

# **REVIEW OF SASNET ACTIVITIES 2005-2009**

by

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The Swedish South Asian Studies Network – SASNET – was formed in 2000. The network is concerned with academic collaboration between Sweden and the increasingly significant South Asian region comprising erstwhile British India, i.e. Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, landlocked Afghanistan, Nepal and Bhutan and the littoral states Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

SASNET was the first national network of its kind in Sweden. The model has subsequently been extended to other fields of educational collaboration, e.g. the Gender and Development Network and the Peace and Conflict Research Network.

In 2005, both an internal and an external evaluation of SASNET were carried out. The self-evaluation was made by Staffan Lindberg, Lars Eklund and Jan Magnusson. The external evaluation was made by Carla Risseeuw, Ghanshyam Shah and Lennart Wohlgemuth. The present internal review is a modest attempt to update the previous evaluations. The review has been deliberately kept brief and the customary executive summary has been dispensed with. Occasional recommendations have been inserted into the text.

The review has been written by Stig Toft Madsen who joined SASNET as part-time Assistant Director in December 2008 to lend a hand to the Director on her return from sick-leave. I would like to thank Anna Lindberg and Lars Eklund for help and suggestions and other respondents for their contributions.

The review has been written in a period during which doubts were raised about the continuation of SASNET. It is hoped that the present review will be of use to decision-makers and other well-wishers of SASNET.

Stig Toft Madsen

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## 1. Scope and limitations of the review

The review aims to paint a portrait of SASNET's contribution to South Asian Studies in Sweden with a view to SASNET's future. The review does not purport to be comprehensive. Since the reviewer is not an economist, the review skirts budgetary considerations.

The review is based on the following sources:

1. The annual work reports of SASNET
2. The external and internal evaluations in 2005
3. The SASNET portal at [www.sasnet.lu.se](http://www.sasnet.lu.se)
4. Responses from selected SASNET staffers and users
5. Participant-observation

## 2. The organization of SASNET

The past activities of SASNET can be said to flow from its staffing. Since its formation, SASNET has consisted of a Director with an academic background and Deputy Director with a background as a journalist. They have been backed up by a national Board and by Lund University.

### 2.1 The staff

The Directors/Acting Directors have been:

Staffan Lindberg	2001 – June 2007
Anna Lindberg	2007 – April 2008
Sidsel Hansson	April 2008 – December 2008
Anna Lindberg	December 2008 - present

All three Directors come from the social sciences/humanities and all three had considerable experience of South Asia before taking up the part-time position as Director or Acting Director.

The long and wide-ranging experience of Staffan Lindberg is noteworthy. From the inception of SASNET, Deputy Director Lars Eklund has brought an equally long and wide-ranging experience to bear on his full-time position. A journalist by training, for many years he edited the magazine *Sydasien* while also working for a Swedish daily. Apart from managing the web portal, Lars Eklund participates in most other SASNET activities.

The external evaluation team noted that, "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" (Risseuw et al.).

2005:17) and warned that, "It will not be easy to replace the present hardworking enthusiasts when they choose to retire" (Risseuw et al. 2005:4).

In fact, SASNET has gained considerably from the willingness of key staff to work beyond working hours. Though paid for 20 hours per week, Staffan Lindberg estimated that he worked 25 to 30 hours per week. Anna Lindberg commented: "The work load has been very irregular. On average I have been working approximately 30-35 hours per week, but I always have the feeling that more work is needed".

Such commitment, however, should not be taken for granted.

*Recommendation: Job descriptions of SASNET staff should be calibrated to designated standard working hours.*

## **2.2 The board**

The board represents not only the social sciences and the humanities, but also the natural sciences and in particular medicine. In 2009, the Board was chaired by Gunnel Cederlöf, Department of History, Uppsala University. Other members included: Pernille Gooch, Catarina Kinnvall, and Jan Magnusson from Lund University, Prosun Bhattacharya from KTH, Stockholm, Cecilia Stålsby Lundborg from KI, Stockholm, Fernando Sardella from Department of Religious Studies, Göteborg University, Neil Webster from DIIS, Copenhagen, and Bengt Kristiansson from Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.

While the Board does include a NGO representative, it does not include representatives from the private sector or from government. As SASNET is a Triple Helix activity (see below) these omissions are not entirely consistent.

## **2.3 The application screening committee**

Twice a year SASNET distributes grants for projects, guest lectures, conferences, etc. Applications are screened by an academic committee. In 2008, the committee consisted of Arild Engelsen Ruud, Institute for Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, Ewa Wäckelgård, International Science Programme, Uppsala University, and Jytte Agergaard Larsen, Department of Geography, University of Copenhagen.

