their educational initiatives. By looking internally, governments could build a national pool of experts, while IOs would have less influence. Participants, for example, spoke of engagement with government officials as generally positive and only difficult to work with when they lacked resources, causing silos and bureaucratic bottlenecks.

This is probably related to the historically devastating impact that conditional aid, employed by bilateral aid packages, can have on a developing nation, which I discuss in SAPs and the International Monetary Fund. In the 1980s, EC SIDS struggled to fund the vision of their education system because of SAPs. In the 1990s, they faced limits to their educational trajectories with constraints on funding shaped by the EFA education agenda pushing primary rather than secondary education initiatives (Miller *et al.*, 2000). Through grant and donor assistance, IOs are seen as capable of shaping metaphorical shorelines, forcing their

vision of evaluation (i.e., success indicators, whose voices are essential to be incorporated, and the data dissemination practices of evaluators) on SIDS.

Jules (2020a, pp. 2-6) described the GEP environment in the EC as a “shadow of globalization” where industrialized nations, whether intentional or not, weakened developing states, “reducing them to a state of dependency” and elevated IOs to a hegemonic construct defining all measurements of education (discussed further in Caribbean Education Policy Space

In response to the competition and discord in the region, Jules (2020a, p.2) recommended a collaborative regional approach devoid of competition, “we fight harder against each other than against the international forces [or international organizations] that conspire to keep us subjugated.”

While it was beyond the scope of this study to analyze donor funding patterns, it seems probable that the power of assistance leads to influence, and policymakers and policy actors saw government strength as the sole pipeline out of the paradox. Considering the implications of the international education frameworks on EC SIDS development, it is probable that global education also needs to work on establishing goals against an institutional reality of development aid that makes achieving those goals questionable.

### ***Sub-theme 1.2: Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable***

The second most discussed barrier in the systemic paradox was stakeholder engagement. This sub-theme represented a quarter of the coding relative to the theme and was an essential focus for national policy documents and interview participants (see Table 6). Stakeholders included all persons who are part of or impacted by the educational program or intervention, including civil society members, organizations, researchers, and evaluators. Policy documents, for example, described engaging stakeholders as an essential part of successful education systems (UNESCO, 2015a; Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, 2016). Engagement was typically described as stakeholders’ ability to meaningfully engage in designing, implementing, or evaluating education programs or policies and holding implementing agencies and governments accountable for their impact goals—however, dissimilar types of documents described engagement differently. For example, policies typically described engagement as the need for stakeholders to either “buy in” to government solutions, engender collective responsibility, or elicit partnership for shared funding. On the contrary, policy actors and interview participants described more co-participatory and

shared decision-making as engagement. Therefore, engagement from participants and statements looked at engagement as inclusion, not approval.

Star (2021), a Caribbean participant, for example, described her frustration with the performative engagement of youth leaders, which she felt was akin to tokenism. Furthermore, Rose (2021), another Caribbean participant, felt that consultation by Ministry officials could have been more productive after their lackluster response to teacher needs during COVID-19, suggesting that consultation or feedback mechanisms were insufficient to qualify as engagement. Stakeholder engagement, from the participant perspective, has an expectation of influence and change-making, otherwise described as participatory, co-produced, or power-sharing engagement practices.

Ultimately, Miller (2000) suggests that efforts by the EC regional organizations, namely OECS and CARICOM, to harmonize policy solutions include meaningfully engaging stakeholder and beneficiary groups (discussed further in Organization of Eastern Caribbean States). The literature's discourses suggest that local solid policy actor participation could create a collective EC identity (Jules, Miller and Armstrong, 2000), establishing educational gradualism through diffused policy learning in the region (t. d. Jules, 2015b), which is discussed further in Regional Policy Actors. However, like sub-theme 1.1, this vision of a stakeholder-engaged CEPS is only possible when the government can engender it without exogenous influences.

### ***Sub-theme 1.3: Government Accountability to Funders vs. Stakeholders & Beneficiaries***

Sub-theme 1.3 focuses on the purpose and audience of evaluative reports, primarily attributed to the government and the program's accountability to donors. It was a priority issue for regional policy documents and statements (see Table 7), suggesting that the closer one is to implementing policies and practices, the more policy actors believe accountability requires discussion.

Serrat (2009) explained that IOs typically generate program evaluations and reports to assess program accountability and less for learning (i.e., whether the program spent funds the way donors expected them to or ran the program effectively (see Reports for Accountability for more)); even if they are called "impact assessments." On the other hand, IOs that use data for organizational learning and share that learning with beneficiary communities are what Fowler (2015) called action-learning IOs. In evaluations focused on learning, evaluators centered on beneficiary betterment and shared knowledge production rather

than fiscal responsibility for performance-based funding like reporting for accountability. Understanding the types of reports generated by evaluators (i.e., accountability versus learning), one sees their ability to function as a policy advisor or data translator differs, complicating answering my first research question.

What I found interesting across the accountability findings was the dominance of the idea that governments should be accountable to stakeholders. This contradicts the participants' experience who suggested, in sub-theme 1.2, that stakeholders can rarely hold governments or donors accountable, as they need more power and access to do so. Sub-theme 1.3 paradox speaks to this contradiction: stakeholders ought to be able to hold governments, donors, and even implementing agencies accountable; however, they struggle to do so because (a) donors rarely share data from reports and (b) the GEP environment is not set up for stakeholder engagement for accountability to go upwards (i.e., beneficiary to donor), only downwards (i.e., donor down to implementing agency).

