

**External evaluation**  
**of the Swedish South Asian Studies Network**  
**(SASNET)**

*By Carla Risseuw, Ghanshyam Shah and Lennart Wohlgemuth*  
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## **1. Summary and Conclusions**

SASNET was created through a grant from Sida/SAREC and Lund's University in May 2000 to create an institutional base in Sweden for academic competence building and thematic work on present day South Asia. The long-term goal was to strengthen the relatively weak academic competence in Sweden in the field of South Asia.

Before an extension after 2005 it was agreed that an evaluation of SASNET should be made. The purpose of the evaluation was “to improve the performance of the SASNET network and to provide information to Lund University and Sida/SAREC about its organisation, work process, effects and consequences as well as an overall analysis of the working of the network”. This external evaluation has been preceded by an extensive internal self-evaluation which has been a useful source of information.

At the outset it has to be kept in mind that SASNET is a very small enterprise both measured in financial terms and in people actually employed, with an aim to fulfill a very large task. Taking this into account SASNET has in the very short period of its existence produced remarkable achievements and become very visible in the area of South Asian studies in Sweden. Its visibility is a result of the gateway/website and the energy of the two persons employed to run the undertaking. It is not yet possible to assess the impact of SASNET to create a capacity of new scholars in the field, as is discussed below, but at least through the work of the node it is now possible to acquire an overview over the number of scholars who are active in the field today in the 148 university departments identified (see table 1 and 2). This is far better than was the case previously or what is possible in any other similar area.

The activities, which were identified to fulfil the immediate objectives of SASNET as outlined in the original project document, have all been implemented. Below we discuss those achievements and some of the problems that have been met during the implementation phase. Many of the achievements have been astonishing, like the gateway, while others have been much more slow to implement such as the quest for multidisciplinary. As could be expected the results have been best and more visible in Lund than in the other centres of South Asian studies elsewhere in Sweden. This phenomenon partly stems from the physical distance to the node, partly to the fact that one of the staff members when not working 50 % for SASNET works on similar activities for Lund University, and partly to passivity from the stakeholders of the network. A network will only function when those who are parties thereof actively participate in its work. We found from our interviews that most stakeholders were positive to the network and use it more or less frequently but very seldom contribute to it. This question of making all stakeholders using the network actively participate, requires serious consideration in the future if SASNET is going to have the same impact in other centers as it already has in Lund. SASNET was conceived as a facilitator while the actual implementation of projects in the field of South Asian studies rests with the stakeholders.

For an enterprise, which tries to use the most recent techniques and communication skills, continuous updating and renewal is necessary. This applies not only to the website but to all activities. We discuss a number of such issues below from reintroducing the question of a chat page on the web, to more formalized procedures as regards the planning grant programmes. However, to implement co-operation between disciplines and across faculties as well as institutions has been more difficult in practice. This is not to underestimate the efforts made and the results achieved, particularly between different departments of social sciences, and this problem is not specific for SASNET. However, as interdisciplinary co-operation has been accorded such priority in the work plans it needs more attention. Considerable efforts have to be made to also integrate natural sciences more actively into the activities of the network. We found great interest in certain natural science environments for such a collaboration.

In addition to its networking activities SASNET has also acted as an advocacy agent for South Asia and South Asian Studies in Sweden. Again most of the tangible results can be seen in Lund with a new Master programme started and run now for its second year by the Institute of East and South Eastern Asian Studies and the appointment of a professor in Indian Religion at the department of Religious History. To a lesser extent SASNET has also contributed to similar developments in other centers for Asian studies in Sweden. What was stated by almost all those interviewed was however that SASNET has contributed to making South Asia and studies thereof more visible and discussed everywhere. First and foremost the gateway, but also conferences and seminars held for different stakeholders as well as personal interventions by SASNET staff have contributed to this.

SASNET has also had ambitions to assist its stakeholders to increase the contacts between the Swedish and the South Asian research community. Activities to implement these ambitions have been trips to the region by the SASNET staff, inviting scholars from South Asia to Sweden and the creation of an advisory group consisting of six senior Asian scholars. Lack of funds has seriously hampered these activities, and the results are not as good as was planned for. The idea of an advisory group seems to us of utmost importance for a successful future development of the network and it is therefore recommended that more efforts are made to make this group more operative and helpful to the process. Another more general problem facing everyone with programmes in South Asia is to avoid dominance of contacts with India. This has been taken into account by SASNET but should also be observed in the future. Other contacts outside Sweden particularly in the Nordic countries seem to have been very successful and rewarding.

As regards the organization and administration of SASNET it must again be underlined that the size of the node is small and its tasks immense. The funds available barely allow for a staff of one and a half persons and after a small amount is set aside for the grants very little is left for other activities. The devotion and energy of the two staff members allows in any case a great number of activities and the voluntary work by many of the stakeholders adds to this. As stated below costs are held down to an extent that it might sometimes be counterproductive. In all it seems to us that the funds are well spent and that the major objectives have been reached within the project. As time passes and SASNET is becoming more established some of the functions need to become more formalized. Rules and regulations do exist on most counts but they need now to be refined and in particular to be transmitted and explained to all the stakeholders. We found some complaints on lack of transparency. Even if this is only a perception it must be taken seriously and be confronted. The question of succession must also be taken seriously. It will not be easy to

replace the present hardworking enthusiasts when they choose to retire.

After a period of extreme activity and experimentation, and taking the smallness of the staff into consideration, we also find that it is now time for consolidation and prioritization. Concentration on fewer activities can also lead to deepening of the ones which will continue. As already has been stated, this will also allow for increased decentralization to other centers in Sweden.

Taking all things into consideration the evaluation team concludes that SASNET without doubt makes a major contribution to the creation of interest and capacity in the field of research in and about South Asia. The impact seems to be great and the costs are low. It has acquired national recognition, involving all universities and institutions interested in South Asia, though quite understandably with more benefits accruing to Lund University than the others. Lund University also made it clear to us that they are happy with the present set up and are prepared to continue to meet 25 % of the total cost even with a slightly increased budget for the coming five years. Consequently we recommend SAREC to continue its support to SASNET for a new period based on basically the same activities as at present. The work of SASNET needs consolidation in the coming phase including certain forms of increased formalization. In view of our formulated targets of multidisciplinary and decentralization of activities, we recommend that the support be increased in the next period by some 50 %. It will be first after that period the real impact from the efforts will be measurable. It is our belief that networks require continuous funding to maintain the network and to firmly establish the opportunity for new young scholars to become active members.

