



DUTY TRAVEL REPORT

Regional Capacity Building Workshop and Mission on Time Release Study (TRS)

Staff Member	Mohammed Ajaz	
Destination:	Apia, Samoa	
Source of funding:	Core Activity 2024-30-1-1.1	
Travel Dates:	Departure Date:	30 March 2025
	Arrival Date:	12 April 2025
Purpose of Travel:	To support and coordinate the Regional Capacity Building Workshop and Mission on Time Release Study (TRS) organized by the OCO Secretariat in Samoa. The activity is part of the approved 2024–2025 Work Program under Strategic Priority Area Three: Trade Management and Facilitation. The Subject Matter Expert, Mr. Stephen Muller delivered the workshop and mission.	
Activity description:	<p>The following activities were carried out prior and during the travel period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Workshop Preparations: Coordination of virtual preparatory sessions for participants and completion of WCO CLIKC! TRS module. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Session 1 - 17 March 2025 (12.30 to 13.30FJT) ○ Session 2 - 21 March 2025 (12.30 to 13.30 FJT) ○ Session 3 - 27 March 2025 (12.30 to 13.30FJT) • Face-to-Face TRS Workshop (31 March – 2 April 2025): Delivered three days of technical training focused on TRS methodology, survey design, stakeholder engagement, and data collection planning. • Practical TRS Mission Support (3 April – 11 April 2025): Facilitated the development of Samoa Customs' TRS data collection plan, provided hands-on guidance on stakeholder mapping, and supported initial data gathering activities. • Participant Engagement: The Subject Matter Expert provided technical support, mentoring, and feedback to participants from 8 Small Member Administrations and Samoa Customs throughout the workshop and mission activities. 	
Outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands-on Practical Experience with a Live TRS Setup <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participants not only learned the theory but also actively participated in the design, testing, and adjustment of a real TRS survey tool and methodology, making their skills immediately applicable. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-Depth Familiarity with WCO TRS Software <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Beyond basic exposure, participants inputted actual field data into the WCO TRS software, analysed outputs, and learned how to interpret indicators and reports, a rare opportunity usually gained through direct experience. • Enhanced Field Data Collection Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Through mock and real data collection exercises at critical clearance points (ports, ASYCUDA operations, inspections), participants developed strong data collection planning, coordination, and quality assurance skills. • Collaborative Problem Solving and Adjustments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participants were exposed to real-world issues during data collection (e.g., missing data stamps, operational delays, power outage) and had to collaboratively troubleshoot and adjust survey sheets and data collection strategies on the spot. • Creation of a Regional Support Network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strong peer-to-peer learning and regional networks were built among participants from various OCO Small Member Administrations, creating a pool of TRS practitioners who can support each other beyond the workshop. • Exposure to Private Sector Collaboration in TRS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By involving Customs Clearing Agents and OGAs in the Samoa exercise, participants gained an appreciation of the need for private sector and inter-agency collaboration in conducting successful TRS exercises. • Critical Understanding of TRS Challenges and Risks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participants learned to identify operational bottlenecks, system gaps, and human resource challenges in real-time; critical for planning realistic, phased TRS projects back home.
<p>Recommendations/follow up activities:</p>	<p>For Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the WCO CLIKC! TRS certification if pending. • Develop a process mapping of Seaport Clearance Procedure to guide future scoping initiatives at their respective Customs administrations as a foundation to initiate national TRS. • Conduct knowledge-sharing sessions with management and colleagues to raise awareness of TRS benefits. <p>For Samoa Customs:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalize the data collection phase based on the developed TRS plan, with technical support from OCO and the Subject Matter Expert. • Technical Working Group to manage ongoing activities and stakeholder coordination. • Conduct regular stakeholder engagement meetings to ensure smooth data collection and buy-in. • Provide weekly progress updates to the OCO, Subject Matter Expert and the fellow participants to monitor developments and address challenges promptly. Updates to commence from 25 April 2025.
Acknowledgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OCO extends sincere gratitude to the Subject Matter Expert, Mr. Stephen Muller for facilitating the workshop and the mission for Samoa Customs time release study. • Our deepest gratitude to the Ministry of Customs and Revenue, Samoa, for being an exceptional host during the two-week workshop. The team's warm hospitality and support made our stay not only productive but also truly memorable.
Challengers	<p>Challenges encountered during the workshop and mission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Per diem distribution: Due to the short lead time before the workshop, there were challenges in the timely dissemination of per diems to participants. As a result, one participant did not receive his per diem allowances until the conclusion of the workshop. We acknowledge this issue and will work towards improving the process for future events. • Breakfast per diem adjustment: The hotel accommodation provided a continental breakfast, which was limited compared to a full breakfast offering. Therefore, it is respectfully requested that OCO consider paying the full breakfast per diem allowance to participants to ensure fairness and to meet participants' needs. • Impact of power outage during mission During the mission, a power outage in town disrupted normal operations and significantly affected the collection of real-time data. This unforeseen circumstance contributed to delays and ultimately prolonged the mission's completion time. • Training Facility The training room and amenities were a little compromised as the room size was not suitable for this group with additional issues such as the air conditioning, AV equipment and meals caused some concerns during the training. However, the team managed the situation but highly recommend a better setup in future trainings.

