

# The impact of ICT on Taxation: the case of Large Taxpayer Department of Tanzania Revenue Authority

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## Abstract

This article examines how the use of ICT has modernized Tax administration procedures and improved revenue collection at Large Taxpayer Department of Tanzania Revenue Authority. ICT was introduced into the department in 2001 for facilitating maintenance and timely access of records and fast processing of return so as to remove postal delays; minimize operational costs; curb cheating and plug revenue loss (TRA 2010e). Large Taxpayers and Large Taxpayer Department staff (100%) agree that, since 2001 time for processing return and responding to queries have been reasonably shortened (Victor–Nyambo 2009). TRA reports reveal that, actual revenue collection increased from TZS. 204,397.5 Millions in 2001/02 to TZS. 1,605,751.2 Millions in 2008/09 while revenue contribution share rose to 41% in 2008/09 from 23% in 2001/02. Although other factors in the economy like; increased internal trade, reduced importation and more reliance to home products may cause the increase, if there is no good tax administration, revenue will not be reflected in collections. The fact that revenue has increased proves that, ICT use enhance better tax administration.

**Keywords:** Taxation, Tanzania Revenue Authority, ICT, Large Taxpayer Department, Computerised Tax administration system

## 1. Introduction

In the Taxation as commonly used can be defined as the imposition by government of compulsory contributions or levies on the citizens, property, income, commodities, transactions and so forth, for the purpose of raising revenue for government expenditure. The major reasons for united republic of Tanzania to impose tax includes; to raise money for the purpose of financing social services like health, defense, law and order, education and infrastructure; second, to raise share of the national cake going to the poor; to encourage investment; and to defend local market on domestic products through heavy taxes on unnecessary imports (TRA 2012).

The tax system in Tanzania is built on three important components; namely tax policy, tax law and tax administration. Tax policy is a statement of what the government wants to accomplish through the use of taxation. Tax may be levied for the purpose of raising revenue for government expenditure. This is one of the common purposes of tax, and is well understood by almost everyone. However there are many other tax policy objectives such as income distribution, economic stabilization, and promotion of investment. Tax administration incorporates a set of activities in ensuring that tax is levied based on relevant tax laws and sanctions applied where appropriate. It comprises three interrelated functions, namely; identification of tax liabilities based on existing tax legislation, assessment of taxes to determine if the taxes actually paid are smaller or larger than tax liability and the collection, prosecution, and penalty activities that impose sanctions on tax evaders and ensures that taxes and penalties due from taxpayers are actually paid (TRA 2012).

The tax system in Tanzania observes fundamental principles of taxation of equity, simplicity, economy, and certainty. According to Mpongoliana (2000), equity is the ability of tax system to treat equal tax payers equally, and unequal tax payers proportionately unequally, which means people with the same amount of income pay the same amount of tax. Simplicity implies that the tax system should be simple to ascertain and measure, the tax laws should be simple to be understood by both the tax payers and the administrators and the administration procedure should be simple for the taxpayers to comply and for the administrators to supervise. Economy is the ability of the tax system to consider what it will cost to collect the tax so that the administration of the tax system becomes least expensive in terms of both manpower and material.

Furthermore the tax system in Tanzania is based on definitive advance forecast of revenue collection for the purpose of yielding expected revenue. This becomes important because a fundamental feature of any tax is

that it is non-voluntary. In fact, according to the “free rider” principle, rational taxpayers should be expected to pay no taxes whatsoever unless tax collections are properly enforced. This means that taxpayers will only “voluntarily” pay their outstanding tax liability when there is a realistic (and proportional) threat in place for failure to pay one’s taxes (URT 2006).

## 2. Tax administration in Tanzania

Tanzania has a three-tier tax administration structure, namely; Central Government tax administration, Tax administration in Zanzibar, and Local Governments tax administration. The Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) administers the Central Government taxes, Zanzibar Revenue Board administers domestic consumption taxes in Zanzibar, and Local Authorities administer the various local imposed taxes. Central Government taxes are the major revenue earner for the Government, it accounts for 90% of domestic revenue (TRA 2006).

Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) is an autonomous revenue agency established by the government in 1995 and became operational in July 1996. It is charged with assessment, collection and accounting of all revenues due under Tanzania's tax laws, like; the Income Tax Act 2004 and the East African Customs Management Act 2005. TRA is also charged with advising the Government on changes necessary to those laws and to fiscal policies. TRA has a total of 3,350 staff of whom 1,227 (37%) works at the head office in Dar es Salaam and 2,123 (63%) works in local office network (ITD 2010). The local office network facilitates the presence of TRA in all 23 administrative regions of Tanzania mainland and in Zanzibar. Its annual operations are financed via the general government budget through the annual Parliamentary budget appropriation process (Fjeldstad & Heggstad 2011).

Tanzania Revenue Authority has four revenue departments, namely; Tax Investigation Department, Large Taxpayers Department (LTD), Domestic Revenue Department (DRD), as well as Customs and Excise Department. Literature reveals that, Large Taxpayers Department (LTD) was created by integration of domestic tax operations and taxpayer segmentation. It was introduced as a directorate of Large Taxpayers on 1st October 2001, and was later on changed to a full department. The most important reasons for introducing Large Taxpayer Department has been “to provide consistent and quality service to large taxpayers, to secure revenue, to improve audit programs, to improve collections and management of tax debts, and also to act as models or pilots for testing new processes, procedures, structures and systems” (TRA 2012).

The, Domestic Revenue Department (DRD) became operational since 2005 after the integration of the former Value Added Tax (VAT) Department and the Income Tax Departments. Its tasks are similar to the Large Taxpayer Department except that it has a broader target group for taxation. The Tax Investigation Department started out as a Tax Audit and Investigations in 1996, but after the Large Taxpayer Department was established its core activity was limited to counteract fraud and other forms of fiscal evasion. The Customs and Excise Department has existed in various forms since 1977 when it was under management of the East African Community. After establishment of TRA in 1996, the Customs Department became an integrated part of the revenue authority. The department collects import duties, excises and VAT on imports, and Fuel Levy. Each of TRA’s revenue functions like; domestic revenue, large taxpayers, customs and excise as well as tax investigations are headed by a Commissioner. Its support functions such as internal audit, legal services, taxpayer services and education, ICT, finance and human resources and administration are headed by Directors (Fjeldstad & Heggstad 2011).

## 3. ICT use for Tax administration in Tanzania

Historically, the use of ICT in Tanzania can be traced back to 1965 when the first computer (an ICT 1500) was installed at the Ministry of Finance. During that period installation was totally dependent on foreign experts. In some cases these experts were not adequately qualified, and applications tended not to be accurately documented and ran only when foreign experts were around. These experts left the country mainly due to political atmosphere which was created by both the Arusha Declaration and nationalization policies in late 1960’s. When computer applications stopped functioning, the government incurred a heavy financial loss and was highly criticized by members of Parliament and the general public. As a result in 1974 the government banned importation of computers and their accessories into Tanzania (Mgaya 1994). However, the ban covered a period of one decade and was lifted in 1984 (Hare 2007).

After the ban was lifted, both private and public institutions embarked on application of ICT. Different scholars provide alternative views as to why private and public institutions rushed into application of ICT. Katundu (1998) points out the speedy generation, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information, which is almost impossible through manual means. Abdallah (2004) denotes the enormous amount of information which can be stored in

stand-alone computer storage devices or published online and made accessible to intended users. According to him, ICT provides alternative formats to hardcopy printouts of information which implies easy, faster, and cheaper information storage. Hill (1999:81) argues that, ICT expands the extent to which one can communicate information in terms of the frequency, amount of information to be communicated and distance over which communication occurs.

Furthermore, different literatures points out ICT use to be extremely beneficial; Mugisha, (2001) attests that, the use of ICT enhances timely access to accurate and relevant information, which is a prerequisite for good planning, programming, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation which forms the key component in development; Suluo, (2003) shows that, ICT use has lead to high level organizational growth; and yet Crede, (1998) reveals two facts, first; ICT has the capacity to increase productivity and create more cost effective output with the same or less inputs and second; Development of ICT applications for business use alter the approach organizations function and eventually, improve their services as well as products. What these scholars are trying to emphasize is that; the spread of ICT use in various sectors brings new opportunities for economic growth and development. New organization design, new markets, new products and improved services are been created which brings with them new sources of revenue.