Lastly, participants often depicted reporting for accountability as a highly negative experience, creating openings for corruption in evaluation. However, Alice's experience with the literacy organization (see Sub-theme 2.3: EBA Implementation Hurdles) indicates that accountability reporting is potentially not the issue but rather the lack of funding for other types of evaluation. If donors include co-produced research financing or evaluation as essential elements of programs and impact assessments, the tension between accountability and learning might be resolved.

While the policy documents and actor statements describe the desire for a system where beneficiaries (i.e., the people they serve) hold all others accountable, the participants describe a drastically different environment. The dissension between the vision of the policy documents and statements versus the local actors is present in sub-theme 1.2, as policies describe a hopeful future of mutual accountability, and aid workers and local actors describe a state of GEP where voices are rarely heard.

#### ***Sub-theme 1.4: Outside Influence and Funding Challenges***

Sub-theme 1.4 describes how global organizations and agendas influence GEP evaluation through (a) the strings attached to their educational funding and (b) the ability to control the project cycle. Caribbean participants, international and regional policy documents, and reports described this theme as especially important; otherwise, I would have excluded it based solely on overall coding frequencies.

Caribbean participants discussed these outside challenges more often than their international counterparts. The reason for the attention was not explicit but could potentially be because Caribbean actors are more aware of who the “outsider influencers” were, which international aid workers would need to consider themselves. It could also be caused by Caribbean workers fulfilling different organizational positions (i.e., more fundraising involvement) than international aid workers who typically fulfilled ad-hoc contracts and were not currently filling funding roles.

Another potential reason for the attention Caribbean aid workers gave this sub-theme over international staff could be a difference in terminology, where funding constraints and outside influencers are less common terminology for international organizations where the preference might be to discuss “resource mobilization” and “external consultations.” This difference in language is an issue that is taken up later in the Decolonial Spacemaking

Miller (2000) and Jules *et al.* (2000) recount the EC SIDS experience with the EFA agenda-setting as a prime example of goals colliding with IO institutions. The authors suggested that LAC education ministers submit policy requests to the Education for All policymakers, specifically requesting secondary education as a global policy priority. The ministers were concerned that without explicitly stating secondary education as a worldwide priority, IOs would withhold educational funding because of the region's successful primary education systems. Miller (2000) called the first EFA global agenda a “hurry up and crawl” strategy, or what policy studies call an incrementalist approach (Lindblom, 1959; Migone and Howlett, 2015), specifying only primary education as a global priority, realizing the LAC minister’s fears and causing EC SIDS to miss out on international education financing, potentially slowing their educational progress for years to come.

Lastly, the project-based nature, or what Miller (2000) calls ad-hocracy education funding, that GEP donors offer is described as a barrier to EC SIDS achieving long-term sustainable education growth and programming. Through these barriers, the focus is on the international community’s influence on the overall GEP environment, which complicates implementing the global and programmatic goals.

### ***Summary of the Systemic Paradox***

The systemic paradox describes an environment rife with conflicts between goals and institutional realities; each presented as barriers to achieving the elusive goal of a data revolution. These results contribute to this field by identifying four obstacles that significantly impede the evaluator’s ability to

generate meaningful evidence and help establish a data revolution for GEP. Key findings from the first theme suggest that higher-level documentation focuses on everyone's responsibility to complete international goals (i.e., SDGs and Education 2030). In contrast, reports, statements, and participants focus on the individual actor and the government's responsibilities to engage their civil society stakeholder groups more meaningfully in evaluating externally financed educational programs, projects, and interventions.

Considering my first research question, what is the role of evaluation in GEP? The different policy actor perspectives presented in the systemic paradox offer us a nuanced answer depending on which viewpoint is situated. For example, according to international policies, evaluators are meant to fulfill the role of policy advisor and data translator. However, stakeholders are rarely involved in evaluation decisions, including methodology, data collected, and dissemination practices, suggesting evaluators would find a policy-informing role challenging.

Since evaluators can be hired by any one of the policy actor groups, what role they play within the seascape and what limitations are placed on them are unlimited. For example, many evaluations are desk reviews conducted by evaluators stationed abroad. In these instances, evaluators are akin to experienced surfers asked to review a program from afar (i.e., watch videos of waves, look at pictures of the seascape, read information about the landscape, including tide tables and ecological reports as functions of historical contextualization) and then prepare a program evaluation. This process is similar to my situation completing this thesis (i.e., a non-native, conducting research from afar, and interviewing aid workers over the phone). Other evaluators can be surfers, come to analyze only one swell or wave formation over one week, produce a report, and then leave. Other M&E experts might work closely with the program team or staff at the implementing agencies and have intricate knowledge of the community they work with, the program that was implemented, and the meaningful benefits of the program. However, these actors' actions can still be constrained by the funding available, the agreement made with the donors about what data they are allowed to collect, the report type they must generate, and who exactly is allowed to read the final report.

The systemic paradox presents a picture of evaluators and the data they generate as disconnected from the seascape by the donor or funding agency. The evaluation environment pits the goals of a data revolution against the reality of the GEP policyspace, leaving space to paint a more detailed picture of the seascape before I am able to answer the first research question.