Meeting documents where available (to put on server with [hyperlink](#)):

The documents for training can be found [here](#).

Photos:



OUTCOME STATEMENT

Regional Capacity Building Workshop and Mission on Time Release Study (TRS)

31 March – 11 April 2025, Apia, Samoa

The OCO Secretariat successfully delivered the Regional Capacity Building Workshop on Time Release Study (TRS) from 31st March to 11th April 2025 in Apia, Samoa. The event gathered 15 participants, comprising 9 officials from 8 Small Member Administrations (American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, 4 officials from Samoa Customs and 2 officials from the Samoa Ports Authority and Customs Brokers. The training was facilitated by Mr. Stephen Muller, Subject Matter Expert (SME) and supported by OCO Customs Enforcement Advisor (CEA), Mohammed Ajaz.

This capacity-building activity addressed a critical priority under OCO's Strategic Priority Area Three: Trade Management and Facilitation. The workshop responded directly to findings from the OCO IMPACT Project Gap Analysis and Monitoring & Evaluation Framework, which highlighted Time Release Study (TRS) as one of the least implemented and critical areas for Customs modernization among Small Member Administrations.

The workshop and mission successfully achieved the following objectives:

- Built foundational capacity within OCO Members to understand and apply the Time Release Study methodology developed by the World Customs Organization (WCO).
- Supported the Ministry for Customs and Revenue, Samoa, in initiating its Time Release Study by developing the TRS plan (scoping exercise), defining data requirements, and starting initial data collection preparations.
- Developed a pool of trained TRS focal points within the Pacific region who have both theoretical understanding (through virtual sessions and the WCO CLIKC! module) and practical exposure (through the hands-on activities during the mission in Samoa).

Key Outcomes

- Participants successfully completed three preparatory virtual sessions and the TRS module on the WCO CLIKC! platform prior to the face-to-face workshop.
- A practical TRS workshop was conducted, equipping participants with the skills to plan and prepare for a Time Release Study, including designing survey forms, identifying key stakeholders, and understanding data collection processes.
- Samoa Customs, with the support of OCO, SME and workshop participants, initiated its Time Release Study, with planning finalised and initial steps for data collection commenced. Full data collection and completion of the TRS will continue post-workshop.
- A regional pool of Customs officers from Small Member Administrations was developed, capable of supporting future TRS initiatives both nationally and regionally.

The blended learning approach, combining theoretical training with practical application has created a first wave of regional TRS focal points who are now better equipped to support national and regional efforts to measure and improve border clearance processes. This capacity-building activity directly advances OCO's Strategic Priority Area Three and contributes to the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy's goal of simplifying and coordinating clearance processes.

Recommendations

To maintain the momentum gained from the Regional Capacity Building Workshop and Mission on Time Release Study (TRS), the following immediate and achievable recommendations are proposed:

For Participants:

1. Participants who have not yet finalized the certification process are encouraged to complete their WCO CLIKC! TRS certificates for future recognition and deployment opportunities.
2. Within three months of returning, participants should develop a process mapping of Seaport Clearance Procedure for “FCL” and “LCL” cargo, as this process mapping forms part of the foundation for the subsequent TRS activities.
3. Participants should organize a short debrief session with their respective senior management teams or colleagues to share key learnings and raise awareness of the benefits of TRS.

