Gulf South Rising

COP21 / Paris Report
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Introduction

Thirty-one delegates from the Gulf South traveled as part of the Gulf South Rising delegation to Paris, France and participated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of Parties (COP) from November 30th until December 6th, 2015. Community members shared their unique Gulf South perspective with global communities on the frontlines of climate change and brought back stories from people working for ecological justice around the world. Airfare, lodging and meals were provided for the entire delegation through supporting grants from philanthropic partners and individual donors.

Throughout the year Gulf South Rising worked towards the attainment of four goals: 1) to build regional movement infrastructure; 2) to connect and convene frontline communities around collective healing and ecological equity; 3) to advance regional efforts of indigenous tribal and land sovereignty; and, 4) to shift the regional narrative from resilience to resistance. Gulf South Rising’s delegation to Paris prioritized indigenous leadership and created a mobile community that furthered ecological equity and served as the culmination of the Gulf South Rising 2015 initiative.

The delegation in Champeaux, France.
Why Paris 2015?

As affirmed by the Gulf South Rising initiative, 2015 was a decisive year for the climate justice movement in the Gulf South and internationally. From hurricanes to oil-drilling disasters, the Gulf states have already been experiencing many severe impacts resulting from decades of unaccountable extraction and inequity in climate-based disaster recovery. As the effects of climate change continue and intensify, global leaders promised a new climate agreement through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference Of Parties (COP) held in Paris in late 2015. The legally binding Paris Agreement on climate change has now been signed by more than 150 world leaders.

COP21/Paris was a movement-building moment. Gulf South Rising organized to put frontline communities in the center of this global focal point to deepen relationships and alliances. COP21 was an opportunity to hear the voices of frontline communities bearing the brunt of the climate and economic crisis and the corporate practices that drive it. Comprised of grassroots and frontline community leaders, the Gulf South Rising delegation wanted to build off of the strength and lessons learned from Gulf South Rising’s 2015 events, to put frontline voices at the center, and to have the most strategic impact possible.
The Delegation

Gulf South Rising’s invitation to be on the delegation was open to the general Gulf South community and targeted invitations were made to individuals who had engaged with the Gulf South Rising initiative during 2015. Community members were asked to complete an application and were ranked based on whether they had:

- hosted a previous Gulf South Rising event
- participated in a previous Gulf South Rising event
- facilitated a local Gulf South Rising group meeting
- hosted a Gulf South Rising training
- participated in a Gulf South Rising training

Priority delegates, who were allowed to enter accredited UN spaces, were selected earlier in the year due to security clearance requirements and based on leadership in a unique frontline community of the Gulf South.

As funding became available, individuals were invited to join the delegation according to their position in the final ranking. In the end, Gulf South Rising was able to welcome all 31 applicants into the delegation. Short biographies of all delegates can be found on the [Gulf South Rising website](#) and in Appendix 1.

The delegation was comprised of community members, staff and out-of-the-region allies. Of the 31 individuals in the delegation, 24 are leaders from communities at the frontlines of climate change in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida. Of the 24 leaders, seven individuals were identified as priority delegates, and three of these were credentialed to attend the accredited COP21 zone as official observers of the negotiations. Gulf South Rising’s three credentialed delegates included Principal Chief Thomas Dardar of the United Houma Nation in Louisiana; Mary Gutierrez, founder of Earth Ethics, Inc. and an environmental scientist and climate activist in Florida; and Colette Pichon Battle, Esq., Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy, in Louisiana, and Lead Coordinator of the Gulf South Rising Initiative. Six individuals acted as support staff for the delegation.
The Gulf South Rising delegation included people from diverse geographic, cultural, professional, and spiritual backgrounds. The delegates collectivized assets including knowledge of security and emergency preparedness, audiovisual production, photography, healing practices, and multiple languages. The youngest delegate was 19 years old, a student at an HBCU in Louisiana, and the oldest delegates were two 76-year-olds, one of which is a long time Civil Rights activist from Mississippi and the other of Cajun heritage from South Louisiana.

