Insights from the 21st Annual Conference of the Parties (COP-21)
The 2015 United Nations’ Climate Change Conference was held in Paris, France, from November 30 to December 12, 2015. It was the 21st annual session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-21) to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 11th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

The conference negotiated the Paris Agreement (see “The Paris Agreement” below), a global agreement on the reduction of climate change, the text of which represented a consensus of the representatives of the 196 parties attending the conference. The agreement will become legally binding if joined by at least 55 countries, which together represent at least 55 percent of global greenhouse emissions. Such parties will need to sign the agreement in New York between April 22, 2016 (Earth Day) and April 21, 2017, and also adopt it within their own legal systems (through ratification, acceptance, approval, or accession).

The following three articles include interviews with Observers from key stakeholder groups conducted in December 2015 and January 2016 on behalf of EM by Gary Bramble, a long-time member of EM’s Editorial Advisory Committee and past COP Observer. [Editor’s Note: The interviewees were given the option of providing insights anonymously.]

The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement was adopted on December 12, 2015, and includes the following key elements:

• Establishes the first-ever universal framework for addressing greenhouse gas emissions involving actions by all nations, a major step for developing countries.

• Enshrines the concept of nationally determined contributions (NDCs)—in which each nation defines the GHG commitment it can make—and sets in place a process for increasing those commitments every five years.

• Contains a global goal of holding the increase in the global average temperature “to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels.”

• Establishes a global stocktaking process, to begin in 2023, to assess progress towards meeting the purpose of the Agreement and the long-term goals.

• Establishes frameworks for transparency of action and support, which includes reporting requirements designed to provide clarity in tracking the progress of Parties in achieving their NDCs and their provisions of support, including financing.

• Allows for Parties to engage in the voluntary use of “cooperative approaches” in meeting their NDCs, including the use of markets through:
  - Emissions trading (known as “internationally transferred mitigation outcomes”); and
  - Creation of a mechanism to support sustainable development for projects undertaken in a host country that help another country meet its NDC (similar to the clean development mechanism established under the Kyoto Protocol).