## **2.4 The reference group**

Since 2003, SASNET also has a South Asian Reference Group. It consists of Rita Afsar, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Mohsin Khan, Health Specialist, Islamabad, Tek Nath Dhakal, Campus Chief of Public Administration Campus, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Kumudu Wijewardena, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Sri Jayewardenepura,

Colombo, Dipak Malik, Banaras Hindu University & Gandhian Institute of Studies, Jamui Campus, Bihar, and J. Devika, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

### **3. Activities during the period 2005-2009**

The external evaluation (Risseuw et al. 2005:7) categorized SASNET's many activities under "four major pillars" as follows:

1. The Internet gateway
2. Conferences and meetings
3. Networking in Sweden and South Asia (and elsewhere)
4. Planning grants and education projects

All the four pillars are considered integral to SASNET. "If we delete one of the four "legs", there is a risk that SASNET would start limping", according to Anna Lindberg pers. com.).

This review will employ this categorization to look at major SASNET activities. The review will not cover all of SASNET's activities. For example, contact journeys in Sweden and South Asia will not be considered in any detail.

#### **3.1 The Internet gateway**

SASNET's Internet gateway is big: "On April 9, 2009, the website contained 1.490 pages, with 2.500 photos and 13.300 external links", the most recent work report states.

The gateway may serve several functions, including the following:

- As a source of news and information
- As a record of activities in Sweden
- As a tool of research
- As a means of communication within a moderator-driven network

The site may be searched in a number of ways:

- Any word or string of words may be located through the "SiteSeeker" index which screens the entire site
- Individual Researches may be located through a name or specialization search
- "Core fields" of research in Sweden are listed institutions-wise under Biotechnology, Democracy-Governance-Movements, Education, Gender, Health, Peace and Conflict, Religious Studies, Rural Development and

- Ecology, Languages and Indology, Water and Sustainable Development
- The page [www.sasnet.lu.se/environmentf.html](http://www.sasnet.lu.se/environmentf.html) lists *all* departments doing South Asia related research in the entire country providing detailed information about who is doing what. With its wealth of links and cross-references, this list is unique. No other country - including the South Asian countries themselves - is likely to have such a detailed national inventory of ongoing South Asia related research
  - The website may also be searched for information about performing art and conferences around the world
  - The webmaster regularly makes copies of the list. These copies served as a record of Swedish South Asia related activities. SASNET is regularly copied to <http://web.archive.org> which acts as a storehouse of 150 billion webpages.

In the following, I will try to ascertain the degree to which SASNET performs some of the desired functions by asking various questions.

*Is the portal visible on the Internet?*

A Google search on "sasnet" + "Sweden" yields 3.150 hits, "Sasnet" + "Swedish" yields 3.900 hits, "Swedish South Asian Studies Network" yields 2.130 hits. In comparison, a Google search on "British Association for South Asian Studies" yields 6.360 hits, a search on the Seattle-based history discussion site "H-Asia" yields 23.500 in combination with "history". A Google search on "NIAS" + "Nordic" yields 46.200 and a search on "Nordic Institute of Asian Studies" yields a surprising 323.000 hits. Thus, SASNET I clearly visible on the Internet, albeit not on par with the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies whose hit frequency must represent the pinnacle of Audit Culture achievement.

*Is the portal used?*

According to the 2005 evaluation, the site had had 37.500 visitors by April 2005 (Risseeuw et al 2005: 7). According to the 2006 work report (section 2.3) it had about 2.700 visitors per month. Next year the number had crossed 3.000 visitors per months, and by April 2009 the figure had almost reached 4.000 visitors per month. This is a considerable number.

By comparison, the older and larger institution NIAS tallies around 22.000 "unique users" (discounting repeats uses) on its AsiaPortal (pers.comm., Anja Møller Rasmussen, NIAS).

*Is the portal national?*

The SASNET search engine gives the following number of hits on Swedish cities selected by the reviewer:

Kiruna	7
Umeå	74
Uppsala	510
Stockholm	609
Göteborg	335
Gothenburg	55
Linköping	123
Jönköping	39
Kalmar	50
Gävle	14
Lund	1043
Malmö	124

Lund comes out ahead followed by Stockholm and Uppsala and Göteborg/Gothenburg. Does the number of hits reflect the actual interest in South Asia in the chosen places? As an indicator I searched the number of Google-hits on the same cities in combination with the term "South Asia":

Umeå University +Kiruna + South Asia	141
Umeå University +South Asia	1580
Uppsala University +South Asia	15000
University of Uppsala +South Asia	35400
Stockholm University+South Asia	10700
University of Stockholm +South Asia	180000
Göteborg University +South Asia	21300
Gothenburg University +South Asia	18500
University of Gothenburg +South Asia	151000
University of Göteborg +South Asia	32900
Linköping University +South Asia	52200
Jönköping University +South Asia	3490
Kalmar University+South Asia	44900
Gävle University +South Asia	3290
Lund University +South Asia	413000
University of Lund +South Asia	47900
Malmö University +South Asia	11200

Lund again emerges on the top. Hence, one may conclude that the SASNET site does pick up the smaller places in Sweden, while also reflecting the distribution of South Asian interest in major universities.