Most of the delegation on tour in Paris. Photo credit: So-Called Media.

**Gulf South Rising Process**

**Setting a Collective Vision**

The Gulf South Rising initiative envisioned an intentional connection of Gulf South frontline leaders to international processes rooted in human rights and global accountability. The vision of a Gulf South Rising delegation at the COP21 prioritized building community through a shared experience that connected the delegation to the rest of the globe, and developing a grassroots self-governance method. As a result of the latter, delegates were asked to wholeheartedly commit to collective decision-making. Decisions were made collectively from the beginning; for example, the delegation’s driving goals came out of a conversation among community members in an open Gulf South Rising meeting in Louisiana, and were collectively reaffirmed by delegates. These goals were: (1) to take stories of the impacts of climate change in the
Gulf South to share with counterparts in the Global South; (2) to connect with individuals from the Global South and collect stories of the impacts of climate change in their communities; (3) to share, with communities in the Gulf South, stories collected, experiences lived, and knowledge gained.

Delegates Ruth Story and Noreen Dardar at the COP21 Climate Generations Area at Le Bourget. Photo credit: Maria Victoire.

Collective Self-Governance

The terrorist attacks in Paris in late November 2015 raised concerns about Gulf South Rising’s delegates’ safety and participation in the COP. Applicants to the Gulf South Rising delegation were convened on a regional call to discuss the political climate in France and changes to COP21-related activities. This call created space for delegates to voice and respond to concerns, and to collectively decide whether the delegation should still go to Paris. Various delegates expressed concerns about travel restrictions, the potential for ongoing terrorist attacks, and the possibility of violent backlash against Muslims and people of color in the delegation from state police, military members or private citizens. Given that Gulf South Rising intentionally prioritized people of color from the Gulf South for its delegation, many of the delegates voiced concern over over-policing or targeting of people of color. The discussion around whether or not the
delegation should still go included the assessment of alternatives (e.g., going with fewer people or for a shorter period of time) and an assessment of these alternatives using the Jemez principles as a guide (e.g., What does it mean to be inclusive in this context? Can we say we are being inclusive if we are leaving behind people of color because they do not feel safe?). Using a conference call service that allowed call participants to vote on their phones, delegates voted to go to Paris, with 47% of delegates agreeing that “we really should go”, 17% agreeing that “we should go”, 7% remaining neutral, and 15% agreeing that “we should not go” or “we really should not go”. The size of the delegation was not modified and individuals were given the option to decide whether or not they wanted to go; 28 affirmed their desire to go, while 4 individuals opted not to go. Troy Robertson, a young delegate from Louisiana, captured the essence of the delegation's reason to push forward:

We should maybe modify the delegation because it’s obvious some people do not want to go. And I personally think that this is an amazing opportunity, despite the threats that we’re confronted with. People in the past have been confronted with the same threats, and danger was just as imminent, but they made a decision to look past those threats and stay on path. It’s very important that we do go and make sure that the voices of the Gulf South are heard. If anything else, this is not about going to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower, and just having a conversation with people. My gut is telling me that this is the right thing to do. If we don’t go, if we allow fear to take us, we are going to regret it one day because this isn’t just for us. This is for the entire Gulf South. This is for future generations.

