

Hester Biosciences Limited

January 21, 2022

Ratings

Facilities	Amount (Rs. crore)	Rating ¹	Rating Action
Long Term Bank Facilities	90.00	CARE A-; Stable (Single A Minus; Outlook: Stable)	Assigned
Long Term Bank Facilities	ong Term Bank Facilities 27.76 (Enhanced from 24.21)		Reaffirmed
Long Term / Short Term Bank Facilities	50.00	CARE A-; Stable / CARE A2 (Single A Minus; Outlook: Stable / A Two)	Reaffirmed
Short Term Bank Facilities	0.22	CARE A2 (A Two)	Reaffirmed
Short Term Bank Facilities	0.00	-	Withdrawn
Total Facilities	167.98 (Rs. One Hundred Sixty- Seven Crore and Ninety- Eight Lakhs Only)		

Details of instruments/facilities in Annexure-1

Detailed Rationale & Key Rating Drivers

The ratings assigned to the bank facilities of Hester Biosciences Limited (HBL) continue to derive strength from its experienced promoters, long and established track record of operation with strong position in poultry vaccine industry, diversified product portfolio with increasing focus on large animal division and healthcare products and its wide marketing and distribution network. The ratings also factor its healthy profitability, comfortable capital structure, debt coverage indicators and adequate liquidity. The above ratings strengths are, however, tempered by its modest scale of operation, large working capital requirement due to inherently high inventory holding requirement, presence in regulated vaccine industry and implementation and salability risk associated with its ongoing projects. CARE also takes cognizance of the completion of a greenfield project of Hester Biosciences Africa Limited (HBAL) however, scaleup of its operation and achieving envisaged benefit remains key monitorable.

Rating Sensitivities

Positive Factors – Factors that could lead to positive rating action/upgrade:

- Increase in its scale of operations with total operating income (TOI) higher than Rs.400 crore while continuing to earn healthy profit before interest, lease, depreciation and tax (PBILDT) margin and greater than 25% return on capital employed (ROCE) on a sustained basis.
- Maintaining its overall gearing around 0.50 times along with improvement in its total debt to gross cash accruals (TDGCA) to less than unity on a sustained basis.
- Completion of its on-going debt funded projects within envisaged time and cost parameters along with realizing envisaged benefits thereon.

Negative Factors - Factors that could lead to negative rating action/downgrade:

- Deterioration in its overall gearing beyond 0.75x and/or total debt to PBILDT above 3x
- Further elongation in its operating cycle adversely affecting its cash flow from operations and liquidity
- Significant cost or time over-run in its on-going expansion projects
- Delay in ramp-up in Africa project and /or any regulatory change in Africa having adverse impact on the business and financial risk profile of HBL

Detailed description of the key rating drivers Key Rating Strengths

Wide experience of promoters

HBL was founded by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, CEO and Managing Director, who has an experience of more than three decades in vaccine industry and looks after the overall operations of the company. The promoters are supported by qualified second tier-2 management. Over the years, the company has regularly launched new products as well as expanded its geographical presence in various countries including Africa and Nepal through its subsidiaries mainly HBAL and Hester Biosciences Nepal Private Limited (HBNPL) complementing the Indian operations.

¹Complete definitions of the ratings assigned are available at www.careedge.in and in other CARE Ratings Ltd.'s publications.



Long and established track record of operations

HBL has established track record of more than three decades in manufacturing of poultry vaccine. HBL primarily operates in two segments, i.e. Poultry Healthcare (vaccines and healthcare products) and Animal Healthcare (vaccines and healthcare products). HBL manufactures vaccine and health products mainly for poultry apart from sheep, goat, cattle and buffalo. It is one of India's leading animal healthcare companies with strong market share in poultry vaccine. HBL manufactures vaccines by using fermentation, tissue culture, continuous cell line and chick embryo origin methods. Vaccines at HBL includes viral and bacterial vaccines. HBL is certified by DSIR (Department of Science and Industrial Research), WHO-GMP (World Health Organization-Good Manufacturing Practice), GLP (Good Laboratory Practice), ISO (International Organization for Standardization) 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015 and OHSAS (Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series) 45001. HBL also has diagnostic lab at Anand (Gujarat) and Hyderabad.

Over the years, the company has also expanded its geographical presence with setting up plants in Nepal and Africa under its subsidiaries. HBL has four subsidiaries namely Texas Lifesciences Private Limited (TLPL), Hester Biosciences Kenya Limited (HBKL), Hester Biosciences Nepal Private Limited (HBNPL) and Hetser Biosciences Africa Limited (HBAL). HBNPL is engaged in the manufacturing and supplying of animal vaccines. In HBAL, it had setup plant for manufacturing and supplying of veterinary vaccines and animal health products which had started trial production in Q3FY22 and HBKL is the distribution company for the African market. TLPL, manufactures healthcare products such as pharma formulations, tablets, capsules, powder, oral liquid, etc. for human and veterinary health at Mehsana, Gujarat which are sold in Indian market though HBL. HBL is planning to gradually manufacture most of its health products at TLPL which would help the company in terms of better control over quality and production schedule.