*Is the portal interdisciplinary?*

From the outset, SASNET attempted to be an interdisciplinary venture. Its search engine produces the following results on a series of search words that intend to probe the universe of relevance. I have chosen words beginning with a "t":

Technology	557
Television	47
Trade	271
Tea	89
Tata	54
Transparency	35
Test ban/CTBT	13
Taj Mahal	4
Tagore	75
Tulsidas/Tulsi Das	9
Truth	52
Tibeto	13
Tribe	188
Tectonic	0
Tuberculosis	34

The portal seems to pick up varied interests with a marked stress on "Technology" and "Tagore" and a low stress on "tectonic". The external evaluation (Risseuw at al. 2005: 3) found SASNET not yet multidisciplinary. It appears that this observation no longer holds for the SASNET portal. It is multidisciplinary.

*Does the portal cover the whole of South Asia?*

Typically, India dominates South Asia academically. Searching the site for country names, the following figures emerge:

Afghanistan	237
Pakistan	468
India	1102
Nepal	413
Bhutan	220
Bangladesh	462
Burma	51
Sri Lanka	422
Maldives	175

The presumed hegemony of India is not borne out. Hits on Pakistan, Nepal,

Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are high. The search indicates that even Burma has a presence on the site.

*"The glorious list"*

As mentioned, the portal aims to provide an updated list at [www.sasnet.lu.se/environmentf.html](http://www.sasnet.lu.se/environmentf.html) of all South Asia related activities in Sweden. The list is tellingly called "environment" as it does provide a Nils Holgersson view of the landscape of South Asian studies in Sweden. The list is build around 52 universities and their departments, plus a number of individual research institutions as well as a few companies. As the list is constantly updated, it provides a snapshot of the research environments. As older snapshots are available, the lists also serves a research tool. The list is richly illustrated with photos of many events that otherwise would leave no visual record. It is extensively cross-referenced.

Is this list utilized? It is not frequently referred by its heading, "Departments in Sweden engaged in research on South Asia". However, the list is very prominently displayed by conducting a Google search on "South Asia" + "Research" + Sweden". Here the two relevant SASNET sites come up as the foremost Google pathways. In other words, if someone were to search for research about South Asia conducted in Sweden, that person is more than likely to be directed to a SASNET website.

Some years ago, it was common to hear the argument that since South Asia study environments in the Nordic region and in Europe were spread out, some form of coordination was called for. Dispersion would dissipate efforts, it was felt. Until Lars Eklund made what I like to refer to as the glorious list, no one in Sweden knew how many environments there were. The list has made these environments visible for those who care to know. According to Lars Eklund, many of the individual researchers in various departments had carried on their South Asia related research or hobby at some personal hardship. Now that South Asia has risen further to international respectability and notoriety, many feel vindicated. In effect, Sweden has sustained and nurtured a wide and resilient network of South Asian studies umpteen times bigger than the network of Swedish studies in South Asia. This network has been built up mostly on public money and through competition for funding. SASNET serves to further information between these individuals and institutions as well as an arena of exchange and competition. The list reflects the policy that SASNET aims to be a national network and not a central governing institution.

*Use of the Internet portal vis-à-vis the Newsletter*

In addition to the Internet portal, SASNET also produces a monthly newsletter which is e-mailed to approximately 1.700 recipients around the globe.

In order to ascertain whether researchers consult the list or the newsletter, I have written an e-mail to all persons listed in the SASNET register of researchers and having a particular letter in their surname. I have asked these 30 persons the following question:

I am currently making a small internal review of SASNET for SASNET. You are listed in the SASNET list of scholars in Sweden as a person who has a (omitted) in your surname. I would like to know how often you search the SASNET website and read the SASNET newsletter. Please answer the following two questions. The information from you will be treated anonymously

Twelve persons responded.

*Question a: How often have you used the SASNET website [www.sasnet.lu.se](http://www.sasnet.lu.se) in 2009:*

1. Not at all	5
2. 1-5 times	3
3. 5-10 times	4
4. More than ten times	0

*Question b: Have you read any of the SASNET newsletters from this year (nos. 92-96):*

1. No, I have not read any of them	1
2. Well, I have looked at one or more of them	3
3. Yes, I read them regularly	8

The responses indicate that the newsletters are widely read. The website is less regularly used. Some people, who do read the newsletter, do not enter the portal.