For Samoa Customs:

1. Samoa Customs is encouraged to continue its data collection activities based on the TRS plan developed during the workshop, with technical support from OCO and the SME as needed.
2. A dedicated team of 4 officers are officially bestowed with the responsibility as Technical Working Group and will coordinate data gathering, stakeholder engagement, and reporting activities.
3. Samoa Customs will submit weekly updates to the OCO, the SME and the fellow participants on the progress of the TRS implementation to ensure timely support and identify any challenges. The team is deemed to meet on every Fridays @ 1400hrs Fiji time for consecutive 5-weeks commencing on 25 April 2025.

Conclusion

The successful delivery of the Regional Capacity Building Workshop and Mission on Time Release Study (TRS) marks a significant milestone in strengthening Customs modernization efforts across the Pacific. While the TRS for Samoa Customs is still underway, the workshop effectively built the foundation for members to plan, initiate, and eventually complete TRS activities within their administrations.

End

TRAINING POST EVALUATION SUMMARY

Regional Capacity Building Workshop and Mission on Time Release Study

31 March – 11 April 2025, Apia, Samoa

The TRS (Time Release Study) Capacity Building Workshop was conducted to enhance participants' understanding and operational capacity to implement TRS as a trade facilitation tool. This evaluation report summarizes participants' feedback to assess the effectiveness of the training and identify areas for improvement.

Participants Overview

- **Total Responses:** 11 out of 15
- **Gender:**
 - Male: 91.7%
 - Female: 8.3%
- **Age Distribution:**
 - Majority aged between 35–44 years (63.6%)

Training Content and Delivery

Overall Satisfaction

- Participants rated the workshop very highly regarding meeting expectations, relevance to their work, and overall satisfaction.
- Over 90% of respondents rated the content as *very good* or *good*.

Session Ratings

Participants' perception of individual sessions indicated:

- High relevance and usefulness of the presentations.
- Clarity of concepts and good engagement by facilitators.
- Suggestions included allowing more time for in-depth discussions.

Knowledge & Skills Gained

- Participants reported a significant increase in knowledge and confidence regarding TRS concepts, data collection, validation processes, and analysis.
- The most valuable learnings highlighted were:
 - Understanding the TRS methodology and phases.
 - Importance of stakeholder engagement and validation.
 - Application of TRS findings to facilitate trade reforms.

Key Strengths Identified

- Facilitators were praised for their deep knowledge, practical examples, and engagement style.
- Well-structured training content.
- Participants appreciated the balance between theoretical and practical exercises.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

Training-Related Challenges

- Limited time to cover technical areas in greater depth.
- Some participants requested more practical hands-on sessions and real-world case studies.
- Suggestions were made to include more breakout group discussions for active participation.

Logistics Issues

- Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the venue facilities:
 - Inadequate air-conditioning caused discomfort during sessions.
 - The training room was considered too small for the group size.
 - Audio-visual equipment (e.g., microphones) had minor issues that affected delivery.
- Catering was also mentioned:
 - Some felt the catering arrangements could have been better managed and more varied.

Participants recommended careful selection of larger, better-equipped venues for future trainings to ensure comfort and maximize learning experience.

Suggestions for Future Trainings

- Extend the workshop duration to allow deeper discussions and more exercises.

