

**Customs Modernization and Infrastructure Development  
Project under Accelerating Transport and Trade  
Connectivity in Eastern South Asia (ACCESS) –  
Bangladesh Phase 1 Project**

**Terms of Reference  
for Consultancy Services of Time Release Study (TRS) at  
Key Customs Houses  
(Baseline, Midline and End-line Survey)**

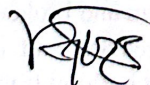
**Location** : Dhaka, Bangladesh  
**Appointment** : International  
**Period** : 36 months from the start of the contract

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**1. Background of this Assignment:**

**1.1** The Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received a Credit from the World Bank Group for financing the cost of Accelerating Transport and Trade Connectivity in Eastern South Asia (ACCESS) – Bangladesh Phase 1 program, being jointly implemented by the National Board of Revenue (NBR), Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA) and Road and Highways Division (RHD), with an aims to increase the efficiency and resilience of trade and transport along selected corridors in Bangladesh. The program seeks to address the main drivers of high trade and transport costs. It will support the transformation of the cross-border clearance ecosystem through the provision of digital and automated systems for trade, transport and trade- enabling infrastructure, and capacity building and technical assistance to streamline policy, regulatory, and procedural impediments that constrain freight movement.

**1.2** The National Board of Revenue (NBR) is implementing the Customs Modernization and Infrastructure Development (CMID) Project as part of the ACCESS program. Object of the project is to create a cost-efficient, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient trade infrastructure at select customs ports. It also seeks adoption of modern customs procedures aligned with WTO Trade Facilitation Agreements (TFA) and international best practices. Additionally, the CMID Project supports the implementation of a trade-enhancing tariff system and capacity development for its effective administration. The project also focuses on enhancing capacity of Bangladesh customs administration at all levels by improving the organizational structure and strengthening human, financial, and physical resources within the department.





## 2. Context of this Service:


2.1 The international movement of goods involves not only Customs administrations but also other national authorities such as national security, health, Food, Drug Administration, Plant quarantine, agriculture, port authorities, logistics providers, as well as the trading community which include brokers, forwarding and shipping agents, carriers, banks and other intermediaries. The trade entities, in particular, are constantly concerned with measures to ensure faster clearance of goods. Delays in the release of goods are very often attributed to the procedural and documentary requirements of Customs since they are one of the more visible agencies at the border. It is, therefore, in the interest of the Customs Administration to initiate measures for faster clearance and for monitoring the release time for goods through regular review.

2.2 Now the CMID project intends to engage a consultancy firm to conduct a Time Release Study (TRS). The TRS is an element of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which came into force in February 2017. Article 7.6 of TFA requires members to measure and publish average release times for import and export goods and it encourages cross-border agencies to conduct the TRS periodically and in a consistent manner, using inter alia, World Customs Organization (WCO) TRS tools. Over the past few decades, TRS has been used by the WCO member countries to undertake a comprehensive assessment of trade facilitation needs and priorities. TRS has also been helpful for periodic monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of implementing specific associated measures, policies and programs.

2.3 TRS is a strategic and internationally recognized tool of WCO to measure the actual time required for the release of goods, from the time of arrival until the physical release of cargo, with a view to finding bottlenecks in the trade flow process and taking necessary measures to improve. The TRS is used by many countries to help improve their competitiveness.

2.4 Against this backdrop, a comprehensive TRS was conducted in 2022 by Bangladesh Customs, in collaboration with the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) through the Global Trade Facilitation Program (GTFP). The study was carried out at Benapole land port, Chattogram seaport, and Dhaka airport, with the active participation of all relevant stakeholders. In line with the globally accepted methodology developed by the WCO, that study reviewed import clearance processes and measured the actual time required for the release of goods across in four key commodity sectors : (i) food items, (ii) pharmaceuticals raw materials, (iii) garments raw materials, and (iv) capital machinery.

2.5 The findings of the study revealed that the average time required to complete the import clearance process at Benapole is approximately 11 days. In contrast, the corresponding time for Chattogram and Dhaka is approximately 12 days and 8 days, respectively. However, a significant portion of the overall clearance time (72%-78%) is consumed by importers and brokers in obtaining and submitting import related documents from various regulatory agencies and other relevant facilitating stakeholders, including cargo handling logistics providers, that highlights the urgent need for automation, particularly in the pre-customs declaration stage. A detailed analysis of Chattogram port data further reveals that the implementation of pre-arrival processing (PAP) can significantly reduce clearance time. By utilizing PAP, importers can potentially decrease the overall release time by 57%.