*Recommendation: Steps should be taken to ensure that the list at [www.sasnet.lu.se/environmentf.html](http://www.sasnet.lu.se/environmentf.html) is more easily traceable on the net. Similarly, the "research" pages one and two should have a title that makes them more easily searchable. The newsletter is too long for some. Important information may be highlighted.*

### **3.2 Conferences and meetings**

Internet and other forms of non-visceral connectivity have not yet replaced face-to-face interaction. Conferences and meetings continue to be of major importance in the creation of *communitas*. They could be classified under networking activities as SASNET itself often does, but I will follow the external evaluators and treat conferences separately.

The biggest event so far arranged by SASNET was the 18<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies held in Lund in 2004 with 356 participants. According to SASNET's 2004 report: "This was the biggest ever European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies and the first one that was fully operated via Internet". The organizers provided travel grants and boarding and lodging for no less than 47 persons. About 66 people in the participants list came from Sweden. This must be considered satisfactory, i.e. SASNET can be said to have provided Swedish Southasianists an opportunity to interact with likeminded others. Nevertheless, as a participant in the conference I want to note that as regards giving key-note addresses and also as regards asking questions in plenum the Swedish researchers and the Europeans as a whole played second fiddle. As often before, the Indians and the Americans dominated the show at the economic cost of the Europeans, *in casu* the Swedes. This is a major and almost unacknowledged problem: The Europeans are sidelined.

SASNET may not have an explicit plan to overcome this problem but in spite of this, SASNET does try to nurture *desi* Southasianism. One major initiative is the Nordic Conference on South Asian Studies for Young Scholars to be held in August 2009 in Falsterbo. The conference explicitly aims "to discuss various issues which young scholars face in doing research focused on South Asia from organising their fieldwork to publishing the results of their investigations and locating a job." This is a worthwhile attempt to address a major problem. A similar SASNET workshop-cum-conference held a few years ago did succeed in bringing together younger scholars across disciplines.

### **3.3 Networking in Sweden and South Asia (and elsewhere)**

SASNET means the Swedish *Network* for South Asian Studies. The networking that SASNET does is not fundamentally different from the networking that all academics commonly engage in except that it is more interdisciplinary and more likely to encompass a larger variety of groups and social classes. The mandate under which SASNET operates allows it to engage in a wide variety of contacts. This comes into play when SASNET moves overseas, but it also comes about when SASNET does what SASNET should do at home. I will illustrate this below at some length.

#### *One day in the life of SASNET*

In May 2009 SASNET set up a one-day program in Lund and Malmö for the Indian Ambassador to Sweden as below:

**08.45:** Visit Mayor of Lund (kommunfullmäktiges ordförande), Ms. Annika Annerby Jansson. Rådhuset

**09.30:** By car to Lund University's Faculty of Engineering (LTH), Sölvegatan 22

**09.45-11.00:** LTH, Fakultetsklubben, K rhuset: Introduction on Lund University and the Faculty of Engineering by Prof. Per Warfvinge, Vice-Dean for International Relations, LTH. Coffee.

From K rhuset a short walk to E-huset, and the Department of Electrical and Information Technology. Meeting with Prof. Ove Edfors, and the Indian student Srikanth Gopal studying in the Masters programme on "Wireless Communications".

**11.00:** By car to the Vice Chancellor's Office, Lund University, Universitetsplatsen.

**11.15-11.45:** Meeting with the University Director, Dr. Marianne Granfelt

**11.45:** Short walk to the Old Bishops House

**12.00-13.00:** Lunch for invited guests at Old Bishops House

**13.00:** Taxi to Ideon Science Park

**13.15-15.30:** Sweden India Business Council/SASNET/Ideon business seminar on India. Knut Wicksells Konferensrum, Scheelev gen 17. Presentations given by:

- H.E. Mr. Balkrishna Shetty

- Prof. Baboo Nair, Dept. of Applied Nutrition, Lund University.

**15.30:** Short walk to SASNET's office at Scheelev gen 15 D.

**16.00-17.00:** Meeting with Lund University researchers, students and international coordinators involved in India related projects. Venue: Conference room, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Scheelev gen 15 D, 1st floor. Separate 10 minutes presentations of:

- The Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window lot 15 programme, coordinated by Lund University (Dr. Sidsel Hansson)

- The SASNET Fermented Foods project (Prof. Baboo Nair)

- The Division of Indic Religions at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University (Prof. Olle Qvarnstr m)

### **Transport to Malm **

**18.00-19.00** Ambassador visits the Bollywood cinema hall BioCentrum in Limhamn. Introduces the evening's film "Saawariya" to the audience.

**19.00** By car to Hipp, Kalendegatan 12 B.

**19.30-** Reception hosted by the Embassy of India in Winge-salen at the fifth floor of Hipp. Indian catering food supplied by "Curry on Wheels". Musical entertainment by Mrs. Bubu Munshi-Eklund giving a recital of Rabindraasangeet songs accompanied by harmonium.