## **The Technical Paradox, Riding the Waves through a Tied-Evaluation Environment**

The technical paradox presented in the thematic analysis focuses on the barrier evaluators have to overcome to generate meaningful evidence. The paradox describes a tied-evaluation environment where donors control evaluation practice (i.e., methodology, reporting types, data dissemination, and whose voices and experiences are included) and make evaluation in GEP challenging. This paradox's focus on the evaluator's role and perspective in international education environments contributes to policy studies and GEP research by filling a significant gap in evaluation research (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984; Christie and Lemire, 2019; Cairney, 2019) around evaluation's role in the policy cycle (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). While the first paradox presented challenges inherent in the institutional structure of the GEP landscape, this paradox describes a meso-perspective focused on the technical aspects of evaluation and evidence-based practice in GEP.

I pulled out three sub-themes from the data as essential to evidence-based policymaking and practice for evaluation in GEP settings, including (a) the emphatic support for evidence-based approaches but the evaluator's struggle with collecting meaningful data, (b) the importance of solid M&E practice in GEP but challenges to funding and staffing those departments, and (c) the focus on frustration with generating meaningful evidence within a tied-evaluation environment. Through these three sub-themes, a picture of the evaluation environment in GEP emerged, suggesting that donors, through their restrictive reporting requirements, instituted a tied-evaluation environment controlling what data is generated and shared across the global education landscape. There was no data regarding whether this was intentional; the focus was primarily on the effect of the tied-evaluation environment and quality of data in GEP.

The wave metaphor applied to the second paradox is best depicted as waves forming and crashing as individual policy events. In the technical paradox, the ocean swells with each policy decision, barreling forward until momentum peaks, creating a crest and finally curling over to create a wave. Waves tumble forward until either the energy passing through them dissipates, or they meet an equally forceful object in their path (i.e., a rock, cliffside, jetty, surfer, or beachgoer standing in its way). Each wave is unique and represents a singular policy event; the peak represents a decision made, waves are the policy or program implemented, and the crash signifies impact. The more energy and momentum running through the tide, the more significant the wave's impact will be. Evaluators observe these waves, sometimes only retroactively assessing impact, sometimes riding the wave from crest to crash. When donors limit the observations by

controlling the information evaluators can access, the analysis techniques allowed, their output type, and their dissemination practice, meaningful data is often sacrificed.

### ***Sub-theme 2.1: EBA's Importance & Data Limitations***

Sub-theme 2.1 focused on the importance of evidence-based practice and educational policymaking, but the poor data quality and dissemination practice made EBA challenging to achieve (see Table 8). Caribbean and IO policy actor statements (see Table 3 for a list of speaker statements) stood out in this theme as incredibly supportive of evidence-based practices. This extra attention given by policy speakers to EBA could potentially be perceived as a push towards evidence-based policymaking or an implication of global and regional policies pushing EBA and policy actors' reactions to that.

While support for evidence-based practice and policy seems uniform across all document types, participants highlighted the challenges faced by aid workers and evaluators specifically to collect impactful data. Justice (2021), for example, said she could not see anything negative with evidence-based practice in theory, but in practice, she found collecting data in SIDS challenging. Within her region, she struggled to get a handful of teachers to answer a survey, and she asked, “do [I] want to represent [evidence of] something based on such little data?” Miranda (2021) also considers evaluation in IOs as an inferior practice without real payback to beneficiary communities, “I think that they are also just done often like sloppily loosey goosey shoddy.” An example provided by OJ (2021) highlights the need to incorporate additional local knowledge sources, which she calls making “informed assumptions” rather than basing practice and policy on other’s experience or knowledge outside the region.

The sharing of evaluation data, or dissemination, was also discussed as a barrier to achieving evidence-based policy and practice in EC SIDS, where policies described the generation and sharing of data through reports. Aid workers rejected this idea, suggesting that information is not perceived as substantive but performative. Rose (2021) even suggested that GEP evaluation is only for IOs’ annual reports, not for learning. Within the coding frequencies, this paradox plays out with international policies supporting EBA (see Table 10), especially in global education policies like Education 2030, but participants counter that support with the weariness of EBA’s efficacy at capturing real learning.

### ***Sub-theme 2.2: M&E Importance & Limitations***

Sub-theme 2.2 captured discussions around the practice, importance, and barriers to conducting monitoring and evaluation in GEP. Where 2.1 focuses on operationalizing evidence to inform policy and practice, sub-theme 2.2 focuses on collecting, analyzing, and producing reports through M&E. As suspected from the findings presented in the systemic paradox, all documents described M&E practice as collecting data to report for accountability to donor agencies, as opposed to organizational or beneficiary learning. While accountability reporting is a reasonable request by a donor of an implementation agency, aid workers described having reporting fatigue due to the excessive data collection and reporting requirements of donors. Report fatigue is a potential cause for local organizations' lack of supplemental data collection or reporting when it is outside the scope of donors' needs and funding.

OJ (2021) suggested that evaluators produce inferior quality data as the impact is impossible to gauge within a one (or even five) year project cycle, proclaiming, "a tree doesn't take a year to grow!" Miranda (2021) also suggests the quick lifecycle of a global education project and the focus on reporting for accountability creates a perfect storm of donors rewarding displays of data-informed approaches but not always for their integrity.