Tanzania Revenue Authority was not left out in a rush toward ICT use; as pointed out earlier, it created a Directorate of Information and Communication Technology (ICTD) which has the responsibility of embracing ICT usage in all tax operations. Currently, the revenue departments are supported by ICT systems with the most central being the Integrated Tax Administration System (ITAX), Taxpayer Identification System (TIN), Computerized Motor Vehicle Registration System (CMVRS), Customs Administration System (ASYCUDA++) and Computerized Drivers' License System (CDLS). Other support systems for the TRA departments are Integrated Financial Management System (EPICOR), Integrated Payroll, Human Resources System (PEODESY), TRA Messaging System (e- Mail) and other legacy applications (TRA 2010e).

In line with Bird & Zloty findings, application of Information and Communication Technology has affected both the design and administration of tax system in Tanzania. There are no more rooms full of clerks posting entries by hand in large ledger books as it used to be; instead there is a widespread use of computers to administer tax. Tanzania Revenue Authority have advanced to an extent of using electronic payments like TISS and EFT, electronic filling of return, as well as portals and websites. To facilitate connectivity to regional and district offices TRA has some of its networks provided by mobile phone companies. These are not only cheaper than the land-based telephone systems, but also convenient as they only require transmitters and booster stations (Bird & Zloty 2008)

By virtue of using ICT, TRA recorded remarkable achievements. For example; iTAX contributed to improved taxation by speeding up administrative processes, timely monitoring of taxpayers and their penalties and its interests, and increase of revenue and income. In 1996, TRA used to collect US\$ 25 million per month but the collection rose to US\$300 million per month in 2007. iTaX also enhanced efficiency, data security and even transparency of processes, release of staff from unproductive work, and possibility of electronic transfer and exchange of data with government and nongovernmental institutions (e-government). Through iTAX, there is a promotion of equity, communication with taxpayers, preventive impact on corruption and bribery, and impediment on tax avoidance and tax evasion. So, iTaX contributes to fair, effective and efficient taxation and increase on revenue, as well as supporting TRA's vision of becoming a modern tax administration (Shekidele 2007).

#### **4. Large Taxpayer Department and the use of ICT**

To gain an in-depth understanding of the department and its status in terms of ICT use, three key areas namely; the rationale of creating Large Taxpayer Department at Tanzania revenue Authority; the rationale of using ICT at Large Taxpayer Department; the availability and accessibility of ICT infrastructure and facilities together with the extent at which LTD staff and taxpayers make use of ICT at the department have been detailed

##### *4.1 Rationale of creating Large Taxpayer Department*

According to ITD, (2010) Revenue patterns in most countries show that a small number of large enterprises account for the majority of tax revenue (60-70% of total tax revenue). Large taxpayers are enterprises which engage in large-scale, complex/specialized, and often global operations. Such enterprises are complex because of being characterized by; (1) multiple operating entities and/or diverse business interests; (2) high

volume of transactions in day-to-day business activities; (3) large number of employees; (4) international dealings, often involving cross-border transactions with related parties; (5) operations in an industry that presents unique tax issues (e.g. banking and insurance); (6) wide spread in geographical terms; (7) dealings in complicated issues involving complex tax law and accounting principles; and (8) complex financing and tax planning arrangements (OECD 2009).

Apart from being complex, from the revenue bodies' perspective, large taxpayers present major tax compliance risks due to various factors including: (1) significant offshore activities; (2) policies and strategies to minimize tax liabilities; (3) large portion of tax assessments result from audit activity of large taxpayers; and (4) growing/significant differences between financial accounting profits and the profits computed for tax purposes. Furthermore, Large taxpayers has a critical role in revenue collection due to size and the range of taxes they are responsible for, including their role as withholding agents for large numbers of employees (OECD 2009). In view of these characteristics, modern revenue administrations set up a Large Taxpayer Office to manage the tax affairs of the large taxpayers. For similar reasons, the Large Taxpayer Department of Tanzania Revenue Authority was created in 2001. The department has 370 (0.08%) large tax payers selected from a total of 487,984 taxpayers in Tanzania (ITD 2010).

#### *4.2 Rationale of using ICT at Large Taxpayer Department*

Due to complexity of large taxpayers, they present a major tax compliance risk to revenue bodies, so considering their critical role in Revenue collection; it is the responsibility of tax administration to be ahead of large tax payers in technology in order to curb cheating (Suluo, 2003). Evidence from Philippines shows that, the use of ICT for tax administration results into increased tax collection as well as modernization of administrative processes. For example, the new IT system in 11 pilot districts/cities revealed a gap of non assessed tax liabilities of 3.2 Million Euro. It also used to take up to four hours to inform a (waiting) tax payer about his tax bill. But with the new IT system, this waiting period was reduced to 3 minutes, including issuing a proper tax or payment receipt (Seelmann, 2011).