(Excerpt from SASNET email)

For the evening reception, the following categories of persons were invited:

**Indo-Swedish Community in Malm -Lund:** 26 persons

**Lund Cricket Club**

**L nsstyrelsen:** Landsh vding

**City of Lund:** The Mayor and six others

**City of Malm :** The Mayor and one more person

**Media:** Six persons

**Business: Representatives of nine firms**

**Cultural people:** Nine people

**NGO people:** Three persons

**Malm  University:** Rector and eight others

**Lund University:** 41 persons

**Others:** Six persons

According to Jack Goody (1977), humans invented the script in order to make

lists and inventories. The lists made on this occasion is a worthy example of list-making that required an extraordinary degree of social knowledge to compile. I am reproducing them here to make it clear to the reader how much work some SASNET staffers do and how much cultural capital they possess.

Does SASNET only take such pain when it is an Ambassador, who makes a visit? No. A few month earlier two Indian students, who had won a quiz arranged by the Swedish Embassy in New Delhi, were received in Lund as part of their tour of Sweden. They, too, were shown the city albeit on a less elaborate circuit.

What is the purpose of these forms of networking? Specifically, researchers working in medicine and natural sciences may appreciate getting the chance to meet significant others because they do not relate to South Asia on a daily basis. Getting to know each other seems to be a generally felt need that SASNET may speak to (Åse Ljungh, pers. comm.). In the extreme, the main purpose of networking may be to get a visa. Getting a visa to South Asian countries has long been a major problem causing anguish, delays and cancellations for Swedish researchers and institutions.

In the most general terms, however, the networking that SASNET promotes conforms to contemporary ideals of *Triple Helix cooperation* (Delman and Madsen 2007). By promoting the interaction between the triple helix of academia, the state, and the private sector, SASNET aims to further innovation and development locally and globally. In this connection it makes sense that SonyEricsson provides office space within the Ideon science park for SASNET.

*Recommendations: SASNET has gone to considerable length creating a community of scholars by holding conferences, workshops, and by networking. It may be useful also to further highlight, promote and reward extraordinary writings and other works relating to Swedish South Asian studies more systematically in order to make such works known to more people within and outside the community. Instead of following the unwritten norm that keynote speakers should be foreigners, one may promote Swedes as and when feasible while taking care not to invoke collegial jealousy.*

### **3.4 Planning grants and education projects**

#### *SASNET grants*

In its 2005 assessment, the external evaluators observed that the planning grants distributed annually by SASNET *generated about 15 million SEK worth of further grants* for South Asia related research in the years 2003-05 (Risseeuw et al. 2005: 12). In an understatement the report notes, "This is a significant achievement". According the Self-evaluation (Lindberg et al. 2005), more than 70% of the grant-recipients had successfully proceeded to apply for

larger projects. A major portion of the applications fell within the fields of medicine and natural science. Such interdisciplinary collaboration is a rare asset in a world of specialization.

By 2008, SASNET had distributed 109 planning grants to researchers from 20 different Swedish universities and university colleges. Sixty-seven grants were for new research and programs, 20 to develop new educational projects, 8 to organize interdisciplinary workshops and 14 were for guest lectures.

Taking a closer look at the grants distributed in 2008 a slightly disturbing pattern appears. The projects that found favor are mainly in medicine and the natural sciences. Applicants from the humanities and social sciences apparently restrict themselves to invite guests and organize interdisciplinary workshops, or they write applications that are not as well-written as those from the natural sciences.

#### *SASNET as applier for grants*

SASNET occasionally engages in application work on its own. The most spectacular achievement in this regard is the *Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window Lot 15* program involving 12 European and 8 Indian universities. The Indian universities were mainly those with whom SASNET had established contacts on its earlier contact journeys. Owing to the normally chaotic application procedures of the EU, it proved very useful for SASNET to have already interacted with a large number of Indian universities. That made it possible to meet EU demands.

The Erasmus Mundus program involves the exchange of hundreds of students and faculty. The application for this program was written by Anna Lindberg in 2008. The program is now administered by Sidsel Hansson and a small staff. Though the program is not administered in the name of SASNET, it was clearly initiated by SASNET. Apart from Lund University, the list of collaborators includes Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm. Thus, the program does not benefit Swedish institutions equally.

Will the program benefit the persons and the departments involved and at what cost? Time may tell, but in any case it may represent *the largest single investment since colonial times in academic collaboration between Europe and India – brought to Sweden courtesy SASNET.*

#### *SASNET and education projects*

Though the import of SASNET can be considerable, it also has its limits. Since 2003, SASNET is housed with the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies (ACE). SASNET staff sometimes gives classes at the department and student and faculty from the centre attend lectures arranged by SASNET. However, the

presence of SASNET has not meant that South Asian studies do well at the department. Sometimes students have been few. At other times, a larger number of students have registered but failed to turn up (Lindberg et al. 2005: 15). A number of students from South Asia or elsewhere have been academically non-committed. Further, the South Asia "track" has little in the way of teaching-cum-research positions as compared to the other "tracks" at the centre despite the fact that until a few years ago Jan Magnusson (who specializes in Tibet and Tibetans in India) was the Study Director at ACE.