An interesting finding on the coding frequencies was that I coded reports at similar frequencies as the other policy documents, which was not always the case in other sub-themes. The same was true about national policy documents (see Table 10). Possible reasons for reports describing M&E more than EBA, for example, are because reports are expressions of projects and program impacts not yet transformed into policy guidance. The reports I included, for example, came from UNESCO and were general statements of the evaluation situation within EC SIDS rather than IO reports on program accountability. However, national policies focus on M&E over evidence-based approaches because national policies are closer to implementing agencies. While it seems commonsensical that global policies might speak more generally about evidence-based practices and national policies would be more prescriptive, this would be an exciting area for future investigation. Policy actors' statements potentially confirm this theory, as statements often discussed evidence-based practices but rarely discussed M&E (see Table 9). As the statements were from policy actors working in IOs, regional organizations, and global institutions, we can probably conclude they would be more general. Perhaps if the M&E experts were local policy actors or national staff in IO offices, their

descriptions of M&E practice would lean more towards technical practice than generalized evidence-based practice, which would be another area of interest to explore in the future.

Ultimately, this sub-theme is supported by Serrat's (2009) and Fowler's (2013) contributions to the literature about reporting for accountability and action-learning IOs. At the same time, the text and talk data support M&E as an essential practice in evidence-based GEP; donors' exhaustive reporting requirements fatigue evaluators as they find little time to collect and reproduce meaningful data; evaluators find themselves rewarded for dishonesty over data integrity.

### ***Sub-theme 2.3: EBA Implementation Hurdles***

Sub-theme 2.3 captured the aid workers' frustration with needing more priority for M&E practices in GEP. Hurdles to evidence-based approaches identified in sub-theme 2.3 included (a) the need for more funding for data collection not specifically for grant reporting (or accountability), (b) the difficulty in collecting meaningful data across sometimes very distant spaces, and (c) the inability to translate or connect those findings for policymakers to ensure they inform policy. These systemic issues within IO country offices, education ministries, at the conference table, or in the classroom make the goal of becoming data-driven through effective monitoring and evaluation practice seem impossible.

Most text and talk data supported M&E, but the lack of funding for the practice and donor attention to different types of reporting required for successful GEP was challenging for participants. An example of this can be seen in Education 2030, where evidence-based practices and M&E procedures were not policy goals nor indicators of success but listed as management principles to which all IOs and implementing agencies should adhere. Alice's (2021) examples of IOs' lack of data collection exemplified this finding unless it was funded for and specific to a grant. Her frustration with this lack of prioritization came out, "I've always said, as soon as the donors make something a priority, the [IO] community will step up because they're chasing funds."

While this sub-theme represented less than a quarter of the paradox's coding frequencies (see Table 8 and Table 9), it was imperative to Caribbean participants and regional policy guidelines. In the findings, I proposed that a potential reason for this attention might be the different perspectives taken in each document type. Another explanation for more attention by regional policies on EBA implementation hurdles could be the prescriptive nature of policy documents, where the regional organization describes specific limitations

and how to overcome them. Other potential causes for this could be that Caribbean staff could more easily name specific parts of the systemic environment that were challenging outside government and stakeholder engagement and accountability, including the frustration with project cycles. In contrast, international staff might have grown accustomed to this practice. Other potential conclusions that could be drawn from Rose's (2021) example of defending the government process and inability to hold them accountable are that the Caribbean staff are more likely to defend the government and their relationships with it, seeing working with the government as a partnership and not as much as a hurdle, described by international staff.

There is relatively little literature about this paradox, where donors support evidence-based practices but do not fund research that would contribute to it. A potential reason for this is that donors are the leading evidence producers, and putting up a mirror to reflect their shortcomings would be extraordinary. Also, implementing agencies and global education program sites are typically closed, and external evaluators are not allowed to research on-site without donor and organization approval, which complicates having literature to support or reject these conclusions.

### ***Summary of the Technical Paradox***

Through the technical theme's paradox, I suggested that the discord in the systemic theme flows over into practical work environments of evaluators as donors, with their financial and diplomatic power, create an environment akin to the tied-aid environment of the 1980s, where prescriptive aid conditions caused more harm than good in developing economies, which I call tied-evaluation. While all data sources agreed that evidence-based approaches and strong M&E practices were essential to GEP, most interviewees and local policy actors concluded that achieving this goal was often impractical. Through the donor-implementing partner relationship, evaluation is an activity controlled by donors. It limits the evaluator's abilities to generate meaningful evidence, engage stakeholders and beneficiary groups in participatory approaches, and share the data collected with the government, other organizations, and program beneficiaries. This is counterproductive for CEPS, actively seeking to diffuse learnings, policies, and programs across a region to counter education stagnation.

When considering my research questions, the second paradox offers more explanation about the role of evaluators in GEP. In the systemic paradox, I described the evaluator's role as convoluted by the stances in which one viewed them. For example, from an international policy perspective, evaluators function as

data translators and policy advisors. However, from the technical paradox, we see that through donor restrictions, evaluators find conducting authentic evaluation challenging and have little power over data and results. From this perspective, the evaluator's role is as a performative reporter, only allowed to inform on the successes and failures that donors have predetermined are allowed to be shared, lacking any real power or authority to advise in the policymaking system, challenging any notions of evidence-based policymaking with data informer from those in evaluation roles.

### **Finding a Conceptual Paradox Between Neoliberal Paradigm and Unwavering support for Local Approaches**

The conceptual paradox examines the conflict between the neoliberal paradigm and the goals of implementing local solutions to evaluation in GEP. While this theme captured only a quarter of the coding, the importance that Caribbean aid workers, policy actors, and literature placed on harmonization, collaboration, and non-competition made it necessary to pull out this theme. I identified two sub-themes focusing on (a) the push towards regional collaboration, policy harmonization, collaboration, and sharing information for data-informed learning, and (b), most often, the neoliberal, or market-based, justifications for that action. As a document type, reports stood out against all other policy-related documents in this theme (see Figure 8). Reports mainly focused on sub-theme 3.2, whereas the rest of the document types focused on the first sub-theme (3.1).