From left to right: delegates Tabitha Mustafa, Eric Harrison, Troy Robertson and Chinasa Porter in Luxembourg with a sustainable farmer. Photo credit: So-Called Media.
The decision to take a delegation to COP21 despite the terrorist attacks was accompanied by the decision to create a security team responsible for developing protocols according to which the delegation would move and behave. These protocols (summarized in the Security Work Plan, see Appendix 2) included the creation of a buddy system, and a requirement for delegates to move in groups of four or more at all times. Delegates from Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi travelled together to and from Paris, as did delegates from Florida. Four staff members were sent ahead of time to prepare for the delegation’s arrival at the airport. Every morning a member of the security team briefed delegates on the day’s activities, and groups were formed with at least one member of the security team as team lead in each group. A communication tree was put in place: all delegates reported to their team lead throughout the day, and these team leads in turn communicated with each other. The delegation relied on WhatsApp, an Internet-dependent messaging application for smartphones, to stay communicated. In order to ensure that all delegates could use WhatsApp for the duration of the trip, Gulf South Rising applied to and received a $1,000 grant and distributed it evenly among all delegates so they could hire an international data phone plan. Individuals without access to WhatsApp were required to have a buddy with WhatsApp capabilities.
Originally, the Gulf South Rising delegation was to stay in two separate apartments in the heart of Paris. However, as a security precaution, the delegation collectively decided to keep one apartment in downtown Paris as a safe house and to stay in Champeaux, a small town outside of Paris, at a house run by the ATD Fourth World Movement. This change allowed for the entire delegation to be housed together and decreased the cost of housing. The delegation also chose to move around as a group in private-hire buses and vans so as to avoid any potential threats to delegates moving independently and/or using public transportation; the savings in housing made this transportation option viable. One small car was also rented for small outings (like grocery shopping) and potential emergencies.
Building Community

Delegates came together every morning to go over the day’s itinerary and delegates’ tasks for the day and came together again in the evening to debrief. At the suggestion of one of the delegates, every meeting started with song; not only did the group adopt the suggestion, they held each other accountable to implement it.

Throughout the duration of the delegation’s stay in Paris day-to-day work was collectivized and divided among group members. Given that the delegation did not stay at a hotel but rather stayed at a house, every day delegates were asked to help with cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, and other household-maintenance chores. This division of labor helped create a sense of community and family among delegates, as they had to learn how to work together and communicate with each other.

“It is easy to tell when groups have sang together and when groups haven’t. When we embrace music as sublime liberation, communication, and connection it is beautiful! It fosters a unique intimacy.”

Delegates Noreen Dardar, Ife Kilimanjaro, Mary Gutierrez and Kamalah Fletcher preparing a meal. Photo credit: Yvette Arellano
Delegates May Nguyen and Chris Lang helping with the dishes.

The ATD Fourth World Movement house was renovated and is up-kept by volunteers. The managers of the house suggested that the Gulf South Rising delegation follow in this tradition and leave the house better than they found it. Before leaving some delegates deeply cleaned the house, some members of the delegation repaired a brick wall and others painted a colorful mural with the Gulf South Rising logo.

“\[quote\]
I have never been comfortable with this communal living, this was not a comfortable situation to come into and now I’m genuinely sad leaving this.\[quote\]

From left to right: Erik Elshire, May Nguyen and Bro. T (Tyrone Henry) repair a wall. Photo credit: Colette Pichon Battle
Sharing Knowledge and Information

Every day delegates were presented with various options of activities that they could choose to attend; often these activities overlapped in time, or were held at separate venues. At the end of each day delegates dined together and had an informal debrief session in which delegates communicated to each other and the group what they had learned and experienced that day. Additionally, delegates committed to collect materials (such as handouts, flyers, etc.) to be scanned and uploaded to a shared online folder to which all delegates have access; these resources are now available to other community members upon request. As delegates met other climate leaders and individuals from the Global South, business cards and contact information were also made available to the broader delegation so that all delegates could benefit from the expansion of their professional and movement networks. Additionally, delegates uploaded their pictures and videos to a shared online folder accessible to the entire delegation.

Delegate Maria Victoire with indigenous representatives at the COP21 Climate Generations Area.

Delegates May Nguyen and Jennifer Crosslin with Philippine community members. Photo credit: Craig Magraff.
Climate Justice / Climate Science Communications Training

Delegates were required to attend a climate justice and climate science communications training before departing to Paris. This one-day training in New Orleans was open to the public and delegates from the sister HBCU delegation. This was the first time all of the Gulf South Rising delegates came together and met each other. Individuals that could not attend the training in person were invited to join via a video conference call.