2.6 As a trade facilitation measure, NBR has been implementing Bangladesh Single Window (BSW) through National Single Window (NSW) project under World Bank BRCP1 program. This initiative aims to significantly reduce costs and time associated with customs clearance processes by harnessing technology as the system will enable importers and exporters to submit their applications for all types of certificates, licenses, and permits (CLPs) required for customs clearance through a single electronic gateway. This streamlined approach eliminates the need to submit the same information multiple times to different Certificate, License, and Permit Issuing Authorities (CLPIAs), and also ensure paperless trade. By 2026, the project is expected to integrate 19 CLPIAs, including BSTI, CCI&E, Plant Quarantine, Livestock and Fisheries, EPB, DGDA, Atomic Energy Commission, BGMEA, and others governments/ trade agencies along with their 100+ CLPs, onto this unified platform, and is anticipated to optimize trade facilitation management.

### 3. Objectives of the Study:

3.1 The study will help to measure the impact and progress of ongoing customs modernization and trade facilitation initiatives undertaken by the customs administration over the past few years.

3.2 Specific objectives of Time Release (TRS) are to:

- Determine the average time taken, along with average time taken in each step, to release goods from arrival, and/or submission of cargo declaration, to physical release after all regulatory agencies and port obligations have been met.
- Analyze the average time for goods requiring intervention from other regulatory agencies or other entities for customs clearance
- Identify bottlenecks and redundant steps in existing processes that hinder the release of goods, information flow, document processing, and financial transactions.
- Assess port performance by comparing average clearance times for the same goods across different modes of transport (air, land, and sea).
- Identify strategies to enhance coordinated border management by engaging all stakeholders involved in the goods release process.
- Evaluate progress made in the clearance process of four specific commodities/sectors since the baseline survey in TRS 2022. Furthermore, assess the impact of NSW system on these sectors, provided the system is operational for these sectors.
- Assess the implementation progress of recommendations made in TRS 2022.
- Develop potential corrective actions and recommendations to optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of the clearance process.
- Raise awareness among stakeholders about release/process times and encourage expedited actions to reduce average release times.





#### 4. Scope of Service:

4.1 The firm will, in line with the WCO TRS guidelines, measure the average release time across various import clearance processes at the following locations:

- Chittagong Seaport
- Benapole Land Port
- Dhaka Airport

4.2 TRS will be conducted on specific import and export commodities. In case of import TRS will be conducted on four key commodity sectors: (i) food items, (ii) pharmaceuticals raw materials, (iii) garments raw materials, and (iv) capital machinery. On the other hand, TRS will be conducted on two key commodity sectors: (i) Green vegetables and (ii) Apparels.

4.3 The firm will calculate the average time taken for each step in the clearance process, which ranges from arrival, and/or cargo declaration, to clearance of goods (e.g., examination, assessment, unstuffing, obtaining permits/certificates/licenses, chemical testing etc.).

4.4 The firm will assess the current clearance process of four specific commodities under the TRS 2022 baseline study, identifying any progress made in clearance times, using WCO tools, since the baseline study as an impact of earlier TRS recommendations.

4.5 The firm will evaluate the implementation status of overall recommendations outlined in TRS 2022 baseline study.

4.6 In the process of the study, the firm will assess the impact of the National Single Window (NSW) system on the clearance process of the four commodities studied in 2022, with a specific focus on obtaining regulatory certificates, licenses, and permits through the NSW system – should the NSW be operationalized during the period of this study.

4.7 The firm will propose remedial measures, identify redundant steps, to expedite goods release and introduce practical policies, such as service standards or client charters, for Customs and other relevant agencies.

4.8 The study will be conducted in three phases:

- **Baseline Study:** To establish a benchmark for measuring the current performance of customs clearance. It provides a starting point for identifying bottlenecks, inefficiencies and areas for improvement with recommendations.
- **Midline Study:** To assess the impact of the interventions implemented after the baseline study. It aims to evaluate the progress made since the baseline study and identify any further areas for improvement.





- **End line - Final Study:** To evaluate overall impact of the interventions implemented after baseline and midline studies, develop a sustainability plan and identify lessons learned.

## 5. Methodology:

**5.1** A standardized questionnaire, aligned with WCO TRS guidelines, will be developed for data collection. A pre-test of the questionnaire will be conducted to assess stakeholder ability to accurately complete and submit it.

**5.2** The firm will conduct multiple stakeholder consultations involving port authorities, civil aviation authorities, importers, customs brokers, freight forwarders, customs staff, other government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders in the clearance process. Participants, especially those who will complete the questionnaire, will receive comprehensive training.