The wave metaphor extended to the third paradox, which describes the underwater seascape, including the seafloor. The underwater seascape has an immense impact on the shape of a natural shoreline, each wave's formation, and its undertow. It is often invisible from the shoreline or imperceptible from the top. Undertows are the powerful current that draws back water from a wave that has crashed on the shore and can be particularly dangerous, as they are not something you can see but only feel, catching even the most advanced swimmers off-guard with their strength. The seafloor, too, can have dangerous sandbars or steep drop-offs where one would least expect it. The conceptual paradox is illustrated through this imaginary, where imperceptible forces are at odds under the ocean waves, with ideas attempting to force new policy action and momentum forward, battling the status quo and thrashing of entrenched beliefs about market supremacy and decolonial localized approaches to newly imagined education trajectories.

### ***Sub-theme 3.1: Local, Collaborative, & Harmonizing Approaches***

Sub-theme 3.1 focused primarily on localized solutions, regional policy harmonization, policy learning, and governments meaningfully collaborating and partnering with local stakeholder groups. Participants highlighted the need for collaboration to move past performativity and tokenism into genuine inclusion of local policy actors, which I detailed further in Sub-theme 1.2: Importance of Stakeholder Engagement & Power to Hold IOs & Government Accountable. While one policy actor referred to neoliberalism and its impacts on the EC SIDS (Jules 2008), there was little discussion about modernity, coloniality, decolonization, or counter-hegemonic approaches to neoliberal or market strategies inherent in global agendas or policymaking. Most text and talk data focused on efforts to collaborate and coordinate activities. Discussions were represented predominantly by Caribbean policy voices (i.e., statements and interview data) compared to the international perspectives (i.e., policies and interview data). Since Caribbean voices are steeped in an environment that promotes harmonization and collaboration, they are better equipped to move past neoliberal views than international aid workers. I will discuss this conflict in more detail in the next section, Decolonial Spacemaking.

t. d. jules (2015a) discusses regional convergence of collaboration and harmonization strategies as working towards educational gradualism, which also explains the potential conflict of worldviews between Caribbean aid workers and internationals. While educational gradualism may counter the paradigmatic neoliberal perspective in EC SIDS, even OECS and CARICOM were designed and continue to perpetuate neoliberal ideas, as they must function within the international education system or GEP. For example, while the OECS director remains steadfast in his desire to transform the EC SIDS region into one developed in a single Caribbean image (Jules 2010; 2020), he must also conform to neoliberal ideals of success and laments that the labor market returns promised by educational investments do not stack up (i.e., the cost of educational attainment are not translating to economic benefits for the country).

### ***Sub-theme 3.2: Neoliberal Solutions & Limitations***

Sub-theme 3.2 encapsulated conversations about colonialism, coloniality, neoliberalism, globalization, and market-oriented solutions in GEP, especially pertaining to evaluation. Two international aid workers (33%) problematized neoliberalism as a contributing factor to the inability of GEP to achieve participatory evaluation, superior quality M&E practice, or evidence-based policymaking. Caribbean

participants discussed collaboration and local approaches exponentially more than neoliberal limitations, unlike their international counterparts. There was no explicit reason for this divide in the discourse or why only internationals would highlight neoliberalism's negative impact on evaluation in GEP settings. However, a probable cause is that international aid workers work within IOs and are required to meet neoliberal success indicators daily. Recall Miranda (2021), an international aid worker, suggesting that donors often reward evaluators for dishonest reporting rather than integrity; perhaps this practice extends further than data collection and reporting.

Additionally, Rose (2021), a Caribbean aid worker, described doing the best with what they have. Caribbean voices focus on what is in front of them and getting work done, whereas (rightfully so) it is the international's job to grapple with the more significant questions about whether institutions, efforts, and solutions are being imposed on developing nations in a form of coloniality, or not.

A second document type focused on neoliberal perspectives in GEP and evaluation was reports (see Table 12). Reports discussed this sub-theme (3.2) 241% more than the entire text and talk dataset average. When I removed reports from the overall dataset, sub-theme 3.2 almost disappeared when considering only coding frequencies. While I did include only UNESCO reports, not program evaluations from IOs, which this thesis argues are tied to donor demands, it seems probable that even regional and annual global reports by UNESCO are influenced by neoliberal perspectives.

Lastly, international and national policies also talked more about this sub-theme than 3.1. National policies' attention on the second sub-theme, relating to neoliberalism, could be because national policies are more prescriptive than international or regional policies might be. Their specific description of evaluation practices details particular neoliberal concepts (i.e., quantifying rate-of-return in the Education Strategy of SVG (Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2014)) compared to international policy documents that speak about neoliberalism more conceptually (i.e., prescribing impact assessments in Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015a)).

### ***Summary of the Conceptual Paradox***

The conceptual findings provide clarity to the underlying workings of the GEP environment: national governments looking to engage locally adapted and supported evaluation strategies, learning from their experiences and those within the region, but having to juggle these wants with the international policy agendas, institutional influences, and need to access funding from international organizations. Even when

global agendas align with local priorities, like where Education 2030 recommends participatory evaluation practices, the funding, reporting systems, and success indicators remain controlled by international donors whose positionalities are deeply rooted in economic rationale (i.e., poverty reduction, increased labor productivity, and national GDP measures). Because of this, the CEPS' educational empirical realities continue to be controlled by exogenous Western influences, creating discord for evaluators in the GEP field.

