

Taking into account that 87% of the total land of the islands is a forest land and 13% is the revenue land, and that out of 13% revenue land, 255 km² area is covered with deemed forests, any further change in land use policy should be within the limits of 87% forest land : 13% revenue land ratio. The acute shortage of revenue land for developmental activities including defense, transport and communication (as expressed by the all the government stakeholders, defense officers and PRLs) and loss of land due to subsidence resulting from 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami can be met by swapping the degraded forest land or encroached degraded forests land to deemed forests having more than 40% canopy closure. The swapping should be within the limits of land use ratio notified.

4. Shekhar Singh's recommendations 1, 2 and 3 and SC order 1 deal with more than one issue. As far as the tribal reserves and Protected Areas are concerned, provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 ensure that the felling of trees and collection NTFP are strictly prohibited except in Tribal reserves where tribals have rights on the forests, and hence recommendations 1 (a part of it) and 2 have no significance and the SC order 1 needs to be reviewed.

As has been ordered by SC, no felling of trees should be allowed in Little Andaman because of rampant clearing of forests for settlement and commercial plantations and unsustainable logging in the past.

5. Since 26 December 2004 tsunami damaged the houses and other infrastructure, free distribution of timber and NTFP to the tsunami affected people as one time exception be allowed. However, timber and NTFP be provided to the settlers not affected by the natural disaster of 26 December 2004 only on payment basis. The dead trees of littoral forests and upheaval mangroves be used for providing timber and fuel on payment to settlers not affected by tsunami. Distribution of timber and NTFP to settlers and government departments be channelized only through forest department and no direct access to the forests be permitted for the collection of NTFP.