A good number of studies show that, the use of ICT is extremely beneficial to Large taxpayer Department. Victor-Nyambo, (2009) findings revealed that, ICT help to maintain consistent record keeping, timely access of such records, fast processing of return which together improved the performance of tax revenue. By reducing the time taken to communicate with taxpayers and providing access to similar institutions around the world where lessons learned can improve the tax regime and tax administration; ICT assist to cut down postal delays and costs as well as plugging revenue loss at the Large Taxpayer Department.

Furthermore, the use of ICT facilitates taxpayers' information to be stored at Large Taxpayer Department and quickly retrieve it from computer systems whenever needed as evidence of tax paid, return filed, or otherwise. This serves to improve taxpayer compliance knowing that the department has correct and up to date records of business/ tax liabilities, correspondences and payments. Also, the use of ICT facilitates easy monitoring and evaluation, good planning and quick processing and accurate taxpayer return of income assessment. In this regard for example; instead of submitting tax return on income manually through hard copy, one can submit it via ICT electronic filling followed by computer processing. This not only will speed up the process but will economize the department's operational costs by sharing the costs with the taxpayer who will use own resources to key the information in the computer and send it via internet paid by him/her.

#### *4.3 Availability and use of ICT at Large Taxpayers Department*

Based on responses from staff, Large taxpayers Department is in possession of necessary ICT infrastructure and facilities which are accessible to both staff and taxpayers. For example; it has computers in good working conditions which are connected to the internet; the computers are also networked via Local Area Network (LAN) and Wide Area Network (WAN); necessary software like Ms-Word & spread sheet applications as well as ITAX/TIN system/database are installed; and storage devices like flash disk are available to staff as shown by Table 1 below

Table 1. Availability of ICT infrastructure / facilities at Large Taxpayer Department

Questions set to ascertain availability of ICT infrastructure / facilities	LTD staff Response	
	Yes	No
Are Computers present within each LTD office?	100%	0%
Are these Computers accessible to LTD staff?	100%	0%
Are these computers connected to the Internet?	94.4%	5.6%
Are these Computers networked via LAN and WAN Intranet?	100%	0%
Are ITAX/TIN system/database installed to these computers?	100%	0%
Word & spread sheet applications installed to these computers?	100%	0%
Are Flash disk and other storage devices available for LTD staff?	77.8%	22.2%

Source: Victor-Nyambo (2009)

The significance of using ICT at large taxpayer department has already been translated into real world situation. According to Victor – Nyambo, (2009) the availability of ICT infrastructure and facilities has enabled the Large Taxpayer Department to computerize its revenue systems into an integrated tax administration system (iTAX); it has also established electronic communications with banks; it uses internet/ email correspondences to communicate with taxpayers and tax consultants on tax issues (such as assessment, penalty notices, refund) and so forth as shown by table 2 below.

Table 2. Application of ICT at Large Taxpayer Department

Statement set to ascertain the Use of ICT	LTD Staff Response	
	Agree	Disagree
Staff at LTD use e-mails for official communications	88.3%	11.7%
LTD staff use Word and spread sheet for official activities	94.4%	5.6%
Staff at LTD use Network computers to communicate with taxpayers	72.2%	27.8%
Staff at LTD uses ITAX/TIN system/database for official duties	77.8%	22.2%
Staff use Flash/storage devices as information source from taxpayers	77.8%	22.2%

Source: Victor-Nyambo (2009)

Further findings reveal that, 100% of Large Taxpayers and Tax consultants (firms) have computers in their offices which they use for their day to day operations. They also have internet, which they use to communicate with other institutions TRA being one of them. Large Taxpayers & consultants have intranet which they use for internal communications and a large proportion of them (98.4%) use ITAX/TIN application system/database

### 5. Impacts of ICT use to Large Taxpayer Department

Introduction of ICT has changed the way tax administration used to be handled at Large Taxpayer Department. ICT is known for its capability in speeding up processing time in business. Victor – Nyambo (2009) tested these conceptions via analyzing responses from both staff and taxpayers at the department. Her findings revealed that, 88.8% of staff agree that introduction of ICT at the LTD have shortened the lengthy

cumbersome manual procedures. They were of the opinion that preparation of tax assessment would require a lot of work if they were done manually and that, ICT usage has minimized errors in return processing and in assessment. Also, 100% of Large Taxpayers agree that processing time and responding to taxpayers queries have been reasonably shortened. As a result, 100% of Taxpayer and Tax consultants (firms) prepare tax return using computer and 41.7% submit them via Internet.