The underwater seascape illustrates the conceptual paradox and underlying neoliberal hegemonic values that are deeply entrenched and difficult to reshape. For example, with 80% support (excluding reports) for the localized approach, the momentum of the localized processes with harmonization is still insufficient to break free from the economic paradigms embedded in GEP. However, a more insidious interpretation could be that international institutions know stakeholders, and EC SIDS specifically, wish to co-produce evaluation practice, share data, lead a localized approach to education, and add language into policies to appease them. Knowing donors control evaluation, policymakers allow for the continued conflict between education goals and institutional barriers.

Considering the third research question, what are the aid workers' perceptions of the role and usefulness of evaluation for better development practice? Aid workers believe that co-produced, collaborative, and disseminated data is the only way to approach assessment in GEP. The technical paradox highlighted the resounding support for evidence-based practices (see Sub-theme 2.1: EBA's Importance & Data Limitations), and strong support exemplified in sub-theme 3.1 makes clear any remaining doubt. Evaluation practice throughout the policy and policy-related documents support this conclusion.

### **Decolonial Spacemaking**

Part of the practical decolonial approach taken in this thesis was making space for Caribbean voices (i.e., actors' statements, interview participants, and national policies). Including and amplifying Caribbean voices allowed me to focus on conducting research *with* the Caribbean community rather than *on* them (Atkins, 2013). The added attention to whose voices were represented throughout my thesis allowed me to ensure that international perspectives did not overshadow Caribbean voices and perspectives. Additionally, by weaving decolonial perspectives throughout the study and separating them into their own spaces in Chapters II, III, and here, I can answer my second research question more clearly: how might decolonial methodologies impact evaluation and evidence generation in GEP?

The international policy documents suggest that decolonial methodologies, including co-produced research with beneficiary communities in GEP, should be the norm. Across all policy and policy-related documents, the support for more inclusion and stakeholder engagement sounds an emphatic “yes!” from consultation through participatory design and implementation and widespread dissemination to evoke a data revolution. Similarly, the conceptual paradox describes local and collaborative measures for all evaluation as the primary focus for participants over economic concepts of success. The hurdle was the seascape the international development community has erected that makes achieving that goal a reality. Donors primarily fund research to control implementing agencies through accountability, not for learning. Caribbean interview participants also highlighted the importance of focusing on collaboration, harmonization, and community rather than countering hegemonic neoliberal stances or coloniality, which was an interesting finding.

My research set out to look at the role of evaluators in GEP, their perspectives of EBA within their field of work, and whether decolonial theories would help build out a more considerable breadth of evidence for them. From a decolonial standpoint, where we question the dominant paradigms and incorporate typically othered voices, Caribbean voices have proclaimed that rejecting coloniality is less important than focusing on community and localism. Sub-theme 3.1 highlights this hyperfixation of Caribbean policy actors on a different approach, perhaps signifying the post-interpretative turn that policy studies and GEP have already supposed to have made. The participants focus on the future, which has already left behind neoliberal approaches, whereas international participants remain steeped in them. While the actors utilize the neoliberal tools required of them, OJ (2021) proclaims that she is unapologetically Black, and if she could get her funding from Africa, there would be no looking back (implying African funding would be non-Western and devoid of neoliberal stances). For OJ, decolonization is here, and she is at the place Tuck and Yang (2012) called “elsewhere,” offering evaluators a place if they are interested.

Through the wave metaphor, evaluators would need to approach the observation (or surfing) differently if they adopted decolonial methods. For example, the information they included and the evidence they generated would be collected, analyzed, reported, and disseminated without limitations by donors and for learning and beneficiary’s need for accountability. Surfers could continue to watch from the shoreline, from a computer abroad, or atop a wave - only their purpose and outputs would change from donor-focused to beneficiary-focused. I do not mean that accountability reporting or program auditing would disappear,

only that other types of research would be required to be funded additionally for all programs in a way that does not continue to contribute to evaluator fatigue.

### **Gaps in the Themes Presented**

There are gaps in this multi-lens presentation of the CEPS environment, where essential concepts are undiscussed and thus unexplored in the data and, therefore, were underrepresented in the study. For example, the term *accountability*, discussed in sub-theme 1.2, is used superficially. Data included do not interrogate who holds whom accountable and for what purpose. There are severe systemic and technical consequences of this, including (a) donors holding more power over evidence generation and reporting than potentially intended and (b) data being seen as inferior or as inherently flawed as it becomes operationalized as “evidence” meant to influence policymaking. This may be the case, but further research is needed to draw that conclusion, which is a foregone assumption. While the consensus was that governments ought to be held accountable by civil society agents, systemic barriers like performative or tokenistic stakeholder engagement make this impossible.

Another area that was unexplored in the study was *intentionality*. Stone (2020) suggests that data represents our counting process and what we believe counts. There is an intention to count as a presentation of what matters. However, this topic was not discussed in the text and talk data selected for this CPA. The implications of this are that it is unclear whether the global agenda means to contradict its own goals with managerial practices that make evidence-based decision-making improbable. While the broad support for EBA and monitoring and evaluation practices suggest otherwise, without knowing why the GEP environment continues to support such a harmful tied-evaluation environment, it is challenging to articulate viable solutions that move away from such conditions.

