

SAMS Role Deconstruct

Senior Research Leader - Climate & Sustainability

Leading Think Tank | New Delhi

(What the role truly involves and how to assess your fit)

Why This Role Deconstruct

A SAMS Role Deconstruct helps candidates understand the real expectations of a role beyond the formal job description. It clarifies the leadership mandate, operating context, and performance expectations so you can assess your fit with greater accuracy.

This is particularly important for senior research and policy leadership roles where success depends on the ability to combine intellectual credibility with portfolio growth, external engagement, and institutional impact.

What This Role Is Really About

This is not a senior research role in the conventional sense. Nor is it simply a programme management or donor-funded project leadership position.

This is a senior research and portfolio leadership role responsible for shaping and growing the organisation's climate and sustainability work through research leadership, funded programme development, policy engagement, strategic partnerships, and team leadership.

The successful candidate will need to operate at the intersection of:

- Research and knowledge creation
- Policy influence and thought leadership
- Funded portfolio development and institutional growth
- Strategic partnerships and stakeholder engagement
- Leadership of multidisciplinary teams

The central challenge is to balance intellectual credibility with institution-building. The role requires someone who can think deeply, guide serious research, develop fundable ideas, engage senior stakeholders, secure resources, and ensure that programmes deliver visible policy and sector impact.

The Role's Strategic Priorities

Over the next 12-24 months, the role will likely focus on:

1. Research Leadership & Agenda Setting

Providing intellectual leadership across the organisation's climate and sustainability work; identifying emerging opportunities; shaping research priorities; and ensuring the organisation remains relevant within a rapidly evolving climate, policy, and development landscape.

2. Programme Development & Delivery

Guiding the design and delivery of research, advisory, and policy initiatives that generate meaningful evidence, insights, and influence. The role will need to ensure that programmes remain aligned with organisational priorities, stakeholder needs, and high standards of research quality.

3. Funded Portfolio Development & Institutional Growth

Developing and growing a sustainable pipeline of funded research, advisory, and knowledge initiatives through donor engagement, proposal development, strategic partnerships, and business development. The role will require the ability to convert strong ideas and institutional credibility into fundable programmes and high-impact collaborations.

4. Thought Leadership & External Representation

Strengthening the organisation's visibility and influence through publications, policy engagement, public forums, expert groups, and sector networks. The incumbent will be expected to serve as a credible voice on climate, sustainability, environment, resilience, and related development issues.

5. Partnerships & Team Leadership

Building and sustaining relationships across government, philanthropy, academia, development agencies, research institutions, industry, and other ecosystem actors. The role will also involve leading and developing multidisciplinary teams while fostering collaboration, quality, and accountability.

Your Scope of Responsibility

Reporting into senior organisational leadership, the role includes:

Research, Knowledge & Practice Leadership

Shaping the strategic direction of climate and sustainability work; guiding research outputs and knowledge products; and ensuring relevance to policy, practice, and institutional priorities.

Funded Portfolio Development & Business Development

Identifying and securing funding opportunities; leading proposal development; engaging donors and partners; and building a sustainable pipeline of research, advisory, and knowledge initiatives.

Programme Oversight & Delivery

Overseeing programme portfolios; ensuring quality, timeliness, and delivery discipline; and aligning multidisciplinary workstreams with agreed outcomes and stakeholder expectations.

Partnerships & External Engagement

Representing the organisation in key forums; building relationships with funders, policymakers, research institutions, development partners, and sector platforms; and strengthening institutional credibility.

Team Leadership

Mentoring and developing multidisciplinary teams; strengthening performance, capability building, collaboration, and accountability across research and programme functions.

What Success Looks Like

Within 12-18 months, success would typically be visible through:

- A clearly articulated and visible climate and sustainability portfolio
- A stronger and more diversified pipeline of funded research and advisory opportunities
- High-quality research, policy, and knowledge outputs with demonstrable influence
- Strengthened relationships across the climate, sustainability, policy, donor, and research ecosystem
- A cohesive, high-performing multidisciplinary team
- Enhanced visibility and credibility of the organisation within relevant national and international platforms

Who Will Thrive in This Role

This role is suited to a senior professional who brings:

- 15+ years of experience across climate, sustainability, environment, energy, resilience, natural resource management, or related development sectors
- Demonstrated leadership of research programmes, funded portfolios, thematic practices, or major multidisciplinary initiatives
- Strong grounding in research, policy engagement, and knowledge creation
- Proven experience in proposal development, donor engagement, resource mobilisation, and strategic partnerships
- Experience working with government, donors, development partners, academia, research institutions, philanthropy, and/or industry
- Credibility to represent the organisation externally in senior policy, research, donor, and sector forums
- Ability to integrate strategy, execution, research quality, stakeholder engagement, and team leadership
- A consistently strong academic record, preferably with 60%+ marks throughout

Profiles combining subject matter expertise, research credibility, funded portfolio development, and institutional leadership experience are particularly well aligned.

This Role May Not Be Ideal If

This role may not suit you if:

- Your experience is primarily academic or research-focused, with limited exposure to institution-building or portfolio growth
- You have not led multidisciplinary teams, programmes, portfolios, or thematic practice areas
- You have limited experience in proposal development, donor engagement, or resource mobilisation
- You are uncomfortable representing an organisation before senior government, donor, academic, or sector stakeholders
- You prefer well-defined research assignments over roles requiring opportunity creation, external engagement, and institutional growth

Operating Context

- Location: New Delhi
- Function: Climate & Sustainability
- Reporting: Senior organisational leadership
- Team Leadership: Multidisciplinary programme and research teams
- Compensation: Competitive; aligned with senior sector benchmarks

The role operates in a fast-evolving climate and development landscape that requires both strategic thinking and execution discipline.

Before You Apply - A SAMS Reality Check

You are likely a strong fit if you can confidently say:

- I have led complex programmes, portfolios, practice areas, or major research initiatives.
- I have successfully secured funding and built strategic partnerships.
- I am comfortable engaging with government, donors, research institutions, and senior stakeholders.
- I have managed and developed high-performing multidisciplinary teams.
- I can combine research credibility with organisational leadership.
- I bring a clear perspective on climate and sustainability challenges, and can translate that perspective into fundable, policy-relevant work.

Closing Note

This is a high-impact leadership opportunity for a senior climate and sustainability professional who is motivated by building institutional capability, not merely managing individual research assignments.

The role offers the opportunity to operate at the intersection of research, policy, funded portfolio development, and institutional growth within India's climate and sustainability ecosystem. It demands credibility, maturity, and breadth - and offers commensurate influence, visibility, and the opportunity to shape both organisational direction and sector outcomes.

Prepared by Strategic Alliance Management Services Pvt. Ltd. (SAMS) as a role-clarity and candidate self-assessment tool.