

CARE's Rating Methodology For Banks

CARE's ratings are an opinion on the relative ability and willingness of an issuer to make timely payments on the specific debt obligations over the life of the instrument. CARE has developed a comprehensive methodology for credit rating of debt instruments issued by banks. Some of the factors considered in CARE's rating analysis are described below:

QUANTITATIVE FACTORS

The starting point in reaching a rating decision is a detailed review of key measures of financial performance and stability:

a) Capital Adequacy

Capital Adequacy is a measure of the degree to which the bank's capital is available to absorb possible losses. It also indicates the ability of the bank to undertake additional business. CARE examines the conformity of the bank to the regulatory guidelines on capital adequacy ratio. Higher proportion of Tier I (core capital) in the overall capital is viewed favourably. Further, CARE works out the 'stressed capital adequacy' on the basis of expected erosion of capital arising as a result of factors such as:

- Additional provisioning for NPAs
- Possible losses from restructured assets
- Possible losses from other weak assets

b) Asset Quality

Asset Quality review begins with the examination of the bank's credit risk management framework. The overall asset quality is assessed by evaluating the sector by sector loan and guarantee exposures. The bank's experience of loan losses and write off/provisions are studied carefully. The percentage of assets classified into standard, substandard, doubtful or loss and the

track record of recoveries of the bank is examined closely. The portfolio diversification and exposure to troubled industries/areas is evaluated to arrive at the level of weak assets. Restructured assets in banks total exposure are also taken into account to arrive at the potential NPAs of the bank.

c) Resources

Resource base of the bank is analyzed in terms of cost and composition. Deposits form the core funding source of a bank. Proportion of low cost deposits in total deposits and retail-wholesale deposit mix is examined. Deposit growth rates and their rollover rates are also analyzed. Average as well as incremental cost of funds is examined in the context of prevailing interest rate regime. Ability of the bank to raise additional resources at competitive rates is examined critically.

d) Liquidity

Lack of liquidity can lead to a bank's failure, while, strong liquidity can help even an otherwise weak institution to remain adequately funded during difficult times. CARE evaluates the internal and external sources of funds to meet the bank's requirements. The liquidity risk is evaluated by examining the assets liabilities maturity (ALM) profile, deposit renewal rates, proportion of liquid assets to total assets and the degree to which core assets (those that are relatively illiquid) are funded by core liabilities. The short term external funding sources in the form of refinance facilities from RBI and the inter-bank borrowing limits available along with CRR and SLR investments are important sources of reserve liquidity.

e) Earnings Quality

CARE analyzes the composition of income of the bank by segregating it into those generated from fee based and fund based activities. Core earnings are also identified by excluding non-recurring income from total income. Each business area that contributes to the core earnings is assessed for risks as well as for its earning prospects and growth rate.

Profitable operations are essential for banks to operate as an ongoing concern. Yield on business assets as also on investments are viewed in conjunction with cost of funds to arrive at the spreads earned by the bank. Operating efficiency is also examined in terms of expense ratios. Quality of

bank's earnings is also influenced by the level of interest rate and foreign exchange rate risks that the bank is exposed to.

Finally, the overall profitability is reviewed in terms of return on assets and return on shareholders funds.

Evaluation of quantitative factors is done, not only of the absolute numbers and ratios, but their volatility and trends as well. The attempt is to determine core, recurring measures of performance. CARE also compares the bank's performance on each of the above discussed parameters with its peers. Detailed inter-bank analysis is done to determine the relative strengths and weaknesses of the bank in its present operating environment and any impact on it, in future.

QUALITATIVE FACTORS

Some of the qualitative factors that are deemed critical in the rating process are:

a) Ownership

An assessment of ownership pattern and shareholder support in a crisis is significant. In case of public sector banks, the willingness of the government to support the bank is an important consideration.

b) Management quality

The composition of the board, frequency of change of CEO and the organisational structure of the bank are considered. The bank's strategic objectives and initiatives in the context of resources available, its ability to identify opportunities and track record in managing stress situations are taken as indicators of managerial competence. The adequacy of the information systems used by the management is evaluated in terms of quality and timeliness of the information made available to bank managers. The extent of frauds committed in the bank is taken as an indication of the imperfections of the control systems. CARE focuses on the modern banking practices and systems, degree of computerisation, capabilities of senior management, personnel policies and extent of delegation of powers. The track record of labour relations is also examined.

c) Risk Management

The management stance on risk and the risk management framework is examined. Credit risk management is evaluated by examining the appraisal, monitoring and recovery systems and the prudential lending norms of the bank. The bank's balance sheet is examined from the perspective of interest rate sensitivity and foreign exchange rate risk. Interest rate risk arises due to differing maturity of assets and liabilities and mismatch between the floating and fixed rate assets and liabilities. CARE also assesses the extent to which the bank has assets denominated in one currency with liabilities denominated in another currency. The derivatives and other risk management products used in the past and implication of these deals are also analysed.

d) Compliance with statutory requirements

CARE examines the track record of the bank in complying with SLR/CRR and priority sector lending norms as specified by the RBI.

e) Accounting Quality

Rating relies heavily on audited data. Policies for income recognition, provisioning and valuation of investments are examined. Suitable adjustments to reported figures are made for consistency of evaluation and meaningful interpretation.

f) Size and Market Presence

The fund base and branch network of the bank may have a bearing on the bank's competitive position. While both large and small banks have successfully co-existed in India, in the rapid changing competitive banking environment, the niche strategy of smaller banks against the scale advantages of larger banks would be carefully examined to understand the business model of each bank.

All relevant quantitative and qualitative factors are considered together, as relative weakness in one area of the bank's performance may be more than adequately compensated for by strengths elsewhere. However, the weights assigned to the factors are different for short term ratings and long term ratings. The intention of long term ratings is to look over a business cycle and not adjust ratings frequently for what appear to be short

term performance aberrations. The quality of the management and the competitiveness of the bank are of greater importance in long term rating decisions.

The rating process is ultimately a search for the fundamentals and the probabilities for change in the fundamentals. The assessment of management quality, the bank's operating environment and its role in the nation's financial system are used to interpret current data and to forecast how well the bank is positioned in the future. The final rating decision is made by the Rating Committee after a thorough analysis of the bank's position over the term of the instrument with regard to business fundamentals.

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