On the other hand, Intranet is currently used by businesses as a tool to enable internal communication at minimum costs. Large Taxpayer Department is also struggling to minimize operational costs and maximize revenue collection. Although only 77.8% of staff agreed to have intranet connection in their computers; follow up interview revealed that all computers at Large Taxpayer Department are connected through Local Area Network. Further investigation revealed that, 72.2% of staff communicates with taxpayers and tax consultants via ICT network computers and 61.1% of them uses Intranet to communicate with fellow staff at the department

Furthermore, the mode of payment at Tanzania Revenue Authority in general and at Large Taxpayer Department in particular has reasonably changed. No one is paying directly using cash, 91.7% of taxpayers and consultants pay through Tanzania Interbank Settlement System TISS, and the remaining 8.3% pay through Electronic Fund Transfer EFT. 83.3% of both staff and taxpayers agreed that, the use of ICT provide them with accurate and timely information needed for decision making. Appropriate decision making is a very useful ingredient in improving performance and efficiency in tax administration as was agreed by 94.4% of respondents. The improved performance was presumed to improve revenue collections as agreed by 77.8% of respondents. To validate such presumptions revenue collection performances and revenue contribution share of Large Taxpayer Department was analyzed.

#### *5.1 Revenue collection performances of Large Taxpayer Department*

As pointed out earlier, ICT provides access to similar institutions around the world where lessons learned can improve the tax regime and tax administration at the Department. Equally important is that, ICT help to maintain consistent record keeping; timely access of such records, fast processing of return which together cut down postal delays and costs; curb cheating as well as plugging revenue loss. That is to say, the use of ICT at Large Taxpayer Department proves to be a lethal tool in meeting and surpassing the Departmental set revenue targets. The question of how efficient the department was performing its functions (in terms of revenue collection) was gained by analyzing Tax revenue reports from Tanzania Revenue Authority. The statistical data revealed that, with the exception of one year, the department was meeting and surpassing the set revenue targets. This means, since the introduction of ICT, the revenue collection performance was in most cases more than 100% as shown by table 3 below.

Table 3. Revenue collection performances of Large Taxpayer Department (TZS Millions)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Performance (%)</b>
2001 - 2002	204,397.5	204,397.5	100.0
2002 - 2003	269,837.8	311,948.2	115.6
2003 - 2004	344,877.2	370,636.9	107.5
2004 - 2005	536,780.8	537,122.9	100.1
2005 - 2006	698,112.4	731,036.2	104.7
2006 - 2007	923,444.6	1,042,115.1	112.9
2007 - 2008	1,255,701.5	1,324,949.7	106.0
2008 - 2009	1,848,699.3	1,605,751.2	88.0

Source: Tanzania Revenue Authority, Tax revenue reports

Based on Tanzania Revenue Authority reports, the use of ICT did not only facilitate meeting and surpassing revenue collection targets, but it also enhanced an increase in actual revenue collection from TZS. 204,397.5 Millions in 2001/02 to TZS. 1,605,751.2 Millions in 2008/09 as shown by figure 1 below