## **2. Introduction**

In 1999 the Swedish government developed a strategy for Swedish relations with Asia and presented it for the parliament (Skr 1998/99:61). In this strategy the government presents how the relations with South Asia can be broadened and deepened. All government institutions were requested to act in accordance with this strategy. Development cooperation plays an important part in this. Sida was requested to engage in that work.

Development of research and higher education in regard to South Asia occupies a key role in the new strategy. It was felt that academic competence in the field of South Asia was relatively weak in Sweden. Though many universities do carry out research on South Asia, Sweden does not have a critical mass of scholars and expertise in the field. "There is today no institutional base for academic competence building and thematic work on present day India and the rest of South Asia" (Skr 1998/99:61).

Sida reacted to the directive through its research department SAREC, and among other things, set aside funds for the creation of a centre or network to be co-ordinated at one of the Swedish universities on the condition that the university would also make its own funds available for the project. A second condition was that the project should work nationally in all of Sweden. Three universities competed for the funds (Gothenburg, Lund and Uppsala). Lund University presented a proposal that was most national in character and also with the largest involvement by the university both in terms of personnel and finance.

In May 2000 Lund University was selected for the task, SASNET (Swedish South Asian Studies Network) was created, and a planning period started lasting until the end of that year after which funding was assured by Sida/SAREC for two periods: 2001-2002 and 2002-2005. The annual budget was 2 million during the first period and 2.2 million for the second (75% from Sida and 25% from Lund University). Statutes for the work were issued by the Vice-Chancellor of Lund University in June 2001 and a Board created shortly thereafter.

Before another extension it was agreed that an evaluation of SASNET should be made. The purpose of the evaluation was “to improve the performance of the SASNET network and to provide information to Lund University and Sida/SAREC about its organisation, work process, effects and consequences as well as an overall analysis of the working of the network”.

The evaluation should “result in an overall assessment of SASNET in relation to the aim of the network and the various tasks carried out. It should also result in an assessment of the priorities followed and analyse the time and economic resources spent in various activities and the outcome of this. Alternative ways of organising, prioritising and use of economic resources should also be discussed” (Terms of Reference).

The first phase of the evaluation – a self-evaluation by SASNET’s root node and main nodes – was concluded in April 2005. It is a serious attempt to cover all aspects of the work so far and contains, with its many appendices, very useful information. This external evaluation is based on the self-evaluation, relevant documents and interviews with a large number of stakeholders.

According to its Statutes “SASNET is a national network for research, education, and information about South Asia. The aim is to encourage and promote an open and dynamic networking process, in which Swedish researchers co-operate with researchers in South Asia and globally. The network is open to all sciences. Priority is given to co-operation between disciplines and across faculties, as well as institutions in the Nordic countries and in South Asia. The basic idea is that South Asian studies will be most fruitfully pursued in co-operation between researchers, working in different institutions with a solid base in their mother disciplines” (Statutes).

In order to meet these aims the network root node in Lund is supposed to initiate, stimulate, and support South Asian studies at Lund University and within other Swedish universities.

*“The main tasks of the network are to:*

- in various ways initiate, stimulate, and support research co-operation via planning and programme grants for networking (e.g., meetings, travel, visits of guest researchers, co-ordination, etc.)
- in various ways initiate, stimulate, and support academic South Asian studies in Sweden, or studies relevant to South Asia, e.g., via grants for networking in developing undergraduate and graduate courses in Sweden and the Nordic countries, if possible in partnership with universities in South Asia
- encourage PhD studies specialising in South Asia, including networking among individual research students in institutions that do not specialise in South Asia
- promote student and researcher exchange between Sweden (the Nordic countries) and South Asia

- build an information system for South Asian studies in partnership with academic and public institutions, media, business communities, and NGOs
- contribute to co-ordination of consultations between researchers and different public institutions, business organisations, and NGOs” (Statutes).

At the outset, it should be kept in mind that SASNET is only one small activity in the sphere of promoting development research and education in Sweden in general and in relation to South Asia in particular. In our discussion we found a deep and very encouraging interest and engagement in development questions all around the Swedish university system and many devoted scholars are engaged in this work with very small means. We also found that there are a number of different funding arrangements, which could be tapped for specific purposes. However, although appreciating all other efforts taking place we concentrated our own efforts only on SASNET and its particular activities. We also wish to make the point that the major efforts as regards South Asia should of course be made in that region. However, again we are very sympathetic to the idea that in order to interact with that region Sweden requires a minimal critical mass of capacity with in depth knowledge of the region and its developmental efforts.

### **3. Assessment of the SASNET Activities - The Four Major Pillars of SASNET**

“The SASNET model is an alternative to the practice of a centre formation, where a few scholars from various disciplines come together to create an institution, more or less open and sensitive to changing academic trends. SASNET draws on contemporary modes of scientific production, interaction and advances in information technology” (self-evaluation). During the five years of its existence SASNET activities have been geared to the following four pillars:

- an Internet gateway to South Asian studies
- a number of joint programmes and projects including conferences involving Swedish, South Asian and other scholars
- networking in Sweden and South Asia
- planning of new research and education projects.

#### **3.1. An Internet Gateway to South Asian Studies**

SASNET’s website provides the network with its main world-wide visibility. It currently has 14 sections, providing major information sources on Swedish academic activities in South Asia and provides a massive source-base of information on the South Asian countries. The website has been developed in a professional and attractive way (making use of Paul Klee’s design of 1922, which provides an elegant and functional first opening page). The number of pages of the website have steadily grown over the years. Starting in 2001 with 193 sub-pages, it currently carries 605 sub-pages. A daily scan of links is performed, including a daily updating of information. The monthly newsletter has nearly 1000 subscribers and in April 2005 a total of 37,500 visitors to the site had been recorded since its initiation.

