Abstract
A close interrogation of the relationship between rural populations and their environments is one approach to better understand the shifting dynamics that characterize the present moment and the evolutions that tomorrow holds. To understand these responses, this research focuses on the decisions of Adivasi people of the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve surrounding land-use practices in the face of an ever-changing world. Our research began with the goal of understanding barriers to land cultivation in the Aracode Valley. The indigenous Adivasi people of the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve are uniquely situated given their experience at the nexus of ecology, economy, and culture. And this position provides them with powerful insight into what global change means in the context of land-use in more marginalized, rural populations. We begin by presenting and discussing the primary themes that emerged in our findings. First, we discuss the challenges in defining fallow that emerged and our difficulty in constructing a finite definition of the term. Second, we explain the primary agroecological changes that have occurred in the region over the past century as reported by survey respondents. Third, we outline the shifts that have emerged in livelihood strategies and income generation over the same period of time in this region. Fourth, reflecting on the findings of last year’s Fallow Lands Project, we highlight the importance of considering local context in assessing respondents’ perceptions and narratives. With these observations and findings in mind, finally, we discuss the difficulties we faced in exploring the factors that motivate fallow land and explore how to construct a new understanding of agriculture given the observed evolutions in land-use in the Aracode Valley.