The idea that *education is a solution to poverty*, and therefore, successful education leads to market-based returns, is an adage that continues to place economic concepts as the rationale for prioritizing education in nation-states (UNESCO, 2018). By connecting educational inputs to labor market outputs, we distort the purpose of an educated citizenry and continue to perpetuate coloniality through the neoliberalist hegemony of GEP and education programs. This is also related to the lack of interrogation of evaluation data being used to diffuse policy and practice across the globe, which is another way to see globalization. For example, Jules (2020a, pp. 2-6) described the EC education environment as a “shadow of globalization” where industrialized nations, whether intentional or not, weakened developing states, “reducing them to a

state of dependency.” However, as a Director of the OECS, no direct references to the detrimental effects of globalization or neoliberalism were made in two speeches about the CEPS and plans for policy harmonization. Alice (2021), an international IO director, argued that taking such a political stance against partners (or, in Jules’ case, funders of OECS) is a stance that an organization cannot afford. As local and regional organizations lack agency within the funding relationship and partnership (i.e., they cannot exit the partnership without repercussions (Hirschman, 1970)), donors hold power and create the tied-evaluation environment in which GEP exists.

### **Implications and Limitations of the Research**

The data collected, themes presented, and findings discussed in this thesis offered one perspective of a complex policy system, with many policy actors, institutions, and ideas influencing its flow at any given time. The study’s limitations are in thematic analysis and the CPA as an iterative process; it is possible alternative documents or standpoints would yield another set of results. For instance, while I was familiar with the evaluation and global education texts before undertaking my research, I first conducted my interviews before completing any research on the EC SIDS (i.e., identifying key policy documents, reports, or policy actors and allowing their answers to guide me to essential data for the study). While some interview participants accepted the opportunity to control my coding, themes, and final presentation of findings, the thematic analysis merely reflects the CEPS at this specific place and time. Additionally, for results to be relevant outside the CEPS, it would be necessary to conduct further research into SIDS in other regions.

For policymakers, the research highlights the necessity to question data presented as “evidence” for the intent that data has been mobilized. The implications of the research, however, are a new contribution to evaluating a complex space, as I offer an example of conducting critical approaches in GEP. Additionally, this research provides context for the systemic, technical, and conceptual environments in which evaluators find themselves with a practical decolonial lens. This lens incorporates typically othered voices of their beneficiaries, answering whose voice, experience, and knowledge are valuable when conducting research, an essential task Indigenous communities have asked us to undertake.

Severe gaps in GEP provide ample opportunities for future research, including comparing this study’s findings to other SIDS and continuing to adapt Stone’s policy paradox and Kingdon’s multiple streams theory into a policy wave paradox theory, which would be valuable for GEP. A deeper dive can be

taken into understanding how document types produce different learnings, mainly focusing on the skewing of reports in IO and where evaluators and policymakers should go to find less biased information.

Additionally, as the policy landscape of GEP becomes more apparent, we will be able to elucidate the effects of globalization, neoliberalism, and coloniality within SIDS, truly taking that interpretative turn that decolonization scholars request of us and have possibly already taken themselves.

Lastly, the most significant limitation of this study was my choice of audience and decision to make the findings practical for evaluators. That decision required me to take a macro look at GEP, including international, regional, national, and local policy actors, institutions, and organizations. Many nuanced findings are lost in this approach, including a deep conceptual review of decolonization theory within the EC SIDS country examples. However, by practically applying decolonization theory as I have done in this thesis, evaluators have an example of an approach that can be used even in the most restricted M&E department. While I may have sacrificed depth for breadth, I believe the contributions to the field through methodology and examples make up for this limitation.

## **Concluding Remarks**

I set sail on my dissertation journey, riding the wave of the international community calling for evidence-based policy and practice. My goal was to understand the role evaluators play within GEP, whether the data they generated was helpful (to policymakers or practitioners), and whether decolonial perspectives could add weight to our findings. While I had expected to find that the multitude of actors made researching the area complicated, I had not expected that there was uniform support for evidence-informed, data-driven, or results-oriented education programming across the development sector. I had not expected to find such strong support for monitoring and evaluation practices, especially co-produced participatory research methods across the global education policy landscape. I expected to see an evaluation environment limited by donors, yet not one where this dynamic creates a paradox within the system, inconsistent with the stated wants of (almost) all policy actors and policies that no one was discussing. I had not expected local approaches and policy harmonization to play a pivotal role in policy, policy-related, and interview participants' perspectives of quality evaluation and practice.

While I was able to answer my research questions with the limited research available in GEP and what policy actors were willing to reveal to me through the talk and text data, there are plenty of areas left to

explore. For instance, I wished to go deeper into coloniality and dissect the region with themes relevant to feminism or gender equality, but that was not the seascape in which I found myself. Another area that requires further exploration is the tied-evaluation environment in which evaluators in GEP find themselves, akin to the SAP climate of the 1980s. Without an entity controlling donor's power over implementing agencies and data production in GEP, evaluators will continue to remain tied by the limitations placed on them by funding agencies. The situation evaluators find themselves in is essential to resolve should CEPS and GEP genuinely want to generate meaningful data to inform evidence-based practice and policymaking.

However, the fact remains that without a policy event strong enough to wash away the institutional barriers erected by international organizations in GEP, data generation in GEP environments will continue to serve the purpose of donors' accountability frameworks and not the learning and development of implementing agencies, local governments, or beneficiaries. Without evaluators claiming the power mandated to them in the international education agendas and policies, evidence-based practice and policymaking will continue to be perfunctory, only signaling modernity steeped in coloniality. Likewise, neoliberalism and market-based rationale will continue to be the predominant justification for educational investment, and the return on investment for policymakers will define indicators of success. Without this theoretical shift, Caribbean voices and experiences will continue to be seen as alternatives, lacking the rigor needed to be included in evaluations and reports in GEP environments and never supplementing data collection efforts as "informed assumptions," as OJ (2021) described.