This gateway has three functions of which the first two are the most central:

- The first is to form a basis for linking up and connecting Swedish scholars of all academic disciplines working full or part time on/in South Asia. Through the monthly e-mailed newsletter, all subscribers are informed on seminars, conferences, concerts, meetings and other activities in relation to South Asia organised in Sweden or abroad. Besides the university community, this newsletter is received in wider circles in Sweden, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, staff members of Sida, SAREC, non-governmental organisations on an (inter)national level, South Asian students, scholars etc. It is further used internationally and provides Sweden with a successful and professional profile of activities in relation to South Asia.

All scholars we interviewed were highly in favour of the SASNET gateway and its newsletter. It is regularly used to locate colleagues and make new connections. It leads to developing a new form of co-operation. From several students we spoke to in Lund, it further became clear that the website plays a role in attracting foreign students to Sweden. Several of these students selected Sweden for their Master Studies as they learn about Swedish academia – scholars/institutions and their impressive work in relation to South Asia on the SASNET website. Both the Master courses in Uppsala and Lund could benefit in this sense, while international PhD students will find the gateway facilitates their knowledge on possibilities to obtain a PhD or post-doctoral training and possible funding in Sweden.

- The second main function of the website is to provide a wide range of information on South Asia. The website is extremely well set up to locate information on each separate South Asian country and provides a most valuable collection of data and further access to other websites such as academic journals, local newspapers and resource bases. During our mission everyone whom we spoke to said that they periodically used it and tended to be unanimous on its usefulness in supporting students in pursuing their research interest in South Asia. For BA/MA students it also forms an excellent resource base. Academic specialists well established in their respective fields, whether in the hard or soft sciences, would tend to concentrate more on websites specialised in their fields of study. But this can be expected and one should accept this as a realistic limit of the scope of the website. It should not aim for more, as this would also not be practical. But these specialists did consult the website for special events, addresses they wished to locate and mentioned the usefulness of being able to point young students to this site for further information. Furthermore South Asian scholars on South Asia (living in Sweden or elsewhere), made a certain use of the gateway in relation to their own countries of origin, and maybe even more to gain information on neighbouring countries. Last but not least several non-governmental organisations in Sweden, involved in South Asian topics are also regular enthusiastic users of the website.

- Thirdly, the gateway also provides certain information on Sweden, which is relevant to students coming to do research in the country, such as visa requirements. As more students come to study in Sweden, it might be advisable to expand this level of information.

The evaluation team is duly impressed with the gateway which has been developed and sincerely compliments Lars Eklund for the hard work and vision he has put in so successfully. The team realizes the great effort taken to go into other gateways, checking the workability of other sites, before adding them to the SASNET information data. Such an enterprise needs daily updating. Mention should also be made of the exceptional assistance both root node staff members provide when asked to advise and assist in locating forms of support. In addition to students a wide circle of people interested in developing activities with South Asia benefits from this form of support.

The energy and time put into this activity is exceptional and leads to substantial results. This is the first and so far only one of this kind of Gateway providing comprehensive information on South Asian Studies. All other websites on “South Asian Studies” are mainly confined to the programmes of a respective organisation or a particular theme.

The team members would like to mention that as this gateway has now been developed and is used regularly all over Sweden and abroad, it is advisable to renew ways of actively tapping certain users of the gateway for their specific relevant knowledge in their own fields. For example:

- This applies especially to the interdisciplinary approach (more information on natural science projects and expertise in South Asia). Further examples of fruitful interaction and cooperation between scholars of the social sciences and humanities, with scholars of the natural sciences should be promoted, in order to make users (especially young students) aware of the potential in this field of (future) interdisciplinary research.
- Scholars from South Asia, now living permanently in Sweden, could be approached and requested to check their specific knowledge of the library and data resource bases.
- The same request can be made to visiting scholars as well as to the South Asian members of the Advisory Committee.

In this respect we may suggest that a general e-mail to all would not work effectively because of the busy schedules of professionals. But telephone contacts and person to person meetings with specific proposals may be tried. As a team we for instance also found certain sources of information missing in the otherwise so excellent website and were happy that SASNET staff so readily took our suggestions on additions on board.

*For instance, adding the well developed virtual library of the ICSSR, Delhi, with its extensive research data and linkages from many Indian universities and research institutes, provides an exceptionally valuable research tool. We also made the suggestion to have links with several networks and websites run by the Higher Education Commission in Pakistan and that similar links can be explored from Sri Lanka and other countries. Further, although the Human Development Report of the UNDP is on the website under library (<http://www.sasnet.lu.se/library.html>), it is suggested to also place the UNDP indicators per country on the basic fact sheet of each South Asian country. By adding these social and gendered indicators and data, a better balance is achieved with the CIA data on economics and military issues, also listed on each country's basic fact sheet.*

*Besides this, SASNET, depending upon availability of scholars, can develop certain themes such as Gender, AIDS, Environment, Public Health (providing links to other relevant sites and also information about research projects, scholars, libraries, bibliography etc) on which a number of Swedish scholars in collaboration with South Asian scholars are currently working. This would also be useful to NGOs and policy makers involved in development work.*

A second suggestion is to re-attempt to offer the possibility to chat over the internet on specific topics. This could strengthen local level cooperation and give SASNET members an opportunity to move from being passive consumers to more active participants in the next phase (in which SASNET has become an established part of the Swedish South Asian scene). Lars Eklund informed us of his initial effort to initiate such interaction in the early years of SASNET, which led to little positive response. As the gateway is used so much more after five years and a substantial number of scholars and policy makers we interviewed indicated an interest in this facility, we suggest renewing the chat facility on specific topics. For instance a chat site for gender issues, health, education, social development issues, democracy and other issues which would hold an interest for scholars of different universities. Although many scholars in the South Asia network are already friends and have known each other for many years, there is definitely a substantial interest in widening this network in many circles. A chat facility could hopefully contribute to the strengthening of newly emerging ties between Swedish scholars.