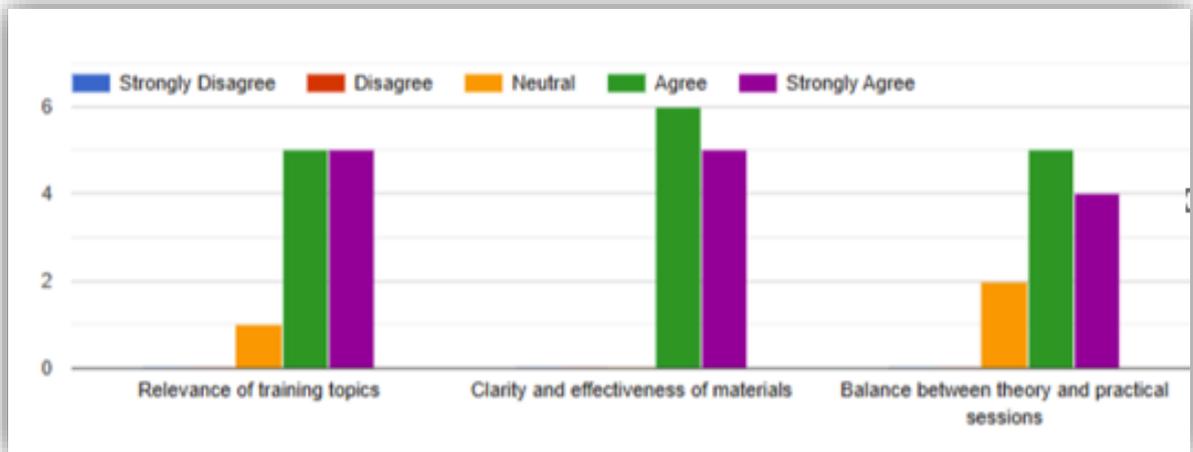
- Incorporate real TRS case studies and simulations.
- Enhance logistical arrangements:
 - Ensure adequate venue space and working air-conditioning.
 - Improve AV equipment reliability.
 - Provide diverse and sufficient catering options.
- Offer follow-up mentoring and technical support post-training to assist with national TRS implementation.

Conclusion

The TRS Capacity Building Workshop in Samoa was overall very successful, with participants expressing strong satisfaction with the training content and delivery. However, improvements in logistical arrangements such as room size, AV equipment, air conditioning, meal options, per diems is highly recommended. Addressing these will ensure high level “duty of care” by OCO Secretariat.

Pictorial Presentation of Close-Ended Questions and Extract of Comments for Open-Ended Questions

A. Training Content



Training Content Comments

1.1 Training Content Comments :

8 responses

Topics and materials of this training I agreed, but balancing between theory and practice needs to be coordinated and arranged well before the training.

Learning materials provided were relevance to the training

VERY HELPFUL AND USEFUL INFORMATION

It was a good training for me to gain good knowledge about the four phases of Time Release Study

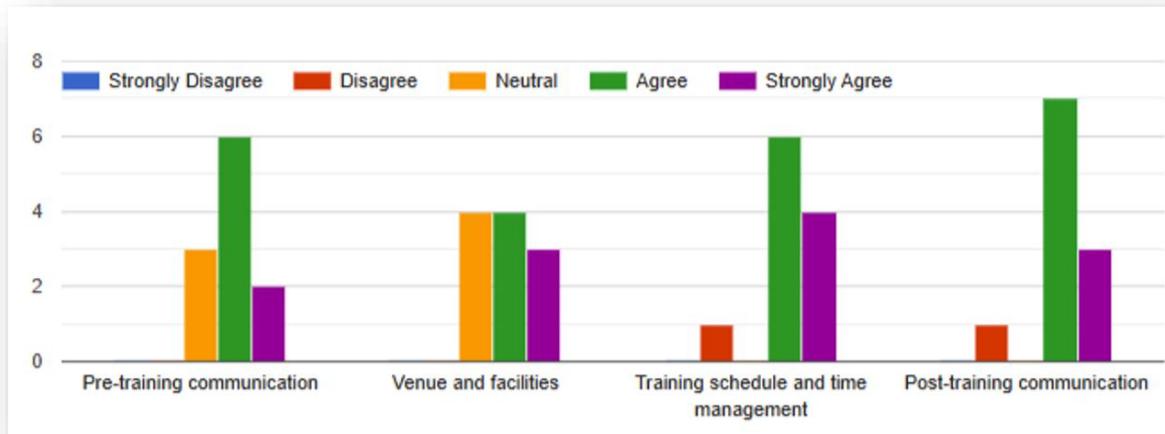
It gave me an idea of how to apply the TRS in my agency. I may tweak it to fit our TRS mission

I found the training content to be comprehensive and easy to follow. I have no problem or concern.*

