

# SASNET SELF- EVALUATION

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## Introduction

The work of SASNETs is analyzed below in the light of the existing strategic plan of 2010 and the directives provided by the rector of Lund University (LU). In brief, these directives state that SASNET is to promote and stimulate education and research on South Asia, and to function as a network for disseminating information nationally on these issues. In addition to these directives, we draw on the strategies that SASNET and its board of directors have developed continuously over time. On this basis, we have completed a SWOT analysis highlighting the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that SASNET is facing. Next follows an evaluation of SASNET's activities based on its operational goals and objectives, as well the directives stated by LU. SASNET is using two of the four criteria stated by LU in its general instructions on self-evaluation, namely 1) interdisciplinary cooperation and 2) internationalization. The other two criteria (quality enhancement and leadership) are not applicable to SASNET, whose objectives are to act as a node in a network linking other research centres and departments engaging in research and educational activities. In the final part of the process of self-evaluation, the activities of SASNET are assessed by an external reviewer, a so-called critical friend, in this case Professor Roger Jeffrey, who is President of the European Association for South Asian Studies. Thus, an impartial reviewer who may provide further advice on how to improve the organization's performance has evaluated SASNET.

## SWOT analysis

Table 1.

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SASNET has built up a solid, widespread global network of South Asia researchers</li> <li>- The SASNET newsletter reaches a large number of researchers and students globally</li> <li>- SASNET is very well reputed among leading South Asia scholars and researchers</li> <li>- SASNET's staff has developed an expert knowledge of student mobility exchanges and writing large EU funding applications</li> <li>- The South Asia network at LU has a broad set of skills and competencies</li> <li>- The SASNET staff has great familiarity with South Asia, both in terms of academic research and more general knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are few young researchers focusing on South Asia at LU</li> <li>- Teaching on South Asia is relatively poorly developed</li> <li>- The organization is highly dependent on a few key persons</li> <li>-The interdisciplinary research environment at LU is not vital and strong enough</li> <li>- The South Asia network at LU may be better integrated with existing research environments at the university</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SASNET is an important agency in promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and the internationalization of LU</li> <li>-SASNET has very solid, long-standing experience in arranging international conferences and workshops</li> <li>- SASNET schedules approximately one public lecture per week at LU, often with international researchers</li> </ul>	
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SASNET can draw on its extensive international network to promote and facilitate the development of a vital South Asia research environment at LU</li> <li>- SASNET is actively working on promoting external research funding applications from LU</li> <li>- SASNET can further promote the internationalization of LU by facilitating teacher and student exchanges, international research collaboration, and by arranging international conferences at LU</li> </ul>	<p>SASNET's existence is endangered unless it manages to rejuvenate its staff and promote a stronger South Asia research environment at LU</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The future of SASNET is uncertain after 2015, when the current round of funding expires</li> </ul>

An obvious strength of SASNET is its worldwide network of South Asia researchers. SASNET has a high reputation and reaches thousands of researchers and students through its newsletters. Taken together, the members of the South Asia network at LU have broad, solid competencies ranging from engineering, medicine, and public health to more general historical and social science knowledge. The SASNET staff has developed an excellent knowledge of student mobility exchanges and has longstanding experience in successfully applying for large scale funding from the EU and other agencies for such purposes.

SASNET also has some few weaknesses. There are few young researchers focusing on South Asia at LU and the organization is highly dependent on a few key persons. Moreover, there is a slight imbalance between the networking activities of SASNET, which are very extensive, and its role in stimulating interdisciplinary research at LU. SASNET has received funding from LU until 2015. Should SASNET not receive funding after 2015, the organization is facing the threat of having to close its operations. However, SASNET may be able to address these weaknesses and threats. By drawing on SASNET's extensive research networks, there are excellent opportunities to promote research collaboration with leading researchers and to stimulate teaching, public lectures, international conferences, and interdisciplinary research projects at LU. From 2013 onwards, SASNET is specifically focusing on promoting research funding applications regarding on South Asia.

### **Cross-interaction**

#### *A. Collaboration across disciplines and faculties at LU*

SASNET is in itself interdisciplinary and the existing cross-disciplinary cooperation consists in the fact that researchers from most faculties at LU are represented in the network.

SASNET functions as a node in a web of links among and institutions at LU. A central task of SASNET is to act as consultants for anyone at LU who wishes to collaborate with someone from South Asia, or carry out research about South Asia.

Each year SASNET arranges seminars and lectures at LU. In 2013 SASNET has been involved in organizing 23 events in cooperation with seven departments at LU and various external partners. On average each lecture had 15 participants. In April SASNET organized a large symposium with leading South Asia researchers and the ambassadors of South Asian countries to Sweden.