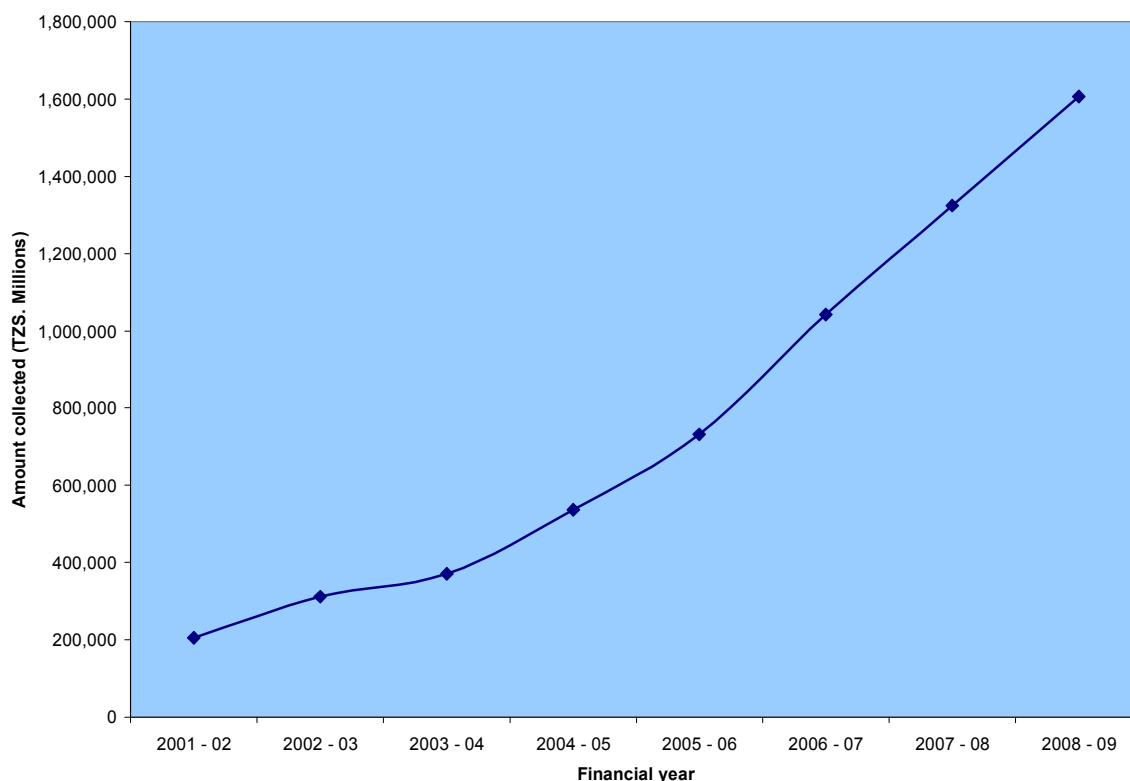


Figure 1: Actual Revenue Collection from Large Taxpayer Department

### 5.2 Revenue contribution share of Large Taxpayer Department

The share of revenue contribution of Large Taxpayer Department kept increasing since 2001. For example; Tax revenue reports from Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA) reveals that, the revenue contribution share from Large Tax payer Department LTD stood at 23% in financial year 2001 / 02 and increased to 41% in financial year 2008 / 09. Some years recorded a very high percentage increase in revenue contribution while others recorded a mild or low percentage increase. For example; a remarkable increase of revenue contribution of 6% from 27% to 33% in 2003 / 04 as opposed to a 1% increase from 40% to 41% in 2008 / 09. An increase of revenue contribution of 6% a remarkable increase for a span of only one year and could have been attributed by increased efficiency and improved performance which could be traced to the use of ICT. From statistics provided by the reports, the cumulative increase of revenue contribution of Large Taxpayer is 18%. This further could have been due to automation of operations. Table 4 below presents; revenue contribution share; increase in revenue contribution share as well as cumulative increase in revenue contribution share of Large Taxpayer Department for financial years 2001 / 02 to 2008 / 09.

Table 4. Revenue contribution share of Large Taxpayer Department (2002 – 2009)

Financial Year	Revenue contribution share	Increase in Revenue contribution share	Cumulative increase in Revenue Contribution share
2001 - 2002	23%	-	-
2003 - 2004	27%	4%	4%
2004 - 2005	33%	6%	10%
2005 - 2006	37%	4%	14%
2007 - 2008	40%	3%	17%
2008 - 2009	41%	1%	18%

Source: Tanzania Revenue Authority, Tax revenue reports

Based on statistics presented by table 4 above, revenue contribution share of respective financial years was used to plot a scatter diagram, on which the linear trend line was added so as to establish the trend of revenue contribution share. The resulting trend line shows that, there is a steady increase of revenue contribution share since the introduction of ICT use at Large Taxpayer Department as shown by Figure 2