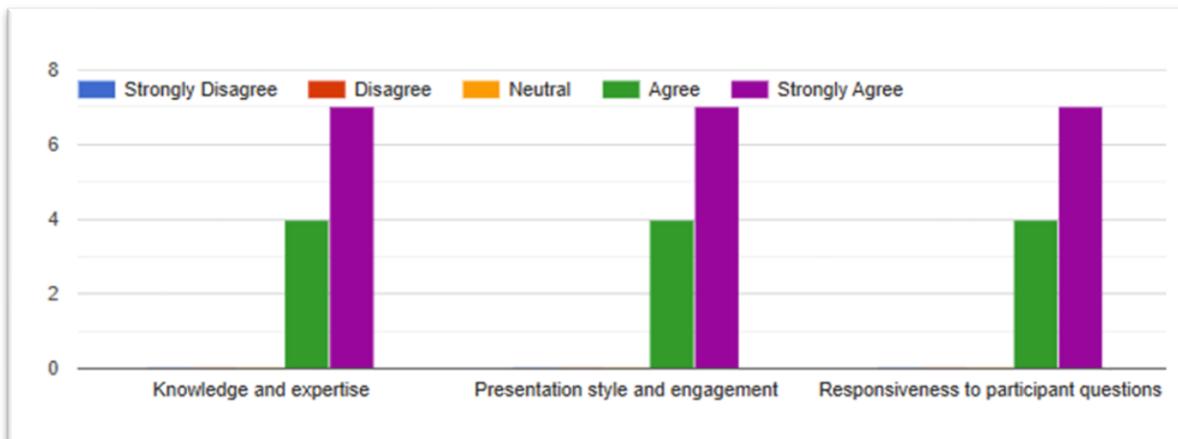
IT WAS A REALLY GOOD START AND IF A COUNTRY IS GOING TO START LAUNCHING THEIR OWN TRS, I STRONGLY AGREE TO BRING IN THE TRS EXPERT TO HELP WITH HIS EXPERTISE .

Great experience for the first time hearing about TRS

B. Logistics and Organisation



C. Facilitator's Knowledge of Subject and Interactions



D. Overall Training Effectiveness



G. Additional Comments by Participants

5. How do you plan to apply the knowledge and skills gained from this training to your organisation?

11 responses

I will do it first in my workplace, to attach a form as time records to every step of the clearance process. Everyone involved in the process has to write the time (start and end) of their process and sign. Then roll out to the other agencies after the awareness and consultations. Have to identify bottlenecks in the processes and then re-engineering of the clearance processes.

Applying knowledge and skills gained from TRS Capacity Building includes streamlining processes and utilizing technology to improve efficiency

I will take back what I have learned and discuss with my COC. Propose a much easier, process and automated system for my island

TO PERFORM A TRS WITH OUR AGENCY

It helps our administration to facilitate our process and identified bottlenecks to improve our processes

get better communication with our stakeholders and resources from our organization

I would like to start to implement a TRS at our station at the U.S. Post Office, perhaps as a pilot project and

6. What were the most valuable aspects of the Training for you?

11 responses

TRS training has assisted Samoan Customs in conducting their Time Release Study, and I have learned and wanted to conduct TRS in my country. I will spend more time studying the data and the system to build up a technical skill specific to my role.

Measuring the actual time taken for clearance of the cargo and identifying bottlenecks in the process

It showed how complicated the ASYCUDA automated process is.

THE PLANNING, SET UP AND PERFORMING TRS

The importance of information flow and physical flow and also the very important part which is the scoping

real time on clearances and understanding the process

Applying the TRS will teach me how to identify inefficiencies and bottlenecks that will help streamline processing. If the practice is good now, it can be better using the TRS tool.

7. Additional Feedback

11 responses

I thank you for including my country to participate in this Capacity Building program.

No comment

Training was very good, and it made it easier for us to identify bottlenecks in the system and the process at first glance.

ALTHOUGH WE MAY NOT FACE THE SAME CHALLENGES ON GUAM AS THE OTHER REGIONS DO THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN PROCESSES

Not enough time

better facility, making the most of our time

The ten-day training for me as the head of the CNMI Customs is too long to be absent from my responsibilities. However, I am glad I attended because it was all worthwhile.

requesting OCO to assist our administration to start a TRS

END