SASNET and the office of External Relations also function as consultant agencies for LU regarding issues relating to the South Asia region, as when a department considers applying for funds for student and teacher exchange programmes with universities in South Asia through such agencies as the EU or the Linnaeus Palme foundation.

#### *B. Collaboration with other universities (Swedish, Nordic, European, South Asian)*

SASNET collaborates with other Swedish and Nordic Universities by spreading information about South Asia research. SASNET also works closely with the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen to arrange conferences and by cooperating in technical matters, such as developing joint website solutions. SASNET is also actively involved with the Nordic Centre in India (NCI), a consortium of Nordic universities, by arranging conferences. SASNET has arranged conferences for young researchers together with some of the leading universities in the field of South Asian studies in Europe: Edinburgh, Leiden, Heidelberg, Paris, and Ghent. SASNET is also represented by its director, Anna Lindberg, on the board of EASAS, the European Association for South Asian Studies.

#### *C. Cross-boundary activities*

SASNET is also in communication with non-academic agencies, such as NGOs, embassies, municipalities, and the business sector. These collaborations have resulted in the diffusion of research findings as well as mutually beneficial exchanges of knowledge and experiences. SASNET is actively engaged with NGOs such as Svalorna Indien-Bangladesh, the Swedish Afghanistan Committee, and the Association of Foreign Affairs (UPF) at LU to arrange public lectures with distinguished guest speakers.

SASNET maintains good relations with the Swedish embassies in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and with South Asian embassies to Sweden. SASNET has arranged several large events in collaboration with the Indian embassy. It has invited ambassadors from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan to cultural events and public lectures at LU.

SASNET cooperates with Lund Municipality, Lunds konsthall (Lund Art Museum), and ABF to present South Asia research to the wider public by scheduling seven to eight joint lunch meetings per year at the Lund Art Museum.

### **Internationalization**

Beginning in 2013 SASNET is operating under new directives with a new board, and it is now financed solely by LU. SASNET's monthly newsletter on South Asian research reaches 2,800 recipients in the world. The SASNET webpage is visited an average of 5,600 times a month from almost 20 countries. The list is headed by India, followed by Sweden, USA, Great Britain, Pakistan, Germany, Bangladesh, Canada, and Denmark.

SASNET initiated the ICCR guest professor chair at LU for Indian professors in collaboration with the Indian government. SASNET also enabled Lund to acquire the responsibility for coordinating the Erasmus Mundus Action 2-mobility programme with India. Anna Lindberg at SASNET wrote the application for this programme. SASNET also assisted the office of external relations in securing for LU the responsibility for an Asia Regional Programme that includes Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Finally, since 2008, 81 stipends have been awarded to South Asian students who have studied at LU, several of whom went on to PhD studies there.

Table 2. Number of scholarships awarded to South Asians at LU through Erasmus Mundus India and Asia, 2008–2011

	India	Pakistan	Nepal	Bangladesh	Total
Undergraduate	5	4		2	11
Masters	16	1	1		18
PhD	20	3		1	24
Post-doc	17				17
Academic staff	9		1	1	11
Total	67	8	2	4	81

The ICCR chair and the Erasmus Mundus programme have had a positive impact on LU. Former ICCR professors have actively participated in outlining research applications and in planning conferences. The Erasmus Mundus scholarships have helped to internationalize the departments where they have been located. In some cases scholarship fellows have assisted in establishing collaborative projects between their departments at LU and their equivalent in South Asia. This was the case at the Departments of Public Health and Gender Studies, where the staff developed Linnaeus Palme collaborations with Indian Universities.

In 2013 SASNET assisted the Department of Human Ecology in applying for funding for Linnaeus Palme collaborations. It has also provided support to the Department of Media and Communication in establishing teacher and student exchanges with a South Indian University. Each year, SASNET arranges an international conference or workshop. The most recent conference was held in March 2013 in collaboration with the Nordic Centre in India and the Institute for Economic and Social Change in Bangalore, India. The conference resulted in two international publications edited by researchers from LU. SASNET is currently planning a follow-up conference with the aim of promoting new research projects.

In the past SASNET has operated with two permanent staff members (Anna Lindberg and Lars Eklund). Project employees have assisted them for shorter periods of time. SASNET is not involved directly in teaching and research, although its director, Anna Lindberg, works part-time with research on South Asia funded by external sources. In 2013, this research resulted in two peer-reviewed international publications. During the same year the director was also a guest lecturer at three Indian universities.

In the autumn of 2013, SASNET employed Dr Olle Frödin (part-time position). He will work as deputy director of SASNET beginning 1 January 2014. His task is to assist the director in strengthening SASNET's work on promoting interdisciplinary research on South Asia at LU.