*Recommendation: SASNET should convene a teachers' moot so that teachers at various departments in Sweden may compare notes and find ways to improve their trade (cf. SASNET Work Report 2004 para 3.5). Teachers may discuss how to help secure the admission of committed and qualified students on a national basis in order to ensure the reproduction and evolution of South Asian studies.*

#### **4. Imagining the future**

The external evaluation in 2005 recommended a 50% increase in SASNET funding (Risseuw et al. 2005: 4). This recommendation was not followed, but Lund University gradually increased its contribution to SASNET.

In early 2009, SASNET circulated a proposal for the period from 2010 onwards (see minutes of the 2009 board meeting). It visualizes a decentralization of some of its visceral activities to subnodes in Umeå and Uppsala and at KTH and KI in Stockholm, while maintaining its activities in Lund. This plan would mean a larger SASNET with a stronger presence in several cities of Sweden. Its mode of functioning would still be one of exchanging information, creating knowledge and securing transparency through networking and publishing on the net.

Assured external funding would enable SASNET to remain national.

##### **4.1 The benefit of SASNET**

At the time of writing SASNET is without secured funding for the period beyond 2009. I have asked some of the persons who have worked intensively for SASNET to articulate what a possible cessation of SASNET activities would mean. This is their response.

*If SASNET were to close, what would constitute the main loss to Swedish South Asian research and cooperation?*



- Att ha kompetensen hos dem som arbetat med SASNET under åren samlad och åtkomlig för dem vid svenska universitet som behöver kunskap, stöd, kontakter, etc.
  - Kunskap om SA forskningen i landet och forskarkontakter i Sydasiens.
  - Hemsidan, som är en gigantisk resurs, vilken uppskattas långt utanför Sveriges gränser.
  - Helhetssyn över behov och möjligheter inom SA forskning och utbildning i Sverige.
  - Tillgängligt nätverk för SA forskare inom alla discipliner i landet.
  - Möjlighet att initiera nya utbildnings- och forskningsprojekt där samtidigt stöd och annan service kan förmedlas.

**Gunnel Cederlöf , Associate Professor, Department of History, Uppsala University. Chairperson SASNET's board**

- SASNET has during its many years of existence built up an amazing interdisciplinary network of researchers, students and practitioners in Sweden and South Asia. More than any other organization SASNET has managed to connect people from various disciplines and practitioners to conduct joint work on important projects in South Asia related to health, water, politics, security and social issues. SASNET has also built up an extremely useful home page that has been a continuous source of information on events taking place in both Scandinavia and in South Asia and it has provided researchers with an invaluable network of contacts throughout the region. SASNET has also organized a large number of events taking place in Lund on South Asian activities and it has been instrumental for the masters teaching taking place at the Centre for Asian Studies at Lund University. SASNET has also been able to finance visiting scholars and has provided seed money for new projects. It would be a tremendous loss if SASNET would not be allowed to continue. In my opinion SASNET has been crucial for establishing cooperation and joint research projects between Swedish and South Asian scholars.

**Catarina Kinnvall, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Lund University Member of SASNET's board (representative of Lund University)**

- Because of its multi-disciplinary approach, Sasnet is a leading network in Europe for encouraging and establishing contacts and collaborations, not only between scholars across the globe but also across disciplinary borders. Scholars tend to establish collaborations with colleagues who share research interests but it often requires a well-established network like Sasnet to go beyond disciplinary and geographical borders. The important role of Sasnet is to inform about different ongoing academic activities and arrange events that stimulate exchange between all scholars who share the interest in South Asian Studies. If Sasnet was to close, it would be a major loss, especially for younger scholars who are dependent on existing networks in order to establish themselves in the academic community. A counter-question would be "what other institution in Scandinavia could replace this network in terms of organization of academic events and communication of information and news about academic activities in South Asian Studies?"

**Kristina Myrvold, Assistant Professor, Dept. of History and Anthropology of Religion, Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University. Deputy member of SASNET's board (representative for Lund University)**

- SASNET has been a focal platform for the Swedish South Asian Network since May 2000. It was initiated through the support of Sida/SAREC in collaboration with the University of Lund. Since its creation the network has been working to create an unifying platform for researchers involved with research on a wide spectrum of subjects within natural Science, humanities and art and culture. The network has also encouraged regular exchange of faculty members from the South Asian Countries which has contributed to the teaching and pedagogic development to many of the

Swedish Universities. As a node of Swedish South Asian studies and research, SASNET has a tremendous impact both within Sweden but also internationally. In addition SASNET also actively fosters keen research interest among the Swedish researchers to work on diverse issues of South Asia.