### **3.2. Organizing Conferences and Meetings**

SASNET has made a great effort to stimulate and organize one major conference a year on South Asia in Sweden. As a culmination of its efforts SASNET core-staff organized the very successful 18th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies (ECMSAS) in Lund in July 2004. This conference, in which 360 scholars on South Asia from all over the world participated in 44 panels was indeed the largest gathering ever on Swedish soil of South Asia oriented researchers, covering all fields from the humanities and social sciences to technology, natural sciences and medicine. The ECMSAS conference was greatly appreciated by all people whom we spoke to. It provided an excellent opportunity to meet and interact with Nordic as well as international scholars. SASNET was also very successful in allocating travel funds for South Asian participants, resulting in a higher percentage of them attending than in previously held conferences (in total 47 South Asian participants with travel grants).

Also the format in which the separate workshops and the papers of the participants could be accessed on the internet, has resulted in appreciation and praise from (inter)national participants. In fact the organizing committee of the next EASAS conference to be held at Leiden University (2006), has gratefully accepted SASNET's offer to use the same format for its conference.

In conclusion one can say that SASNET's being prepared to have the conference in Sweden (Lund) and the great effort taken to make it a success, have contributed substantially to placing Swedish South Asian studies on the map.

Returning to the issue of conferences in Sweden, while being most positive towards the conferences held so far, several people interviewed were in favour of additional smaller workshops to be held within one academic city or between two cities, to increase familiarity with each other's work and each other. SASNET organised two workshops for PhD students which received enthusiastic support. This should become a regular yearly activity. It provides a stimulating occasion for younger students to participate in a larger community of scholars on South Asia, than within their own department. This seemed a good suggestion, as it could involve local scholars in active organising and would strengthen the interlinking of South Asian scholars even at a more local level. It would also strongly contribute to Sida's aim to create a community of Swedish scholars with a good knowledge capacity in Sweden. Further it would to a large extent become knowledge which could be shared.

### **3.3. Networking in South Asia and Sweden**

Networking in Sweden has been the *raison d'être* of SASNET ever since its start. In addition to the activities already referred to above the central node has done its best to support all activities that seemed worth supporting among its stakeholders. The establishing of Master programmes in South Asian studies in Lund and Uppsala as well as creation of a South Asia programme at Österlen's Folk High School are perhaps the most visible activities that received support from SASNET. But many other activities also received, if nothing else, moral support. It seems to us that SASNET has in its short period of existence become a major centre of knowledge and support that is contacted continuously by the stakeholders on all small and large matters of concern.

Networks were also created with other centres active in the field of South Asian studies in the Nordic countries, Europe and the rest of the world. The Nordic networks seem to be the most rewarding and exchange of services and certain activities seem to be both possible to expand and rewarding.

SASNET core staff has put a great deal of effort into networking in South Asia by personal visits to various universities and research institutes. However there has not been a follow up of the visits and no effort has been made, perhaps because of the smallness of the core staff and resource constraints, to strengthen the network. In 2003 SASNET's board constituted a South Asian Reference Group, which consisted of six senior South Asian researchers, for the root node and the board to consult once in a while about SASNET's overall aims and activities. At present there are the following five members: Dr. Rita Afsar, (Bangladesh), Professor Zulfiqar Bhutta, (Pakistan), Dr. Tek Nath Dhakal, (Nepal), Dr. Dipak Malik, (India), Professor Kumudu Wijewardena, (Sri Lanka). So far very few efforts have been made to seek help and involve the Group in networking. We feel that the Group needs to be activated.

SASNET has also been helpful in establishing the Nordic Centre in Delhi. It provides three guestrooms with facilities. This is an important base for Swedish researchers during their stay in India.

During the coming funding-period this strategy of networking in South Asia requires further planning and consolidation. Much has been achieved by the small staff, but it seems clear that in the future some form of decentralization of efforts within Sweden has to take shape. Along with the root node staff, the team suggests a higher involvement of different universities in Sweden and their staff working on South Asian topics. Such members of SASNET's network could in coordination with the SASNET board come to a format for inviting certain Asian scholars to Sweden, crucial to SASNET's activities and influential and recognized in their own fields at home, either for a lecture series in the different universities linked to SASNET, or through combining the lectures with a certain research/writing period in Sweden to complete a manuscript. With such an approach the scholars can become acquainted with several of the network-members, become friends with a few and build up a form of academic exchange etc. After experiencing such hospitality in Sweden and building up contacts over time, one can expect a certain input within their own institutions and networks at home for getting the knowledge on SASNET and its possibilities known in wider circles. Several of these South Asian scholars can then become valuable members of the South Asian Advisory Board of SASNET, due to their firsthand knowledge and experience of the network. In such a format a greater involvement with SASNET,

its members and knowledge of Swedish South Asian studies can be expected and a fruitful basis for long term cooperation can be slowly built up.

### **3.4 Planning and Networking Grants**

SASNET has initiated a grant programme for "Planning and Networking" to the Swedish scholars working on South Asia. It spends around 37 per cent of the funds for this programme. The objective is to provide financial support up to a maximum of 150 thousand SEK for planning of inter or intra-disciplinary research and/or education programmes in South Asian studies. It also provides "continued networking funding" which has already been planned with the help of a planning grant from SASNET. The grant amount is very small and may be called seed money for developing a fuller long term project. The grant facilitates the following activities:

- Arranging meetings with Swedish researchers who can be involved in a network around the programme or project.
- In a programme: Employing a programme co-ordinator for one month, full time; In a project: One month's salary to plan a research project,
- Inviting a guest, for instance an internationally renowned scholar in the relevant field,
- A trip to South Asia by the programme co-ordinator or project leader in connection with the planning.

Applications are invited from Swedish scholars twice a year. The details about the objectives of the grant, eligibility, main requirements in the applications etc. are put on the web page. From 2001 SASNET has so far completed six rounds of the grants. It has received 132 applications and awarded grants to 48 scholars of around 3.5 million SEK. On an average 65,000 SEK was distributed, varying from 23,000 to 125,000 SEK. Five applications were rejected outright on the ground of ineligibility as the applicants were not based in any Swedish institution. Eight projects received an additional grant hence they are not included in the 48.