The training was led by experts from the Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy, Union of Concerned Scientists and the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Dillard University. Delegates were presented with information on climate justice, just transition, the COP21 and its significance, climate science, and EPA’s toxic release inventory. Delegates were also introduced to strategies for effectively communicating climate change and their own personal stories, as well as strategies for giving interviews to media and remaining in control.
Gulf South Rising Delegate Packet

For many delegates the trip to Paris was their first excursion out of the country. In an effort to make the trip as easy and accessible as possible, delegates were presented with a Delegate Packet, which included information on actions delegates needed to take before traveling (such as applying for a passport), travel itineraries, things to pack, what to expect in France, basic words and phrases in France, and emergency numbers and procedures. The packet also included a copy of the invitation letter sent to all delegates as well as a copy of the commitment form each delegate had to sign. A full copy of the Delegate Packet is available in Appendix 3.

Funding

Gulf South Rising was able to put together this 31-person delegation thanks to generous support from diverse organizations and individuals. In total, approximately $50,640.00 were raised, and total expenses came to $62,060.00. See Table 1 and Table 2 below for more information on grants and donations and on expenses, respectively.

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<th>Donor</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overbrook Foundation through Climate Justice Alliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chorus Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women Donor Network – Individual Donor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foundation for Louisiana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women Donor Network - Aggregated</td>
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<td>Natural Resources Defense Council</td>
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<td>Food</td>
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<td>Staffing &amp; Service Fees</td>
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<td>International Phone Plans</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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Media

Traditional Media

Various news outlets covered Gulf South Rising’s delegation to COP21 before the delegation left the U.S. and during its stay in Paris. Some of the coverage was a response to Gulf South Rising’s press release and targeted outreach, and some of it was a result of news organizations independently reaching out to Gulf South Rising after having heard of the initiative throughout the year. Some of the news articles focused on the delegation as a whole, while others focused on individual delegates and their organizations; some articles were penned by delegates themselves. Table 3, below, lists all of these media hits with details about who is featured and provides live links.

The New Orleans NPR station, WWNO, did a series of pieces on the delegation and its allies; interviews were recorded both in Paris and in Louisiana. WWNO pieces focused on support for federal recognition for the United Houma Nation, stopping investments in
fossil fuels in Louisiana, and a look at our partner HBCU delegation. Highlights from other sources include Al Jazeera Plus's “Louisiana Disappearing: Living On the Brink of Climate Change”, featuring Louisiana delegates Colette Pichon-Battle, Eric Harrison, and the United Houma Nation; the National Journal’s “Southern Groups Find Common Cause with Poor Nations in Fighting Climate Change”, featuring all three priority delegates (Chief Thomas Dardar, Mary Gutierrez, and Colette Pichon-Battle); and Open Democracy's “International Rights of Nature Tribunal: Pachamama vs. ‘macho papas’”, featuring Gulf South Rising ally T.E.J.A.S..

Social Media

Delegates were responsible for the creation of content for Gulf South Rising's social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter). Every morning delegates were assigned a specific task like tweeting two things and making one Facebook post, sharing the United Houma Nation's petition for federal recognition, and sharing the Al Jazeera Plus piece.
on Louisiana's disappearing coast. Delegates were asked to use #GulfSouthRising and encouraged to like, re-tweet and share other delegates' posts.

All delegates were required to write a blog post with reflections on their experiences in Paris at COP21, lessons learned, insights into how their work will change in light of the new agreement, etc. All delegates' posts can be found on the Gulf South Rising website.

GCCLP staff member Emma Collin briefing delegates about the day’s social media goals. Photo credit: So-Called Media.

“GSR had a strong push on updating social media and retweeting each other is/was pretty amazing.”