**5.3** The firm will determine effective and efficient data collection methods to enable accurate time assessment of the release cycle. This may include data extraction from automated systems such as ASYCUDA World where time stamps delineate Customs release events. In instances where automated systems do not record time for events within the release continuum (e.g., consignment is referred to another regulatory agency for processing, port authority calculates tariffs for services rendered, etc.) alternate data capture methods will be established.

**5.4** Probability Proportion to Size (PPS) sampling procedures will be used to determine the number of declarations for each selected Border Clearing Point (BCP). The sample size of each selected station will depend on the total number of declarations administered in a period of specific days.

**5.5** At least 3 (three) validation workshops in different cities, after the baseline survey and 2 (two) more after the midline and final studies, must be organized along with dissemination events. Venues will be finalized in consultation with PIU.

## 6. Deliverables and Timeframe:

No.	Task	Delivery Period
1	Inception Report submission for baseline study	Within 2 <sup>nd</sup> weeks of on board
2	Finalization of scope, commodity, study port and planning after discussion with PIU	Within 1st week of 2 <sup>nd</sup> month
3	Report about the implementation status of recommendations made in TRS 2022	Commence on 2 <sup>nd</sup> month, end on 4 <sup>th</sup> month
4	Conducting baseline study that includes stakeholders' consultation, training, development of questionnaires, data collection, processing, validation workshop, submission of	Commence from 4 <sup>th</sup> month, end on 9 <sup>th</sup> month



No.	Task	Delivery Period
	draft report and final Report for baseline study with recommendations	
5	Midline study Report for the current study	Commence on 20 <sup>th</sup> month, end on 2 <sup>nd</sup> month
6	Midline study Report for the 4 sector/ 4 types of commodities under TRS 2022, and assessing the impact of introduction of NSW system (if NSW is operational for these items)	Commence on 8 <sup>th</sup> month, end on 12 <sup>th</sup> month
7	End line Final Report – overall impact of the interventions implemented after baseline and midline studies, develop a sustainable plan and identify lessons learned	Commence on 32 <sup>nd</sup> month, end on 35 <sup>th</sup> month
8	A press release and presentation on the final report for each phase of study will be delivered promptly after the submission of final report to appropriate forums. The specific communication would be disseminated to all participating and relevant parties for review and inputs. Actual release will be the responsibility of PIU. The TRS final reports for each phase should be made available to the public and should not rank trade stakeholders or countries on their performance. The press release may follow the format outlined in Appendix 7 of the WCO Guidance.	-

**Notes:**

- The firm, maintaining the above time period for the baseline survey, will detail specific deadlines for all key tasks in their inception report. These tasks will include, but not be limited to; Stakeholder consultations, customs and other agencies training, questionnaire development, data collection, draft report, validation workshop, final report and presentation. Additionally, the inception report will also specify deadlines for key tasks under Midline survey of the current TRS and the End line survey, while maintaining the overall time period as stated above.
- Scope of work, timelines, deliverables may be adjusted based on the specific needs and requirements of PIU and upon prior discussion with PIU
- The consultancy firm will be required to provide regular progress updates and adhere to the agreed-upon timelines.





## 7. Key Expertise and Resource Planning:

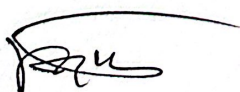
The proposed services under this Terms of Reference shall be carried out by a Firm with adequate experience and knowledge. The firm should prioritize the engagement of local expert having local practical experience, where practicable. The Firm should have significant experience and competence to carry out all activities referred to within this document, as described in the table below:

Key and Non-key Professionals	Preferred Experience & Qualifications
<b>KEY PROFESSIONALS</b>	
<b>Team Leader</b>  01 person 36 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bachelor's degree from a recognized university in International Business/ Trade/ Customs/ Finance/ Management discipline or 15 years' experience in customs or trade facilitation that demonstrates an acceptable level of skills and expertise.</li><li>• At least 10 years of international experience as Project Manager/Team Leader in projects of trade facilitation/similar nature.</li><li>• Hands-on experience in conduction national level survey on trade/customs etc.</li><li>• Knowledge of issues facing Bangladesh related to trade facilitation and cross-border management preferred.</li><li>• Experience working on procedures and policies of Cross-Border Regulatory organizations and other primary and ancillary organizations related to cross border trade in Bangladesh and South Asia (i.e., BBIN) is preferable.</li><li>• Knowledge of processes and automated systems of Customs and other trade related agencies is preferred, including ASYCUDA World and operationalized National Single Window solutions.</li><li>• Expertise in the WCO TRS methodology is preferred.</li><li>• Strong analytical and problem-solving skills.</li><li>• Excellent communication and report-writing skills.</li><li>• Excellent written and spoken English.</li></ul>
<b>Customs Process Specialist-01</b>  01 person 36 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bachelor's degree from a recognized university in International Business/ Trade/ Customs/ Finance/ Management/Economics and related discipline, or experience on 12 years of customs procedures and trade facilitation.</li><li>• Proven experience in conducting Time Release Studies, preferably in accordance with WCO or other international standards.</li></ul>