The planning grants cover three types of activities (1) Research, (2) Education, (3) Other. Out of 48 projects supported 35 are research projects, ten are on education and three are for other purposes: one was for a study of language courses in India; one was establishing the Nordic Centre for India so that Swedish scholars have a residential facility in Delhi; and one was the "Haellquist Book Donation Project" to support the development of the infrastructure for South Asian studies in the Nordic region. Among the three types of grants a sizeable part of the grant has gone to research projects. However educational projects in terms of the proportion of the total applications have gained the larger share. They constituted 15 % of the total applications but 21 % of the applicants for the programme succeeded in getting a grant. An education grant is meant for developing courses or methods of teaching on South Asia in Swedish universities. This is indeed a long-term investment for developing interest and research on South Asia. Research Projects are categorised into (a) Research Planning and (b) Research Networking grants. Often both the objectives overlap.

### *Purpose of Grants*

Purpose	No. of Applications	% of Applications	Grants received	% of Grant recipients	Projects supported*	% of Projects supported
Research	105	83	42	75	35	73
Education	19	15	11	20	10	21
Other *	3	2	3	5	3	6
Total	127	100	56	100	48	100**

\* Nordic Centre in India, two grants; and Book Donation Project

\*\* 56 grants were given to 48 projects. Those projects, which received grants several times often received smaller grants, so the right column gives a better representation of the actual distribution of funds.

Of the 127 applications 56 - i.e. 44 % - received a grant. This is a higher rate of success compared to other Swedish Research Councils, which have approximately a 10 % success rate. This furthermore meets an objective of "seed money".

For the period 2001 – 26 August 2003, a total of 33 projects were supported by SASNET. 15 Research planning projects have resulted in ongoing research projects with long-term funding. Nine, mostly educational projects, received additional finances from the universities themselves. Thus the funding has led to the intended results (planning of education, workshop, etc.) and continued projects with long term funding. It is significant that at least 24 projects received continued support in various forms. A very conservative estimate is that the planning projects have generated more than SEK 15 million for South Asia related research and education projects during the period 2003 – 2005. This is a significant achievement (Appendix F2 in self-evaluation).

### **Recipients**

As PhD. students get funds from their universities, there were few applicants from this category. Among the faculty 66 per cent of the grant recipients have been from junior positions. In some cases this was their first grant which enabled them to network with other scholars in Sweden and South Asia and develop their research. SASNET thus fulfils its objective of encouraging younger scholars who otherwise have limited resources. This process has to be strengthened. Senior professors already have contacts and can manage funds from many other sources.

*Successful applications by positions: Number of grants received*

University	Faculty Positions			
	Professor	Associate/Assistant Professor	PH. D. Student	Total
Göteborg	1	3	1	5
Lund	8	11	-	19
Stockholm	4	6	3	13
Uppsala	6	9	-	15
Others	1	2	1	4
Total	20	31	5	56

\* Note: In this table and the following one, the total of 56 grants has been used as the basis for the tabulations.

SASNET's planning and education grants have spread to all universities in Sweden. It has acquired national recognition as a Swedish Programme, although Lund has a slightly higher share than other universities. The number of applications was also more from Lund than other institutes. Lund University has 22 % of faculty working on South Asia in Sweden. Because of the location of SASNET scholars from Lund have more knowledge about SASNET and its planning grants.

### **Interdisciplinary Projects**

As mentioned above one of the objectives of SASNET is to encourage and facilitate interdisciplinary studies in South Asia. Interdisciplinary includes not only within social sciences or natural sciences but also across sciences. That is collaboration between social sciences and natural sciences including medicine and health. Of the total applications 44 per cent have come from natural and medical sciences. They received a 43 per cent share of the grants. This is almost in proportion to the number of their applications. Among all faculties, humanities is the most successful in receiving grants with its applications. SASNET has thus provided a common platform for social and natural sciences. However natural scientists despite working in the South Asia region are not specifically focusing on South Asia in the way sociologists, anthropologists or political scientists do. They work on a problem. Hence the nomenclature "South Asian Studies Network" is problematic, as one natural scientist commented. It has come from the social science category and therefore gives the impression of being a network of social scientists. Nonetheless some natural or medical scientists are keen to work in South Asia particularly on the issues of health, environment, natural resources etc.

*Number of applications and distribution of grants by major sciences*

Discipline	No. of applications	% of application	No of successful applications	% of total successful appl.
Technology & Natural Sciences	36	27	15	27
Medicine	23	17	9	16
Social Science	56	42	20	36
Humanities	15	11	10	18
Other	2	2	2	4
Total	132	100	56	100

*Source: Appendix F2 in Self-Evaluation*

*Successful applications by mono or interdisciplines: Number of grants received*

University	Mono- or interdisciplinary			Total
	Single discipline	Inter-discipline within faculty	Inter-discipline across sciences	
Göteborg	3	2	-	5
Lund	9	9	1	19
Stockholm	8	4	1	13
Uppsala	7	3	5	15
Others	2	2	-	4
Total	29	20	7	56

Most of the projects that received grants are of mono discipline. One third of the total projects involve collaboration within social sciences or to a lesser extent within natural sciences. Seven projects involve a research collaboration of social and natural scientists. Though the number looks small, it is not insignificant when taking into account the current situation in relation to the social and natural sciences. The platform to bring social and natural scientists together, in order to work on a common research agenda within an interdisciplinary approach, has not yet developed.

Within the limitations of its scope, SASNET could provide this platform and facilitate the process. However the wider academic setting cannot be called conducive as the process of interdisciplinary research and teaching has yet to be initiated within the country-wide university structures. However it should be recorded that SASNET organised the Marstrand PhD Symposium as well as the 18<sup>th</sup> European Conference which were good attempts in this direction. Over the past two years, SASNET has actively been engaged in the development of Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies, and of the Arena for Global Sustainability Issues (AGESI), which is now about to take off. SASNET is also currently supporting a panel on 'Health, Globalization and Marginalization in South Asia' at the NASA conference in Aarhus 3-5 June 2005.

## **Evaluation of Applications**

While inviting applications for a grant, the Planning Committee states the following are the main criteria to be followed for the evaluation of the applications.

1. Relevance for South Asian Studies and/or relevance to South Asia (with relevance for South Asia could be meant, for example, programmes or projects useful for the academic, technical, economic, social or cultural development in South Asia as well as such a development in the relationship between Sweden and South Asia).
2. Scientific or educational quality of programme or project to be planned judged by its inter- or intra-disciplinary approach and theoretical and methodological framework.
3. Quality of the proposed planning judged by the number and background of individuals and institutions included, including doctoral students in a programme, and proposed activities.
4. Qualification of main applicant and her/his institutional environment.
5. Detailed budget in relation to the proposed work to be carried out.