As an evaluator, my concern is mainly with the tides. Tides are predictable – two low and high daily based on a foreseeable pattern. However, environmental shifts can change the tides' patterns with energy passing through waves, making them tsunamis of change or emptiness. These are the findings that evaluators seek but are unable to capture. Just like our definitions of data need to evolve, our evaluation practices need to break free from the limitations placed on evaluators by donors. In GEP, the status quo is a safe harbor, a beach with little waves and almost no impact. To find policies and practices that have an effect, we need to be free to evaluate all projects, share data with beneficiary groups, and move towards research *with* communities rather than *on* and *for* communities.

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## Appendix

### Appendix I – Final Coding and Themes

Document Type		Data (Citations)	1.1.	1.2.	1.3.	1.4.	2.1.	2.2.	2.3.	3.1.	3.2.
		Sub-theme->									
<b>Interviews</b>	<b>International</b>	Alice (2021)	37	31	27	22	48	22	14	37	8
		Miranda (2021)	58	43	23	29	84	42	17	30	25
		Justice (2021)	66	47	8	23	62	22	20	38	9
	<b>Caribbean</b>	Rose (2021)	49	43	10	22	44	33	24	37	4
		OJ (2021)	33	23	15	22	34	19	12	46	4
		Star (2021)	46	32	11	33	44	28	14	53	6
<b>Statements</b>	Burunciuc (2021)	31	14	8	2	13	2	5	19	0	
	Jules (2020)	23	14	12	4	16	3	7	28	6	
	Jules (no date)	67	34	22	16	45	5	9	63	18	
	Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean (2014)	48	16	14	3	19	7	6	32	3	
	Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean (2017)	36	11	16	5	19	6	2	31	7	
	Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean (2022)	25	13	2	2	9	2	0	29	4	
	Kim (2020)	41	19	21	4	21	10	4	17	5	
	Pedro (2021)	26	6	15	2	10	2	3	15	8	
	Jules (2008)	160	65	65	19	93	8	5	108	21	
	Jules (2010)	91	45	35	20	50	8	10	64	24	
	Jules (2009)	5	2	4	1	3	0	0	8	0	
<b>Policies</b>	<b>Global</b>	UN General Assembly (2015)	152	76	58	46	58	6	6	67	21
		UNESCO (2015c)	591	240	163	109	324	103	91	300	72
	<b>Regional</b>	Jules, Miller and Armstrong (2000)	246	122	85	33	103	27	44	210	30
		Miller, Jules and Thomas (2000)	391	125	134	112	102	61	53	389	32
		Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (2016)	458	187	247	108	270	89	121	413	36
	<b>SVG</b>	Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2013)	773	576	156	89	371	84	250	529	161
		Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2014)	787	388	76	55	185	111	143	313	87
	<b>Grenada</b>	Government of Grenada (2003)	150	274	43	28	119	67	84	133	51
		Government of Grenada (2019)	298	31	159	182	240	163	134	517	88
	<b>Reports</b>	Miller (2000)	2	0	1	69	139	113	46	10	97
UNESCO (2021)		0	0	0	296	849	680	225	0	528	
ECLAC, UNESCO and UNICEF (2022)		0	0	0	12	44	32	9	0	38	
UNESCO (2015b)		0	0	0	8	47	32	7	0	32	
UNESCO (2015a)		1	0	3	10	34	34	9	1	35	

## Appendix II – Ethical Approval

Est.  
1841 | YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

York St John University  
Lord Mayor's Walk  
York YO31 7EX

+44(0)1904 624 624  
www.yorksja.ac.uk

School of Education, Language and Psychology

12 March 2021

Dear Kelsey Hood Cattaneo ,

I am pleased to inform you that your project "Evidence-Based Policymaking for International Education Aid Programming: Failing Decolonization and Token Feminism " has now been approved by the School Research Ethics Committee for the School of Education, Language and Psychology.

However, the application is approved on the condition that you ensure your project does the following:

- Ensure data storage is only via a YSJU OneDrive account as this is the recommended safe and secure software by the University.
- Only use your university email in the research project when communicating, never a personal email.
- The committee agreed that it is unnecessary to ask for street address and year of birth. You should use a numbering system or code that you either produce and give the participant (e.g., 1A,2A,3A..), or allow them to come up with their own pseudonym (e.g., choose a memorable fake name, or a favourite place name). To find out more about using pseudonyms in research, see :Ruth E.S. Allen & Janine L. Wiles (2016) A rose by any other name: participants choosing research pseudonyms, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 13:2, 149-165, DOI: [10.1080/14780887.2015.1133746](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2015.1133746)

You do not have to send the committee anything to check this, only your PhD supervisor need check that your project and the associated documentation meets this conditions above (e.g., change Info Sheet if necessary).

The approval code is: REDEDU00049



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Once these items are checked by your supervisor/s you can proceed with the project and we wish you good luck, it sounds fascinating, but do let us know if you plan any substantial amendments.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Scott Cole, Chair, Ethics committee  
School of Education, Language and Psychology.

Est.  
1841

YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

York St John University  
Lord Mayor's Walk  
York YO31 7EX

+44(0)1904 624 624  
[www.yorksja.ac.uk](http://www.yorksja.ac.uk)



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