Any attempt to close the SASNET network might impact the overall research networking between the South Asian countries and Sweden.

**Prosun Bhattacharya, Associate Professor, Dept. of Land and Water Resources Engineering, Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)  
Member of SASNET's board (representative for Swedish universities)**

- SASNET facilitates the possibilities for researchers from a wide range of research areas to learn and develop together among issues of common interest. SASNET also provides a comprehensive update of events going on in relation to South Asian studies. If SASNET would not be there this natural meeting point would disappear and research and other collaboration would be even more compartmentalized than otherwise. The contact net established through or in other ways related to SASNET gives a unique possibility for collaboration and cooperation. These possibilities for multi- and intra-disciplinary contacts rather would need strengthening in today's globalized world than opposite. South Asia would be expected to become an even stronger research and collaboration partner in the future and it is thus important not to lose this viable network.

**Cecilia Stålsby Lundborg, Professor, Division of Global Health, IHCAR, Dept. of Public Health Sciences, Karolinska Institutet  
Member of SASNET's board (representative for Swedish universities)**

- SASNET has been very important to me as a researcher as a source of information on South Asia related matters. Particularly the newsletter does a very good job in bringing together the most important events etc. Also the website is an impressive collection of information. Handling information is a major task for any researcher/teacher these days, so the help that SASNET provides in organising and putting together this information is also very helpful.

It is also my view that the SASNET planning grants have been important in making possible research. I think that the fact that me and my colleague received a SASNET planning grant for cooperation with Colombo university was important in granting us the bigger Sida/Sarec grant. So without SASNET an important source of grants for cooperation Sweden-South Asia will disappear, and thereby an incentive for such cooperation risks disappearing.

**Camilla Orjuela, PhD, Division of Peace and Development Research (PADRIGU), School of Global Studies, Göteborg University.  
Deputy member of SASNET's board (representative for Swedish universities)**

- The main loss would be the lack of a centralized node for networking where scholars and students from India and Sweden can share a common platform, read regular reports of the numerous activities taking place, and get to know the different aspects of each other's research on South Asia both in India and in Sweden. It would also be a set back for many students on all levels, from undergraduates to PhD students, who will miss a reference point and a source of ongoing information and inspiration in their planning of a career in South Asian related studies. The internet webpage is very extensive and an incredible resource on all levels, for both the casual reader and the specialized scholar. The scholarships are also a fantastic resource for encouraging specialized research on South Asia, and cooperation between India and Sweden.

**Ferdinando Sardella, PhD candidate,  
Dept. of Literature, History of Ideas, and Religion, Göteborg University.  
Member of SASNET's board (representative for Swedish universities)**

- As the S. Asian research scene is as decentralized and labyrinthine as any other, organizations like SASNET are extremely important in terms of connecting departments, projects, individual researchers et cetera, as well as providing channels for funding, general information for students and researchers alike. Therefore it would be a terrible loss if it were closed.

**Per Drougge, PhD candidate, Dept. of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University**

**Deputy member of SASNET's board (representative for Swedish universities)**

1. A very important source of seed money for Swedish research on SA would stop.
2. The web-site which is important within and beyond Sweden's borders for SA scholars would presumably close.
3. The multi and inter-disciplinary nature of SA research/ers that has been encouraged, would be weakened.
4. A meeting place for SA research (seminars, meetings, etc etc) would be seriously weakened.

**Neil Webster, Senior researcher,**

**Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Copenhagen, Denmark.**

**Member of SASNET's board (representative for Nordic universities)**

- Even if SASNET is a Swedish operation, it has Nordic reach and importance. There is no other similar form of network for South Asianists in the Nordic region or indeed in Europe. The network performs a vital function in terms of information dissemination to scholars in the region. Perhaps equally important but easily ignored is the fact that SASNET caters to the specific research interests found in the Nordic region, with its core of development concerns, more so than any other network of South Asianists. SASNET's contribution is to foster a community of researchers in the Nordic region, which would otherwise be dispersed and, given our peripheral position, much less effective, visible or influential. This would be the greatest loss should SASNET cease to exist.