### **Strategies for Developing the Organization**

SASNET developed a South Asia strategy in 2010. A revised and updated version of this strategic document will form the basis of our current strategy. SASNET intends to continue its work with following aims:

1. Maintain our current high standard with regard to networking and communication (in part by strengthening our strong “brand”, but also by renewing and expanding our web of contacts)
2. Promote a South Asian perspective in the existing undergraduate programmes at LU in order to stimulate greater interest in South Asia among researchers and students
3. Strengthen research on South Asia by facilitating the formation of research groups (including researchers from South Asia) that apply for external funds. The long-term goal is to establish a permanent research environment or research centre with a fixed core of researchers.
4. Continue to organize international conferences and encourage research on South Asia at LU

SASNET is currently working on several levels to promote teaching and research on South Asia. This includes the drafting of interdisciplinary research applications to funding agencies such as European Research Council (ERC), Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ), The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, the Swedish Research Council (VR), Forte, and Formas. It also consists of promoting and facilitating student and teacher exchanges. SASNET also encourages knowledge about this populous region of the world. SASNET seeks to promote a South Asia perspective in several programmes, such as the LU Master of Development Studies Programme (LUMID) and the Bachelor of International Development Studies Programme (BIDS). SASNET began cooperating with a group of Indian researchers in conjunction with the conference co-organized by SASNET in Bangalore in March 2013. This conference formed the basis of collaborative research projects that will result in applications for funding to be submitted to various agencies in 2014. SASNET has applied for funding for an international conference on the theme of welfare and sustainable development in South Asia in comparative perspective that we plan to hold in Lund in May 2015. We are simultaneously preparing research applications within this field of research.

In the long term, SASNET aims at creating synergies and cooperation between different research centres at LU, such as the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, the Centre for East and South East Asia Studies, LU Centre for Sustainability Studies (LUCSUS), the international Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics (IIIEE), and the Centre for Global Health by creating links between them aimed at promoting interdisciplinary research on globally sustainable development.

The 2010 document on the long-term strategy for South Asian research at LU proposed that SASNET is to promote research within four interdisciplinary research fields: a) sustainability, environment, and health, b) transnationalism, economics, and development, c) globalization, religion, and conflict/security, and d) ICT and development. The objective is for LU to evolve into a platform not only for South Asian studies, but for global sustainability research as well, a goal in which SASNET will play an active role.

**Assessment by Professor Roger Jeffery: Professor of Sociology of South Asia; Director, Edinburgh Institute; Dean International (India); formerly Director, Centre for South Asian Studies, all at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK; and President, European Association for South Asian Studies, 2009-14.**

The self-evaluation by SASNET strikes me as a very fair and modest account of its strengths and challenges. I shall restrict my comments to those parts of SASNET's activities of which I have first-hand experience.

1. SASNET plays an exceptionally valuable role in European academic networks of South Asian Studies: its newsletters and web-site are unparalleled, and provide up-to-date information on a whole range of South Asia related topics. All that is included about its significance in the self-evaluation on this topic is justified, and perhaps under-stated. It would be a great loss to the European community of South Asianists were this resource no longer to be available. Lund and SASNET are highly valued members of the European network of institutions responsible for organising workshops for PhD students working on South Asian topics, and Anna Lindberg is an important member of the EASAS Council.
2. I can compare the situation in my own University, Edinburgh, when evaluating the description of the SASNET activities within Lund University. On the basis of quite a modest financial and human resource investment, SASNET has notable achievements to its credit. The ICCR Chair, the regular series of weekly seminars, the international conferences with which it is associated, and its networking across the different Faculties are significant even if largely unseen contributions to University life. In a world where inter-disciplinarity is increasingly demanded, area studies centres like SASNET facilitate many positive outcomes that are rarely if ever attributed to its work.
3. Given the increasing significance of South Asia in many fields – economic, scholarly, geo-political, scientific, for example – I believe that Universities like Edinburgh and Lund need to invest in resources that provide unique advantages when they engage with the region. Linguistic, cultural, social, political and economic skills need to be available for the creation of exchange programmes and research proposals in many science, medicine and engineering fields. The need for units like SASNET is likely to grow, rather than to decline. From the account of its activities so far I would recommend some further investment to allow for bringing on younger Swedish scholars, making more contributions to undergraduate and graduate teaching programmes, and finding new ways of attracting international students and faculty from South Asia.

In sum, I see this review as an opportunity to identify new ways of building on SASNET's undoubted and very marked strengths, and to contribute to overcoming the challenges with which it is faced. On the basis of the self-evaluation here, I am convinced that SASNET's revised and updated strategy will identify how in the particular situation of Lund this can be achieved.