

Conversion of forest villages into revenue village and settlement of other old habitations.

Forest villages, were set up in remote and inaccessible forest area with a view to provide uninterrupted man-power for forestry operations. Of late, they have lost much of their significance owing to improved accessibility of such areas, expansion human habitations and similar other reasons. Accordingly, some of the States converted forest villages into revenue villages well before 1980. Nevertheless there still exist between 2500 to 3000 forest villages in the country. Besides, some cases of other types of habitations e.g. unauthorised houses/homesteads, dwellings of tribals who have been living in them in virtually pre-agrarian life styles, are suspected to exist in forest lands even though these may not have been recognized either as revenue village or forest villages.

2. In March, 1984 the then Ministry of Agriculture suggested to the State/UT Government that they may confer heritable and inalienable rights on forest villagers if they were in occupation. Development of forest villages has also been addressed to in the National Forest Policy, 1988 which states that these should be developed on par with revenue villages. This issue was again examined by an inter-Ministerial Committee, set up by this Ministry to look into various aspects of tribal-forest -interface, in consultation with representatives of some of the States.

3. Although the forest villagers have lived in harmony with their surroundings forests and the concept of forest villages prove an effective arrangement of sustained supply of man-power, yet it would not be appropriate to deny them legitimate rights over such lands which were allotted to them decades ago for settlement and have been continuously under their occupation since then. Keeping this aspect and the recommendations of the inter-Ministerial Committee in view, the following measures are suggested to resolve the outstanding issues of forest villages and other types of habitations existing in forest lands.

3.1 Forest Villages

Forest villages may be converted into revenue villages after denotifying requisite land as forest, Proposals seeking prior approval of Government of India for this purpose under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 may be submitted expeditiously. While converting these villages into Revenue villages, the following principles may be adhered to:-

- (i) The villages, the following principle may be adhered to
- (ii) administration of these and other Revenue Villages enclaved in forest area should preferably be entrusted to the State Forests Departments.

3.2 Other Habitations

- (a) Cases where dwelling belong to person who have encroached on forest land for cultivation.
 - (i) Cases where dwelling belong to person who have encroached on forest land for cultivation.
 - (ii) Dwellings of other-persons who have been living therein since past without encroaching on forest land for cultivation but their habitations are neither recognised as Revenue villages nor Forest Villages.
- (b) Each case may be examined on its merits. Suggestions for resolving the cases are given below:-
 - (i) In case of category (a) (i) above, wherever encroachments for agricultural cultivation are regularised, the house sites and homesteads, too, may be

regularised either in-situ or as near to the agricultural field as possible subject to certain safe-guards in the interest of forest protection and "eligibility" criteria as may be evolved by the State Government.

(ii) In case of category (a) (ii) above, certain specific habitations, more than 25 years old, involving sizeable group of families, may be examined, case by case, on merits for their amicable settlement.

(iii) Scheduled Tribes and rural poor not covered under (i) and (ii) above should be resettled in non-forest Government land.

(iv) All other unauthorised habitations must be evicted.

(v) Wherever provisions of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 are attracted, comprehensive proposals may please be submitted for seeking prior approval of this ministry. It may kindly be noted that such proposals will be considered only when the State/UT Govt. ensure that all the measures are taken simultaneously and effectively and are accompanied with proposals for compensatory afforestation.
