

Appendix 2

The idea of SASNET

by Staffan Lindberg, February 2003

SASNET is a focused attempt to promote Swedish research and education related to South Asia. It tries to engage all sciences across faculties. While government funding for African, Latin American and East- and Southeast Asian area studies have existed for quite some time, this is the first ever budget support for such activities directed towards South Asia. The design of SASNET is based on the consideration of a number of factors:

- Central government funding is limited. Far more money is put into area studies concerning East- and Southeast Asia and Africa respectively. Politicians and businessmen are yet to discover the importance of South Asia as an emerging economic, political and cultural power in the world. The change, however, from merely emphasising poverty and environmental problems to that of the more positive sides seems imminent since South Asia, especially India, seems to hold some of the central keys to the future global economy, viz. the software and entertainment industries.
- It is very costly to create centres with critical mass. Centres can create strong research- and education programmes but depend heavily on the entrepreneurial capacities of its leadership and staff. They have a varying ability to promote research and education outside their own centre and in other universities, and to create functional links with the world outside the universities. The Nordic Africa Institute is a partial exception. Moreover, the money granted to SASNET would in no way suffice for even starting a centre at any of the Swedish universities.
- Centres tend to work out their guiding principles in a particular historical context and then tend to remain with those principles, while the very context and the questions asked may change. Thus, the funding agencies may rightly feel that their relevance is weakened over time.
- Thus there is a need to create more flexible arenas for problem-oriented inter- and multidisciplinary research, and education, arenas that can be closed down, while new ones are opened.
- The aim is to strengthen both basic sciences, i.e. discipline-based research, and problem-oriented inter- and multidisciplinary research and education.

SASNET draws on the confessed creed and interest of all sciences to be universalistic and networking across all borders. The recent advances in electronic communication technology, i.e. the Internet, offer fantastic opportunities to create flexible research communities for various purposes:

- Facilitate cooperation between researchers within particular universities to promote South Asia research by working for altered priorities. Despite increasing dependence on external finance, the basic funding for South Asian studies (research positions and courses) must come from the large basic university funds.
- Promote cooperation between researchers from all sciences locally and globally to build strong and advanced research programmes and projects that are competitive in winning external funding.

- Help single individuals or small research groups in various universities and colleges, without any tradition of South Asia research, to find partners and interact with them.
- The ultimate aim is to create sturdy research and education environments. This may in the long run mean both sturdier departments (disciplines), centres (inter- and multidisciplinary), and other more flexible networking arenas (Research Arenas). The form is not sacred and should be subordinate to the overall goal.
- Create functional links with extra-mural society: governments, media, business, schools, organisations, and individuals.

Given all these considerations, the design of SASNET is believed to give maximum output for the money and personal effort invested, that is, an annual budget of about SEK 2 million, which allows us one and a half permanent positions and to distribute about SEK1 million in planning and networking grants per annum. Admittedly this tailored networking mode demands a great deal of enthusiasm and some voluntary work to succeed, but it is also hoped that it will generate a plenty of new resources through altered priorities at the various universities and colleges involved in the network and by cooperation with other funding agencies and institutions. SASNET has had a snowballing effect on the development of various activities at Lund and at other major universities in Sweden.

SASNET is a programme with a time horizon of approximately ten years, after which a more low-key permanent type of networking run by any of the stronger centres could take over certain coordinating functions of SASNET, while other more promotional functions may no longer be needed.

Priorities in SASNET work 2003 - 2004

Now that we have established the network and organisation (during 2000 – 2002) and given the very limited funding, there is need to focus our approach as much as possible. The list below is rather all-encompassing, which we may not be able to cover fully, given time- and budgetary constraints. It may be that we can only make patchy contributions under points 7–9. Point 10 is an activity we have to work on slowly but steadily to ensure the sustainability of South Asian studies in Sweden. Overall, the main objective is that we at the root node and the board act as energisers and facilitators for others to do the actual work with sufficient funding from various sources.

Ten basic activities:

1. Gateway to South Asia: Linking development of the Internet gateway to all activities.
2. Networking around those projects that have received planning grants including promoting networking in South Asia
3. Strengthening local networks in Uppsala, Lund, Stockholm, Göteborg and Karlstad; Local Forums; linking others to these networks

4. Doctoral students, recruitment and finance, facilitating studies, courses, graduate schools, etc.
5. Masters' and undergraduate courses: Göteborg, Karlstad, Lund, Uppsala ...
6. Strengthening core research fields:
 - Biotechnology
 - Democracy, good governance, institutions and social movements including those of underprivileged groups (dalits, tribals, etc.)
 - Education
 - Gender
 - Health, preventive and reproductive health, child and maternity health
 - History, especially religion and society
 - Languages
 - Peace, Conflict and Development
 - Rural development, common pool resources, etc.
 - Water, infrastructure and sustainable development

Build large research programmes around these fields, find entrepreneurs, help with finance, etc. Also, whenever scope and potential for it, develop new research fields!

Third task:

7. Course work: business and teachers (for example with Folkuniversitetet)
8. Strengthening information work with journalists and news media
9. Increasing interaction with government agencies, consultancies, etc (Sida).
10. Network with East- and Southeast Asia researchers and centres in Lund, Stockholm, Göteborg, etc. in order to prepare for a long term sustainable institutional framework for South Asian studies within an overall Asia studies perspective. For example, establishing joint programmes of research and masters programmes, as we are currently doing at Lund

SASNET gateway is the tool of interaction and all possible information about SASNET activities are available there. The gateway is a focused source of information for researchers. Our gateway is a meeting place where the latest research is made available to the society outside the universities and where outsiders' concerns and question are transmitted to the research community. With the increased capacity of the Internet at large to become the global library to everything, there is now a tremendous need to create focused and evaluated information. In our case making it from values and priorities developed in the interaction between Swedes and South Asians in a global context.