**Arild Engelsen Ruud, PhD, Dept. of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, Norway**

**Deputy member of SASNET's board (representative for Nordic universities)**

- För Svalorna Indien Bangladesh-sektionen, som en svensk NGO verkande i Indien och Bangladesh, skulle det vara en mycket stor förlust om SASNET stängde.
  - 1) Vi får genom SASNET löpande information om vad som händer inom forskar- och NGO-världen i Sydasien.
  - 2) Det är värdefullt med kontakten med SASNETs kontor i Lund, dit kan man ställa frågor av olika art, ex om lämpliga personer att inbjuda till något evenemang vi vill anordna. Det finns på SASNET stor kompetens så vi kan även ställa frågor för att få förklaring till skeenden i Indien eller Bangladesh, politiskt och socialt.
  - 3) Svalorna har fått rent praktiskt hjälp gällande hur man kan gå till väga för att få visum till Indien för våra utlandsanställda.
  - 4) SASNET är en bra aktör att samverka med för Svalorna om t ex utåtriktade arrangemang.
  - 5) personer från SASNET kan föreläsa vid Svalornas arrangemang.
  - 6) det är en styrka för Svalorna att ha en länk in i forskarvärlden. Forskare och aktiva inom organisationer kan ha stor nytta av varandra, då vi når olika publik med våra gemensamma frågor.
  - 7) Svalorna har inte själv någon som helst möjlighet att skapa ett sådant omfattande nätverk till personer i Sydasien samt till kunniga personer i Nord och andra delar av världen som SASNET har. Genom SASNET har vi möjlighet att få tillgång till detta nätverk.

Om det är frågan om att lägga ner SASNET menar Svalorna IB att det vore en oersättlig förlust.

**Eva Hägerstrand, Coordinator, Swallows India-Bangladesh Section, Lund. Deputy member of SASNET's board (representative for Swedish NGOs).**

- The main loss would be that accumulated knowledge and an enormous database with information about South Asian Research would be lost. It has taken years and years to build it up, and it is considered to be very useful by a lot of people (including SIDA, Swedish Foreign Ministry, and our many users). The activities of SASNET facilitate and stimulate knowledge accumulation, education, and research about South Asia. In particular, SASNET acts as a mediator between disciplines and facilitates dialogues between natural science and other disciplines. SASNET has become a "brand name" for research about South Asia and it has put Sweden on the "Academic map" (in Asia, Europe and North America) as an important nation for research on South Asia. This connection between South Asia research of high quality and Sweden will probably fade away. In order to exist as a national network, serving all Swedish universities, it is desirable that SASNET, at least partly, be financed externally from an independent public source.

**Anna Lindberg, Director, SASNET**

- One of the main aims of SASNET is increased networking. The main means to achieve this networking are

- The Internet Gateway
- Planning grants and education projects
- Conferences and meetings

If SASNET were to close, the increased networking among researchers, also between the natural sciences, technology and medicine on the one hand and the social sciences and the humanities on the other, would be lost.

**Staffan Lindberg, Professor, Department of Sociology, Lund University Former SASNET Director (2001-2007), now deputy member of SASNET's board (representative of Lund University).**

- The vast resource data bank built up over nine years, charting the South Asia related research at all Swedish universities and collaboration with universities in South Asia, currently consisting of a web site with 1,400 pages with a devoted web master that personally knows most of the approximately 400 Swedish researchers involved. Without constant updating this data bank will become more or less useless, at least totally antiquated, within two years. It would be a tremendous waste of a carefully collected information that now is internationally recognised to be the best of its kind in the world. Researchers in India and also many other countries get a unified view of what Sweden offers research-wise. Even though it creates a misleading image – "Sweden is the leading country in the world" – our detailed inventory of the work of researchers in more than 200 different fields is in fact unique. No other country can boast of a national database on South Asian studies.

**Lars Eklund, Deputy Director, SASNET**

#### ***4.2 Collaborators: NCI, ADI, NSU and Österlen Folk High School***

Apart from Relation to the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies at Lund University, SASNET maintains relations with the Nordic Centre in India (NCI), with the newly established Asia Dynamic Initiative (ADI) at University of Copenhagen and with the Nordic Summer University (NSU).

NCI is a Nordic consortium for educational exchange between South Asia and more than a dozen Nordic universities. Sweden has played a major role in this consortium. SASNET has an interest in this venture to help Swedish students join NCI courses in India. SASNET is a Swedish national venture, but if SASNET were to become a Nordic venture, it could suitably merge with NCI.

ADI was established recently by University of Copenhagen as a major move to upgrade its Asian profile. The initiative covers South Asia and includes a professorial position for South Asian studies in view of relative neglect the region has hitherto suffered. As SASNET and ACE in Lund correspond well to NIAS (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies) and ADI in Copenhagen they ought to be able to work together within the Öresund University in the future.

Together with NIAS, SASNET was instrumental in applying to the Nordic Summer University (NSU) to set up a three-year study circle on South Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The first conference was held in March 2009.

SASNET was also instrumental in establishing Indian studies at Österlen's Folk High School. The course has proved viable, but few scholars from Lund are presently involved. The reason seems to be problems of transferring credits from the folk high school to Lund University.

## **5. Conclusion**

This report confirms that SASNET has emerged as a national South Asian studies network of considerable Swedish and Nordic academic utility obtained at a small financial outlay. SASNET also makes its mark outside academia as an interlocutor in a "Triple Helix" context. In both cases, SASNET's utility is enhanced by the competence and dedication of its staff.

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