Delegates James Hartwell, Kevin Roberts, Robert Desmarais Sullivan and Troy Robertson working on blog posts after a day at COP21. Photo credit: So-Called Media.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Feature</th>
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<tr>
<td>11/25/15</td>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>Colette Pichon Battle, GSR</td>
<td>Climate Activists Scale Back Plans For U.N. Summit In Wake Of Paris Attacks</td>
<td>Reid Frazier</td>
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<td>11/25/15</td>
<td>WWNO</td>
<td>HBCU Delegation, Dr. Beverly Wright</td>
<td>Students From Historic Black Universities Head To Paris Climate Talks</td>
<td>Tegan Wendland</td>
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<td>Pensacola News Journal</td>
<td>GSR, Mary Gutierrez</td>
<td>Pensacolian in Paris for U.N. meeting</td>
<td>Thomas St. Myer</td>
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<td>11/30/15</td>
<td>Atlanta Progressive News</td>
<td>GSR</td>
<td>Over 500 Atlantans March For Climate Justice In Lead Up To Paris Negotiations</td>
<td>Anna Simonton</td>
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<td>12/2/15</td>
<td>AJ+</td>
<td>Eric Harrison, Colette Pichon Battle, United Houma Nation, GSR</td>
<td>Louisiana Disappearing: Living On The Brink Of Climate Change</td>
<td>Francesca Fiorentini</td>
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<td>12/2/15</td>
<td>WWNO</td>
<td>GSR, Emma Collin</td>
<td>From Paris: Growing Movement Aims To Stop Louisiana Investment In Fossil Fuels</td>
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<td>12/2/15</td>
<td>France Ecologie Énergie</td>
<td>Yvette Arellano</td>
<td>La Société Civile à la COP 21: Rencontre Avec Yvette Arellano</td>
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<td>12/3/15</td>
<td>National Journal</td>
<td>GSR, Houma Nation, Colette Pichon Battle, Mary Gutierrez</td>
<td>Southern Groups Find Common Cause with Poor Nations in Fighting Climate Change</td>
<td>Jason Plautz</td>
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<td>12/4/15</td>
<td>Facing South</td>
<td>GSR, Chief Thomas, Mary Gutierrez</td>
<td>Gulf South Communities on Climate Change Front Lines Represented at Paris talks</td>
<td>Sue Sturgis</td>
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<td>12/7/15</td>
<td>WWNO</td>
<td>Chief Thomas</td>
<td>From Paris: Houma Chief Seeks Support For Tribe</td>
<td>Tegan Wendland</td>
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Alternative Communications

One of the delegates proposed that the delegation take a token of some kind for delegates to use as networking tools. A group of delegates came together to develop the idea further and created cypress tokens with a logo that combined the Gulf South Rising logo and hashtag with the Climate Symbol. The Climate Symbol, developed by Care About Climate, is an internationally recognized symbol that indicates an individual’s commitment to climate change action. Each delegate received three tokens to give to individuals from around the world with whom they connected. The purpose of the token was to give others something by which they could remember their interaction with Gulf South Rising delegates, and that would encourage them to look at Gulf South Rising’s website and social media pages.
Delegates working on the cypress tokens. Photo credit: So-Called Media.

Delegate Eric Harrison sharing a cypress token with artist Jean-Sébastien Raud at the Climate Generations Area at COP21. Photo credit: So-Called Media.

“The Gulf South Rising Cypress Tree tokens were a brilliant idea and allowed for us to stay connected with the global community, and I think we should expand even more on the idea”
**Evaluation**

**Delegates’ Reality**

Even though racism is not legally condoned it is a real part of people of color’s daily lives, and Gulf South Rising’s delegation’s trip to France was no exception. Many of the delegates experienced discrimination during the enforcement of security protocols while traveling, both in the U.S. and in France. In New Orleans one African American male delegate under 30 years old was denied access to the plane after his passport did not scan correctly at the airline’s ticketing counter. His was not the only passport that did not scan, and while airline employees seemed willing to manually type in other travelers’ information, there was no effort made to do the same for the young African American delegate (who was told to get a new passport because he would not be allowed entry back into the country even if he was allowed entry to France). This young man did not travel with the Gulf South Rising delegation to Paris.