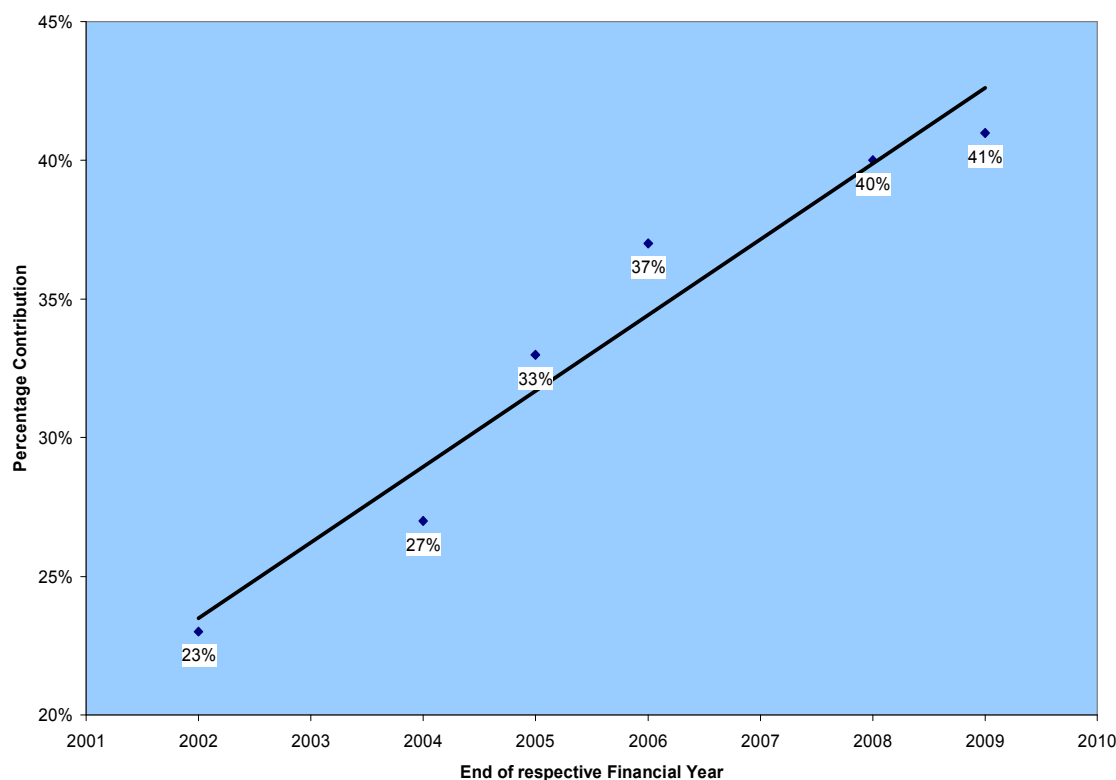


Figure 2: Trend of Revenue contribution share from Large Taxpayer Department

### 6. Conclusion

Taxation can be defined as the imposition by government of compulsory contributions or levies on the citizens, property, income, commodities, transactions and so forth, for the purpose of raising revenue for government expenditure. The tax system in Tanzania is based on definitive advance forecast of revenue collection for the purpose of yielding expected revenue. According to the “free rider” principle, rational



taxpayers should be expected to pay no taxes whatsoever unless tax collections are properly enforced. To this end Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA); an autonomous revenue agency was established by the government in 1995 and became operational in July 1996 and was charged with assessment, collection and accounting of all revenues due under Tanzania's tax laws.

Large Taxpayer Department of Tanzania Revenue Authority, embarked on the use of ICT in 2001. The availability of ICT infrastructure and facilities at Large Taxpayer Department is contrary to scholarly observation of ICT use limitations in developing countries, LTD has proved to be well equipped with ICT and so are the Taxpayers and tax consultants (firms). Application of ICT has affected both the design and administration of tax system in Tanzania. There are no more rooms full of clerks posting entries by hand in large ledger books as it used to be; instead there is a widespread use of computers to administer tax. The impacts of ICT use can be seen in a number of ways, including; reduced administrative and collection costs; decreased need for personnel; time savings for taxpayers due to fast processing; transparency in assessment, collection, and related processes; reduced tax compliance costs; reduced communication costs; and timely access to information which results into plugging all revenue loss and improve efficiency and performance in revenue collections.

Based on TRA reports the actual revenue collection increased from TZS. 204,397.5 Millions in 2001/02 to TZS. 1,605,751.2 Millions in 2008/09 while revenue contribution share rose to 41% in 2008/09 from 23% in 2001/02. Although other factors in the economy like; increased internal trade, reduced importation and more reliance to home products may have cause the increase in revenue collection; it is worth to remember that, no matter how much the economy has prospered if there is no good tax administration the revenue will only disappear in greedy stomachs and will not be reflected in collections. The fact that revenue has increased proved better administration was in place and this is only possible with the use of ICT.

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### Author Biography

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