Key and Non-key Professionals	Preferred Experience & Qualifications
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise in the WCO TRS methodology and software.</li> <li>• Strong analytical and problem-solving skills.</li> <li>• Excellent communication and report-writing skills.</li> <li>• Ability to analyze complex data and draw meaningful insights.</li> <li>• Knowledge of Bangladesh customs clearance and or other South Asia Customs (i.e., BBIN) agencies is preferred.</li> <li>• Excellent written and spoken English.</li> </ul>
<b>NON-KEY PROFESSIONALS</b>	
<b>Data Analyst</b>  <b>01 person</b> <b>12 months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor's degree in Computer Science or any other related discipline from a recognized university.</li> <li>• Minimum 5 years of experience in handling data, structuring, analyzing, writing, tables, drawing drafts and diagrams, charts.</li> <li>• Knowledge of Customs procedures, agriculture trade, organizational matters and administrative structures, statistics, and computers/computer science.</li> <li>• Knowledge of TRS Software.</li> <li>• Experience in perform statistical analyses of data collected in large scale study will be preferred.</li> <li>• Knowledge of Bangladesh customs clearance and or other South Asia Customs (i.e., BBIN) agencies is preferred.</li> <li>• Excellent written and spoken English.</li> </ul>
<b>Customs Process Specialist-02</b>  <b>01 person</b> <b>12 months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor's degree from a recognized university in International Business / Trade / Customs/ Finance/ Management related discipline or experience or 12 years of customs procedures, and trade facilitation.</li> <li>• Strong analytical and problem-solving skills.</li> <li>• Excellent communication and report-writing skills.</li> <li>• Ability to analyze complex data and draw meaningful insights.</li> <li>• Knowledge of Bangladesh customs clearance and or other South Asia Customs (i.e., BBIN) agencies is preferred.</li> <li>• Excellent written and spoken English.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication Specialist</b>  <b>01 person</b> <b>36 months</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor's degree in business communications, or Mass Communications, or any other relevant discipline from a recognized university.</li> <li>• At least 5 years of experience in Communications, content development, Creative Writing and Public Relations.</li> </ul>

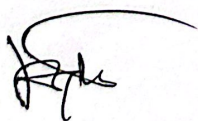




Key and Non-key Professionals	Preferred Experience & Qualifications
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive experience in arranging and coordinating survey interviews with relevant public and private sector stakeholders.</li> <li>• Experience designing comprehensive questionnaires to support data collection amongst complex, multi stakeholder environments, especially involving a cross-border trade and Customs clearance continuum.</li> <li>• Hands-on experience in graphic design, illustration, and creative publications.</li> <li>• Proficiency in both Bangla and English.</li> </ul>
<b>Enumerator (Field Surveyor)*</b> <b>45 persons</b> <b>5 Days Each Person</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bachelor's degree from a recognized university that demonstrates an acceptable level of competence or combination of education and appropriate work experience – at least 5 years working in a cross-border trade related function.</li> <li>• Experience working directly as enumerator (field level surveyor) and or local stakeholders who have a generally informed and unbiased view of handoff processes at the ports will be preferred.</li> <li>• Experience to prepare initial outcomes from the primary data to facilitate Data Analyst.</li> </ul>

#### 8. Prerequisites for Outputs:

- The project will designate a contact person to support the firm in achieving the deliverables described herein. Local Working Groups (LWG) at every study ports have to be formed by PIU/NBR to facilitate the firm for conducting study. NBR will form a Central Working Group (CWG) to monitor the activities of TRS.
- The firm will collaborate closely with the PD/PIU contact points and LWGs to plan the study, select sectors/commodities and study ports, develop training and stakeholder consultation programs, design sampling methodologies and questionnaires/data forms, test procedures etc.
- The contact person/LWG will provide support to have relevant data, where applicable, for the study and analysis.
- The firm will be required to furnish their own software, hardware, and ICT support to fulfill the project requirements.
- The firm will engage suitable number of enumerators for the period required to ensure timely completion of the service, taking into account its scale and the designated deadlines.





**9. Reporting:**

The Consultant shall report directly to the NBR PIU and assigned focal person for Time Release Study survey.

**10. Location of Services:**

The service will be carried out in Dhaka along with different port cities of Bangladesh.

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