

## Session 4: Society, food and power

### Beyond production: the challenges of global food system

*Professor Adam Pain, SLU*

The presentation focuses on understanding issues related to the role of markets in food production systems. It argues that rather than simply treating markets as all about production, prices, efficiency and credit, markets have to be recognised as institutionally complex institutions underpinned by exchange relations. Who gets what out of the exchange depends on who sets the price.

The shift from farming as localised agricultural activities to agriculture as a capitalist sector driven by markets and capitalist relations has had profound effects which in turn has led to the development of global food systems. Land and agriculture have become part of a global commodity exchange. Drivers of agrarian change and transition are not just improved technologies or better access to markets but the interests of elites, the role of national and international political institutions and international agribusiness have also played a role. Politics sets the rule, the paths of transition and technology choices.

What we know depends on 'how' we know things and we have to accept that different knowledge frameworks offer different diagnoses of the problem and of the solutions. But it is clear that climate change is having effects with effects on food insecurity and has consequences for intensification. We also know that technical innovation, socio economic development and environmental change are not separate domains and are context specific and complex. Markets are equally complex institutions and have to be understood as such.

The key challenges we face are twofold. First the long-term processes of commodification that were foreseen by Polanyi (1944, *The Great Transformation*) with the disencumbering of markets from governance regimes leading to the commodification of labour, land and money. Polanyi wrote earlier of crises connecting ecology, political economy and social reproduction that are central to where we are now. To engage with them we need critical thinking and theory that connects these three dimensions and we need to engage in reflective and deliberative processes to reach solutions.

What SLU research can contribute to support durable food production systems depend on where and how it chooses to position itself, the strategic partnerships that it establishes, developing the ability to engage with complexity and other knowledge frameworks outside science.