These criteria are general. Therefore it leads one to feel that some applications tend to get rejected because “it is not adequately developed theoretically”, or “does not generate new knowledge”, or “methodologies and analytical approaches to be utilised ...are not specified” etc. These comments are important but they need to apply uniformly to all proposals. What is therefore needed is to evolve some objective criteria to have a uniform quality for the proposal and which can help new young researchers to write a better research proposal. The Board and Planning Committee can evolve the criteria so as to avoid the impression of arbitrariness in the evaluation.

The applications are evaluated by a reference group consisting of: Prof Pamela Price, Department of History, University of Oslo, Norway, Dr Neil Webster from the Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark, and Dr Malin Åkerblom from the International Science Programme, Uppsala University. As is normal practice at Swedish universities the members of this committee will sit for six years (three plus three years) whereafter a new committee will be selected. They are from different disciplines and with wide research experience. This committee has consisted of more or less the same members since 2001. The members read all the proposals in advance, make comments on each of them, and rank them. Then each proposal is discussed at a meeting. Their recommendations are placed before the Board for the final decision. Several scholars with whom we talked felt that the evaluation system should follow the anonymous referee system and get the opinion of the experts in the field. In the complex development of natural and social sciences no one can, however learned, know about all the fields. However it is important to note here that the Planning Committee puts lots of effort into evaluating each proposal. The committee gives reasons for accepting or rejecting the application. These reasons are conveyed to the candidates. Hence all possible transparency is maintained. We have found that in a few cases the scholars have taken the Committee's comments seriously, reworked the proposal and submitted it again. And, in a few cases the revised proposals succeeded in getting grants in the next round. However, some of those who have not received a grant are unhappy with SASNET. We have studied the applications, though briefly, and found that there had been an objective evaluation done as humanely as possible. There is also transparency in the process as all the candidates are informed about the committee's decision and given reasons why the application was not favoured for the

grant. A foolproof system to the satisfaction of all at all times is hard to achieve. At the same time it is necessary to have regular revision of the guidelines involving a larger number of scholars. We feel that the procedure has to be further formalised by an anonymous referee system, evolving relatively more objective criteria, putting all the titles of the approved applications with the decisions of the Committee on the SASNET web site. A brief abstract of the outcome of the project should be disseminated. As new issues arise, a revision of the guidelines involving larger number of scholars is called for at regular intervals. Today the Board and the Committee have to specify as clearly as possible on the following issues:

“ When is an application a research planning grant and when is it for something that is more akin to a research project? How much should one expect from previous research planning grants awarded when considering a new application from the same candidate(s)? If an application has not led to an application for funding elsewhere, should SASNET provide further funding for a ‘new phase of planning’? How far should previous research performance in general be a consideration?”

#### **4. Evaluation of SASNET and its activities**

##### **4.1. Goal achievement**

As can be seen from the above analysis SASNET has to a large extent been able to implement the programme which was originally outlined in the project plan and detailed in the statutes as summarized in the introduction. Lack of funds has been the limiting factor each year leading to that in particular the grant program had to be cut down below its expected size. Some of the years the wage bill could not be met which led to one of the staff having to some extent to be funded elsewhere. Quality is more difficult to assess. However from the analysis made above and the points made in the many interviews most activities also seem to meet the high expectation on quality. A large number of the planning grants have led to actual implementation after funding has been found and everybody we met praised the gateway. The seminars and workshops have been judged relevant and interesting and other activities were by most seen as important. The two issues, which require further work in the future, are the questions of multidisciplinary and of increased activities outside Lund.

The major pillars of activities are slowly but steadily leading to the formation of a Swedish network and community of scholars, which requires strengthening and continued support over the coming years. The ultimate aim is a broad and multi-polar network in which any node may take the initiative and where the root node is interacting with all the other nodes on a reciprocal basis. Ultimately this will lead to the mobilizing of organizational and financial resources for new programmes and projects. Currently 148 Swedish departments and institutes are nodes in the network.

Over the coming years this network should be further extended, but simultaneously become more decentralized in relation to its initiatives within Sweden. Local university staff can as members of SASNET take their own initiatives to get to know each other within one university city as well as between two cities. This emphasis on a further decentralizing of initiatives from the root node to more local levels was voiced regularly during the interviews. It is a compliment to the originators of SASNET, that members feel the need to participate and develop further initiatives at this local

level. The evaluation team feels that such efforts should be stimulated as they ultimately strengthen the internal consistency and make the community of Swedish scholars on South Asia more of a reality.

SASNET has in other words become a reality in the Swedish arena of South Asian scholars. More scholars have become involved to varying degrees in cooperation and exchange and this poses new challenges for the upcoming five-year period.

In this context the issue of multidisciplinary cooperation, being an ambitious but valuable target in itself, will require a greater input and specific attention during the coming five years if the currently started initiatives are to find a follow up in other departments. More effort will have to be made if this great challenge, especially between the natural sciences and the social sciences and humanities, can become a reality. The evaluation team found several instances of such interest and also research taking shape - also financed originally by SASNET seed money. The team suggests as promotional measures to look into the possibilities of making space on the website especially for reporting on potential and actual cooperation on a multidisciplinary level. This could be further supported by appointing at least two SASNET Board members from the natural sciences and seeing to it that specialists on each field are available to judge the grant applications. Elsewhere in this report a suggestion on a referee system is made.

#### **4.2. Cost effectiveness**

Analyses of cost-effectiveness have become ever more important part of evaluations. In general, it is safe to state that cost-effectiveness analyses of projects are methodologically weak. They often suffer from lack of comparative data, and they rarely contribute to the assessment of the project in question. This is certainly the case with evaluations of social sectors and of research.

For SASNET, the data available covers expenditures. These are collected by Lund University's administration and can be found in the annual financial reports and are summarized in table 3 below. The Swedish Government Audit in accordance with the rules and regulations of government institutions audits the accounts of Lund University including the ones of SASNET. We have not found any reason to question the accounts.