On the way back from Paris, an African American female delegate under 30 years old with Muslim heritage was harassed by airport security officials who demeaned her and began to interrogate her after they found a beauty product with Arabic writing on it in her purse. Airport security management was called and two lawyers traveling with the Gulf South Rising delegation, both of whom are trained observers with the National Lawyers Guild, stood by to witness everything.

At immigration in Dallas, on the way back from France, a male African American delegate under 30 was harassed and intimidated by border patrol officers after his passport did not scan correctly; in the end he had to put something down in writing to be allowed back into the country. A male African American delegate in his late 40s and a female African delegate in her mid-50s were also double-searched by TSA (Transportation Security Administration) officers.
There is a clear pattern here: people of color, particularly young African American males, continue to be discriminated against and harassed by those in positions of power at all levels.

Delegates Chinasa Porter, Grace Morris, Kaydrianne Young, Erik Elshire, Kevin Roberts and Chris Lang.
Photo credit: Chinasa Porter.

**Self-Assessment**

On the final night at Champeaux, the entire delegation met to share thoughts as the trip came to a close. Delegates were asked two questions: “What are you taking away from the Gulf South Rising trip to COP21?” and “What do you look forward to in 2016?”

There were many common themes in delegates’ answers to the question “What are you taking away from the Gulf South Rising trip to COP21?”. The most echoed sentiment was that of leaving with a new family, a new team, and a new community. The delegation’s emphasis on relationship-building during the trip yielded personal connections that empowered delegates, who left knowing that there is a group of people
with whom they can meaningfully engage, and who will support them in the fight for equity and climate justice.

Many delegates also expressed leaving with a new understanding of climate change and the similarities between the Gulf South and the rest of the world as discovered through connections made with, and stories gathered from, individuals from the Global South. Finally, many delegates expressed leaving with a renewed understanding of self, and reignited passion to continue fighting for equity and climate justice.

When asked what they looked forward to in 2016, delegates overwhelmingly said they would like to see the continuation and deepening of the personal connections built in France. Many delegates also expressed a desire to see the Gulf South Rising community grow and continue working towards the dismantling of oppressive systems while highlighting the people power that exists in the Gulf South. Concrete next steps were offered, including: deepening the Gulf South Rising community’s analysis by participating in anti-racism trainings, and capturing the Gulf South Rising process so that other groups can build movements that prioritize and are fueled by interpersonal relationships.

**Collective Assessment**

Two weeks after arriving back in the Gulf South, 23 of the delegates joined a debriefing call in which they received a preliminary report on the delegation’s finances, reflected on whether or not the delegation met its goals, and had an open discussion about the whole experience. The delegation used a conference call service that allowed call participants to vote through their phones. When delegates were asked whether the delegation succeeded at taking stories of the impacts of climate change from the Gulf South to the Global South, 22 individuals (95%) said “yes”. When delegates were asked whether the delegation succeeded at collecting stories of the impacts of climate change in the Global South, 19 individuals (82%) said “yes”. Delegates discussed if and how they had already shared their stories, and at what future events they were planning to share them.
Restorative Justice Assessment: Stop / Start / Continue

Delegates completed an evaluation of the trip using the Stop / Start / Continue tool, which asked delegates to identify ideas and behaviors that need to be stopped (“A conflict or problematic piece within our movement that we need to interrupt and transform – so that together we can fight for our collective liberation”), started (“Something new and wonderful that you have seen, heard about, or dreamed of that could make our organizing work even stronger”), or continued (“Powerful positive pieces within our movement that we want to continue to build even stronger”). What follows is a summary of delegates’ answers; a complete compilation of these answers can be found in Appendix 4.
Stop

