

CARE's Rating Methodology for Short Term Instruments

Background

The framework of CARE's rating methodology essentially consists of analyzing the operational and financial characteristics of the issuer. Besides quantitative factors, qualitative aspects like assessment of management capabilities play a very important role in arriving at the rating for an instrument. The relative importance of qualitative and quantitative components of the analysis varies with the type of issuer. Rating determination is a matter of experienced and holistic judgment, based on the relevant quantitative and qualitative factors impacting the credit quality of the issuer.

Rating Criteria for Short Term Instruments

CARE's approach for rating a short term debt instrument is similar to the one followed for assessing credit risk for long term instruments. Though the time horizon of a short term instrument is upto one year, the time horizon for arriving at the rating normally extends beyond this period since the attempt is to arrive at ratings which do not change frequently.

Assessing liquidity and financial flexibility of the issuer gains more prominence while arriving at short term ratings apart from the basic fundamental credit analysis of an issuer.

Liquidity:

Analysing liquidity is crucial for arriving at the short term rating. This involves analyzing the cash flows, working capital management and examining the availability of any unencumbered liquid investments or unutilized lines of credit from banks. Company's cash-flows are examined to assess the liquidity sources for repaying short term debt. The assumptions underlying the cash

flow projections are analysed to make a realistic assessment of short term liquidity. Examination of asset liability maturity profile becomes important for assessing the liquidity position of companies in the financial sector.

Financial flexibility:

Financial flexibility refers to alternative sources of liquidity available to the company as and when required. While low level of leverage provides basic flexibility to raise additional borrowings, alternative sources of liquidity can be:

- a) General line of credit from strong parent or group company;
- b) Strong group profile which could implicitly mean the possibility of group support in times of stress;
- c) Back up lines of credit from banks etc. Short term debt issued in the form of Commercial Paper (CP) is often carved out of the working capital limits of the company thus implicitly creating back-up liquidity facilities. Though this type of arrangement reduces the chances of default in repayment of CP, it does not fully eliminate it. Inability or unwillingness of the bank to restore the limits or shortfall in drawing power could lead to inadequacy of backup liquidity at the time of CP maturity. Extent of utilization of working capital facilities and likely variation in drawing power is hence studied in detail to assess the nature of cushion available.

Implementing large projects usually involves periods of strain on a company's liquidity position. CARE analyses factors like financial closure, stage of the project, draw down schedule of funds and the various milestones of implementation of capital expenditure programme. In this context, flexibility to defer capital expenditure or implement project in phases eases the strain on liquidity of the company and thus provides comfort in terms of financial flexibility.

End Note: Short Term – Long Term Link

Even though weighed by short term factors which may tend to skew the short term rating, the long term credit quality assumes a pervasive role in determining such short term ratings. A

company with a favorable long term fundamentals will find it much easier to fulfill its short term commitments on account of its strong operating cash flows and its ability to leverage upon its strengths to refinance, if required. This implicitly establishes a link between long term and short term ratings. Moreover, many of the short term instruments tend to get 'rolled over', and though short term by design, they virtually behave like long term instruments. In the eventuality of the company not being able to rollover the short term instrument, it may have to leverage its long term rating to get funds in the absence of any other short term funding sources. Thus, a company's long term credit quality cannot be ignored while assigning short term ratings.

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