The lack of funds available to the SASNET network project has led to a high degree of cost-consciousness. The present cost squeeze at Swedish universities in general adds to this precarious situation. The evaluators found that this cost-consciousness in some cases could even lead to solutions which seem to be counterproductive for example in cutting the costs too much when travelling in South Asia.

### **4.3 Impact**

Impact should be measured against the original objectives defined in the Asian Strategy of the Swedish Government namely to increase the capacity within the research and higher education community working with and on South Asia. This objective is not explicitly referred to in the Agreement between SASNET and Sida or in the Statutes of the network but was confirmed to the evaluators in their meetings with officials of the government and Sida. Impact is always difficult to measure and requires a baseline study. There are very few data on the number of scholars who devote their time to specific regions within the Swedish university system. SASNET has put considerable efforts into building up statistics on South Asia and has now a fairly well documented list published on their website and which is appended in table 1 and 2 below. However good this may be we have no baseline to compare with. Trying to find out the situation of the stakeholders in the different universities we did not find any evidence of large increases during the relevant five-year period. (However to the ones which are active, SASNET has meant a great deal.) The reason for the lack of evidence for the increase in number can depend on a number of facts: 1) Lack of funds for major new activities. In fact funds have been less than before in the past year in particular for social science research and for PhD studies. 2) Consolidation and increase of quality in already existing activities. 3) The time since SASNET was created has been too short to really have already had an impact. Having said this, it should be noted that a number of new activities have been noticed in this short period such as the creation of one Master course for South Asian studies in Lund and one in Uppsala, one new professorship in Indian Religion in Lund, increased activities at Padrigu in Gothenburg and a special course for South Asian studies at Österlen Folk High School.

### **4.4 Sustainability**

On a technical level SASNET is sustainable. It is wholly owned and run as a department of Lund University and as far as we could see is seen as an important part of the profile of that university. The university wants to see itself as an international university with special emphasis on Asia, which explicitly should also include South Asia.

As regards financial sustainability the situation is more complicated. SASNET is financed to 75% with funds from Sida and 25% from the university. SASNET is supposed to be a national institution and it is therefore difficult to see that Lund would be prepared to pick up the full bill and maintain that direction. Funding from Sida is therefore required for at least one more period in order to fulfill the national ambition of the project. Hopefully after that period the other stakeholders will find the network so important and useful that they are prepared to meet some of its cost. The ultimate solution would be that the national education budget would meet the additional costs to keep SASNET a national project.

### **4.5 Organisation**

SASNET is an Institute within Lund University and falls directly under the Vice-Chancellor's Office. As has already been mentioned above statutes for the work has been issued by the Vice-Chancellor. The Board was constituted under these statutes and its duties are also formalized there. The Board should be re-elected every three years and this was accordingly done in early 2005. The Secretariat or as it is called here, the root node of the network, is staffed by one and a half persons, professor Staffan Lindberg (half-time) and Lars Eklund. Administrative support is rendered to a certain but limited extent by the university administration. SASNET rents a room in

the South East Asian Institute, another autonomous institute within Lund University with which SASNET today has very good relations.

The major problem of the organization is the smallness of the staff, which leaves very little room for flexibility and new ventures. The devotion and energy of the two persons involved is the major asset of SASNET, but points also to its vulnerability for any changes. Informality has allowed the staff to be flexible, but as we have stated above as the network becomes more established some of the functions need to become more formalized. Rules and regulations must be refined and transmitted and explained to all stakeholders.

The coming period should therefore be utilized to consolidate SASNET as an all Swedish network. It is understandable and acceptable that Lund University accrues slightly higher benefits, due to the location and the additional funding received from Lund University. Yet this places a challenge to transparency of procedures at all levels, where the issue is also one of image-building. All procedures must be as transparent as possible and opportunities to decentralize initiatives should be looked into and stimulated in the next period. The tremendous input of the root node staff during the initial years must be met with support from all the stakeholders at each university involved in the network.

*List of people interviewed*

**Government:**

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Lisbeth Stålgren, Unit for Asia and Oceania (ASO), MFA.

Oscar Schlyter, Unit for Asia and Oceania (ASO), MFA.

Fredrika Oldbrandt, Unit for Asia and Oceania (ASO), MFA.

**Sida Asia Division,**

Jan Essner, Deputy head

Jan Bjerninger, Director

**Sida SAREC**

Berit Olsson, Head of Department, Sida/SAREC

Barbro Carlsson, Head of Division, Human Sciences for Social Development, SAREC

AnnaMaria Oltorp, Deputy Head of Division for Human Sciences for Social Development, SAREC

**Universities in Stockholm:**

Professor Bo Lindblad, Division of International Health (IHCAR), Department of Public Health Sciences, Karolinska Institutet Medical University, Stockholm

Social Anthropology at Stockholm University

Dr. Eva-Maria Hardtmann, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University

Professor Emeritus Gunnar Jacks, Division of Land and Water Resources, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Stockholm

Associate Professor Prosun Bhattacharya, Division of Land and Water Resources, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Stockholm

Professor Bo Lindblad, Division of International Health (IHCAR), Department of Public Health Sciences, Karolinska Institutet Medical University, Stockholm, Research in Karachi and Lahore in Pakistan and in India

Assoc Professor Sanjevi Carani, Centre for Molecular Medicine, origin South India

PhD in public health sciences, Zarina Kabir, origin Bangladesh

Helen Conte, lecturer in nursing at KI, recently started research cooperation with Aga Khan University Nursing, Karachi, Pakistan

Ayesha da Costa, PhD candidate in International Health from R.G. Gardi Medical College, Ujjain, India

Professor Vinod Diwan, epidemiological and tuberculosis research in cooperation with GMC Ujjain, India

Dr Shahzad Akram, PhD candidate in endocrinology from AKU, Karachi, Pakistan

Professor Marie Vahter, immunology, KI cooperation India

Postdoc Liam Good, Functional Genomics KI, cooperation India

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Associate Professor Gunnel Cederlöf, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology  
PhD Candidate Åsa Hole, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology  
Professor Emeritus Gunilla Gren-Eklund, Division of Asian and African Languages and Cultures;  
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Associate Professor Ashok Swain, Department of Peace and Conflict Research  
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Professor Gunilla Lindmark, International Maternal and Child Health (IMCH), Department of  
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Dr. Gunilla Blomqvist, Dept. of Peace and Development Research, PADRIGU  
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Dr. Monica Erwér, Dept. of Peace and Development Research, PADRIGU  
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Studies of the Human Condition  
Professor Olof Olsson, Dept of Cell and Molecular Biology  
PhD Candidate Ferdinando Sardella, Department of Religious Studies  
Dr. Eva Rosén Hockersmith, Department of Religious Studies

