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Capitan America: A close and careful look at the US action plan

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[The Centre for Science and Environment India](#) recently released the report, [Capitan America](#) in which we take a close and careful look at the US government's action plan on climate change.

We write [this report](#) knowing that the threat of climate change is real and urgent. We know this because we in South Asia are already seeing horrific impacts of changing weather, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable. We strongly believe the world needs an effective and ambitious climate change deal. In this context we ask, "Is the US climate action plan ambitious, equitable or sufficient?" We ask this because it is said that even if the US Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) is not ambitious, it signals a change in the country's position. And that it will build momentum in the future. The question is if the US is on track to make real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions?

Our [assessment](#) presents some inconvenient truths, which have worrying implications for our common future. The US climate plan is nothing more than business-as-usual; emission reductions will be marginal at best. What is even more worrying is that the US plan is largely based on improvements in efficiency. This is not enough. Our data analysis shows clearly that gains made by improvements in efficiency are being lost because of increased consumption – sector after sector.

As we explain in our preface to [the report](#), our concern is US lifestyle and consumption patterns are aspirational and addictive. Quite simply, everybody wants to live like an American. If it were possible to attain such a lifestyle and yet combat climate change, our concern would be

unfounded. But we all know that is not possible. The world—the US and us—cannot combat climate change without changing the way we drive, build homes or consume goods. As we say it is time we accepted that the C-word is the C-word.

It is also important to realise that climate change demands we collaborate and act collectively. The US has to take the lead, point to the direction of change that must be credible and meaningful. Otherwise, the climate agreement will not fructify. The problem also is that the US lack of ambition means that it appropriates carbon space that is needed for development of poorer countries.

We have also pointed out our worry about the lack of critique, indeed the tendency towards self-censorship and restraint in advocating big solutions, we found in the work of big and powerful US civil society groups. For instance, these groups are asking—rightly—for car restraints in many parts of the developing world. But in the US, they still push fuel economy standards and, at most, hybrid cars as the panacea to climate ills. There is no bus rapid transit (BRT) being built in the US, where over 70-80 per cent of people commute to work in cars. This is where practice must also happen, so that the world can follow and emissions reduce.

We know that [this report](#) will be received with some disquiet and even disapproval. But we believe that it is important that we work towards change that is real. The threat of climate change is far too serious and the impacts far too devastating for us to tiptoe around tough questions that will determine our future survival.

We will look forward to your comments. The full report is available [here](#) and a presentation of our key findings [here](#). Please also do share [the report](#) as widely as possible. The sad fact is that the inconvenient truth is not that climate change is happening, but that what we are doing is too little and too late.

Warm regards,
Sunita Narain and Chandra Bhushan

[PDF version of the full report](#)

[Presentation of key findings](#)

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