Delegates offered a wide range of constructive criticism. Multiple delegates remarked that there were points at which, during formal and informal group meetings, individuals took up too much time and space within the group, at times even aggressively; delegates cautioned that the group should not allow this type of behavior to take place and that quieter people with less dominant personalities should be encouraged to participate in a safe space. Multiple delegates also mentioned that the group should be careful not to assume that everyone is operating with the same body of knowledge and understanding of religion, race, gender, and privilege. Other concerns included: ageism; lack of transparency around finances; operating with a scarcity mentality; devaluing backstage work; and focusing only on stories without connecting them to tangible actions.
Delegates offered many suggestions for new things to incorporate into the movement. Many delegates suggested that GSR hold one or more anti-racism trainings, and facilitate conversations around privilege to develop a collective understanding. Many delegates also suggested that GSR continue to expand and work to include more people in the movement and introduce them to climate change and climate justice using vocabulary that is accessible (both in its simplicity, and by having information in multiple languages). A number of delegates suggested that GSR develop a mechanism (such as an email chain, newsletter, group text message, etc.) to facilitate ongoing communication among delegates for relationship building and dissemination of information about events across the region.

Other suggestions include: the creation of a conflict resolution internal mechanism; the expansion of the definition of “frontline communities”; strengthening of the group’s online presence; advocacy for more sustainable lifestyles, focusing on food production and distribution systems; the inclusion of spiritual activists; an emphasis on self-care; holding smaller, more informal meetings; and the use of collaborative artistic projects to engage new climate advocates.

Whereas there was a great diversity of ideas for new things that could be incorporated into the movement, there seemed to be more agreement over what should be continued. Many delegates emphasized the need to continue working together collaboratively and collectively, and the need to build on and nurture the relationships (across the Gulf, and internationally) that were developed in Paris. Many also stressed the importance of continuing to create a space and movement that is inclusive (particularly of all cultures, races, and ages), and the importance of meeting regularly, especially around food and in other more informal spaces. Finally, many delegates expressed the need to continue empowering and valuing frontline communities, and allowing individuals and communities to speak and make decisions for themselves. Other suggestions included having more learning opportunities, such as trainings (about
climate change, justice, equity, etc.); continuing to hold each other accountable when intolerant behaviors arise; starting meetings with a song; sharing stories from the Gulf South; continuing to have a strong collective online presence; continuing to honor and learn from elders and ancestors; and being patient as the fight for climate justice continues.

**Sharing Lessons Learned**

As a requirement for being on the delegation, individuals committed to sharing with their communities the experiences and knowledge gained in Paris. These report backs ranged from one-on-one conversations with friends and family, to reports to state environmental advisory boards, to conference panels, to formal community presentations and independent blog posts. The majority of Louisiana-based delegates reported back to the community in a Gulf South Rising community meeting in early February 2016. Many delegates have expressed a desire and commitment to continuously talk about climate change, Paris/COP21, and climate justice with individuals and groups in their communities.

![United Houma Nation’s Principal Chief Thomas Dardar and First Lady Noreen Dardar at COP21. Photo credit: Emilia Aguinaga](image)

**Conclusion**

Overall, the Gulf South Rising delegation to COP21 successfully met the three goals it collectively set. Delegates were successful in sharing their climate change-related stories, in connecting with and gathering stories from individuals living on the frontlines
of climate change in the Global South, and in sharing these stories and knowledge gained with their own Gulf South communities. The delegation developed collective self-governance strategies, deepened regional and international interpersonal relationships, and kept all individuals safe in a heightened security zone. The Gulf South Rising trip to Paris also furthered the Gulf South Rising initiative’s four goals by bringing people together and building regional movement infrastructure, as well as by convening these frontline leaders around ecological equity, following indigenous leadership, and reclaiming and sharing a narrative of resistance.