### **Karlstad University**

Professor Kjell Härenstam, Dept. of Religions, Division for Social Science  
Associate Professor Marc Katz, Dept. of Religions, Division for Social Science  
Professor Gerhard Gustafsson, Dept of Geography and Tourism  
PhD Candidate Per-Olof Fjällsby, Dept. of History  
Inga-Lill Fjällsby responsible for instruction and research, International Council of Karlstad  
University  
Ulrika Andersson, Cultural Geografy Student.  
Madeleine Augustsson, Religious History Student  
Henrik Janne, Religious History Student

## **Lund University**

Professor Rajni Hatti Kaul, Department of Biotechnology, Centre for Chemistry and Chemical Engineering

Professor Bo Mattiasson, Department of Biotechnology, Center for Chemistry and Chemical Engineering

Professor Torkel Wadström, Division of Bacteriology; Department of Medical Microbiology, Dermatology and Infection

Associate Professor Åsa Ljungh; Division of Bacteriology; Department of Medical Microbiology, Dermatology and Infection

Professor Olle Qvarnström, Division of Indic Religions, Department of History and Anthropology of Religion; Centre for Theology and Religious Studies

Dr. Martin Gansten, Division of Indic Religions, Department of History and Anthropology of Religion; Centre for Theology and Religious Studies

Dr. Sidsel Hansson, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies (ACE)

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Researcher Catarina Kinvall, Department of Political Science

Boel Billgren, Deputy Head of the International Office

Caroline Runeus, Head of the International Office

Björn Wittenmark, Assistant Vice-Chancellor

Hans Modig, Director for the Vice-Chancellor's office

Dr. Jan Magnusson, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies (ACE)

Professor Roger Greatrex, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies (ACE)

Associate Professor Alia Ahmad, Department of Economics,

Associate Professor Neelambar Hatti, Department of Economic History, Chairman of the Nordic Centre in India consortium board

Dr. Pernille Gooch, Human Ecology Division, Dept. of European Ethnology

Melissa Kelly, Master student in Asian Studies

Lynn Burter, Master student in Asian Studies

Keshab Prosad Bhattari, Master student in Asian Studies

Eva Hägerstrand, Deputy Coordinator, The Swallows India-Bangladesh section

Communication – e-mail, telephone,

1. Prof. Pamela Price, Dept. of History, Oslo University, Norway
2. Prof. Neil Webster, Danish Institute of International Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark.
3. Prof. Zulfiqar Bhutta Husein Lalji Dewraj professor of paediatrics and child health, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan
4. Prof. S.K. Thorat , Centre for the Study of Regional Development, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India
5. Mr. Vimal Trivedi, M.c. ( Statistics ), Centre for Social Studies, Surat, India

**Table 1: Researchers and teachers according to faculty involved in South Asia related research and based at Swedish academic institutions**

(Source: 9 June 2005 from the 150 departments and institutes listed under Research on SASNET's Gateway, which is constantly being updated).

Faculty	Professors	Senior researchers	PhD candidates	Total
Nat. sciences & technology	22	31	24	77 (28 %)
Medicine	12	17	10	39 (14 %)
Social sciences & law	13	49	27	89 (33 %)
Humanities	16	28	26	72 (25 %)
Total	63 (23 %)	125 (45 %)	87 (32 %)	273 (100 %)

Note to table: The statistics probably give a very good picture of the relative size of the various categories. MA and MSc students have not been included. Programme officers involved in various programmes have not been included. These two categories probably amount to about 50 persons, which means that around 300 persons are currently engaged in South Asia related research and academic education activities in Sweden.

**Table 2: Researchers and teachers according to city involved in South Asia related research and based at Swedish academic institutions**

(Source: 9 June 2005 from the 150 departments and institutes listed under Research on SASNET's Gateway, which is constantly being updated).

City	Professors	Senior researchers	PhD candidates	Total
Göteborg	11	24	25	60 (22 %)
Lund	17	25	17	59 (22 %)
Stockholm	11	28	23	62 (23 %)
Uppsala	13	31	14	58 (21 %)
Other	11	17	8	36 (13 %)
Total	63 (23 %)	125 (45 %)	87 (32 %)	273 (100 %)

Table 3

**SASNET expenses 2001 - 2004, budget 2005**

Source: Lund University Accounts

In 1000 SEK

Budget post	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
1. Salaries incl social costs	536	858	929	792	941	4056
	32%	35	42	34	40	37%
2. Travel	27	137	90	66	160	480
	2%	6	4	3	7	4%
3. Material	90	36	56	40	45	267
	5%	1	3	2	2	3%
4. Öresund activities	44	48	9	12	20	133
	3%	2	0	0	1	1%
5. Special activity root node	213	126	0	640	25	1004
	13%	5	0	27	1	9%
6. Administrative charges	187	246	204	179	215	1031
	11%	10	9	8	9	9%
7. Planning grants (incl fees)	568	1021	924	620	944	4077
	34%	41	42	26	40	37%
8. Total	1733,32	2572	2312	2449	2450	11074,37
	100%	100	100	100	100	100%

**Notes**

1. Travel includes contact journeys in 2002, 2003 and the one planned for in 2005.
2. Material in 2001 includes technical costs for building the Gateway.
3. Öresund activities include all our activities at Lund University and with our partners at Öresund University in 2001-2002.
4. Special activity: 2001: Workshop on global networking; 2002: Marstrand PhD symposium; 2004: 18th EASAS conference at Lund; 2005: NASA Conference in Aarhus - panel on health.
5. If we regard Special Activity as a form of Planning Grants, the total proportion of the SASNET budget actually spent on planning is 46 %. In addition, if we add the SEK 924.000 raised and used for the 18th EASAS conference, which is not accounted for in the above table, the proportion spent on planning is 53 %.