Completion of a greenfield project of HBAL

During FY18, HBL has incorporated wholly owned subsidiary, HBAL in Tanzania. HBAL is setting up a green field project for manufacturing of of veterinary vaccines and animal health products with capacity to produce 1.50 billion doses of vaccines. The project was expected to commission from December 2020. However, the project has delayed due to Covid-19 pandemic. As stated by the management in the press release dated October 28, 2021, first three batch of the PPR vaccine has been produced and commercialization is expected in Q4FY22. Total cost of project was USD 18 million (~Rs.125 crore, gross block addition of ~USD 15 million) which is being funded by HBL in form of equity capital of USD 4 million and USD 14 million from BMGF in form capital grant of USD 4 million and soft loan of USD 10 million (USD 10 million is disbursed as on September 30, 2021 out of sanctioned soft loan of USD 12 million). As on September 30, 2021, HBAL has incurred total cost of Rs.104.11 crore which was funded from soft loan of Rs.74.17 crore and grant of Rs.22.88 crore from BMGF and Rs.28.75 crore equity infusion by HBL.

The loan carry rate of interest of 3%. As per initial terms, interest was to be paid (quarterly) from October 2021 and repayment of principal would start from January 01, 2025. However, as articulated by the management, company has applied for the moratorium of 1 year due to which interest will need to be paid from October 2022 and principal repayment would start from December 2025. As articulated by the management, the same is approved by the BMGF. This would provide sufficient time for building of cash accruals for debt servicing. HBL has provide the corporate guarantee to the soft loan availed from BMGF.

The saleability risk remains considering the size of the capex as compared with present operation of the HBL and its limited presence in the export market which necessitated substantial efforts in the market penetration and product acceptance from the customers.

Diversified product portfolio with increasing focus on large animal division and healthcare products

As on March 31, 2021, the product portfolio of HBL comprises of 51 vaccines (including 48 poultry vaccines and 3 large animal vaccines) and more than 70 animal health products (including therapeutics, drugs, feed supplements, herbal products and disinfectants). Currently, HBL manufactures PPR (Peste Des Petits Ruminants), Goat Pox Vaccine and Brucella abortus (S19 Delta Per) vaccine in India. Furthermore, HBL is strategically shifting its focus on large animal division and healthcare products rather than depending solely on poultry vaccines segment to leverage the benefits of a diversified product portfolio and strengthening value addition.

HBL is working towards developing the classical swine fever vaccine, lumpy skin disease (LSD) vaccine and sheep pox vaccine which are expected to commercialize by FY23. During February 2020, HBL entered into a technical collaboration agreement with Novapharma, Egypt for manufacturing and selling veterinary vaccines by with technical expertise from HBL. In return, HBL has exclusive marketing and distribution rights for all products manufactured at Novapharma for thirty countries, including vaccine for the Avian Influenza which is an emerging disease in the poultry sector. Hester has signed two agreements with ICAR-IVRI (Indian Council of Agricultural Research – Indian Veterinary Research Institute) in April 2021, for acquiring technologies for the production and commercialization of Classical Swine Fever Vaccine and Sheep Pox Vaccine. HBL is working towards developing the classical swine fever vaccine, lumpy skin disease (LSD) vaccine and sheep pox vaccine and these vaccines are under trial.

Established marketing and distribution network

The marketing function of HBL is supported by six owned warehouses, three C&F agents and strong network of distributors which has pan India presence. HBL also has presence across in more than 30 countries in Asia, Africa and European region. During FY21, HBL has added ~50 personnel in sales and marketing team to grow sales by covering larger territories and expanding its operation. In November 2021, HBL entered into an agreement (regulatory approval is pending) to acquire 50% stake in Thrishool Exim Limited (TEL). TEL has been operating in Tanzania since 2012 and it is a supplier and distributor of animal health and nutrition products. In a few countries, HBL has also collaborated with local existing distributors. During FY19, HBL had incorporated wholly owned subsidiary namely HBKL (in Kenya) and step-down subsidiary namely Hester Biosciences Tanzania Limited (HBTL) in Tanzania for trading of veterinary vaccines and animal health products in African region.



Development of distribution network coupled with scaling-up of operation in the HBAL is expected to create synergy in African market and is expected to drive growth of the company in the medium to long term.

Healthy profitability, comfortable capital structure and debt coverage indicators

HBL has healthy profitability with PBILDT margin above 30%. PBILDT margin improved by 142 bps during FY21 on y-o-y basis with improvement in the animal healthcare segment. PAT margin remained stable at 16.09% during FY21 (FY20: 16.79%). Currently, HBL is expanding its product basket and geographical presence in India as well as its subsidiaries level which along with nascent stage of its capex completion is likely to add to its cost structure and its PBILDT margin are expected to be moderated at 24-26% in near term.

HBL has comfortable capital structure marked by overall gearing of 0.43x as on March 31, 2021, as compared with 0.60x as on March 31, 2020. Total debt declined to Rs.109.70 crore as on March 31, 2021, as compared with Rs.126.20 crore as on March 31, 2020, due to lower working capital borrowings. However, with on-going debt funded capex in HBL (India) and drawdown of debt for the same, its debt level is expected to increase as on March 31, 2022. However, its capital structure is expected to remain comfortable at below unity.

Overall debt coverage indicators marked by PBILDT interest coverage and TDGCA continue to remain comfortable at 10.59x and 2.48x respectively during FY21 as compared with 7.47x and 3.19x during FY20.

Good opportunity in the animal healthcare market

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) and OIE (World Organization for Animal Health) have embarked on a worldwide PPR disease eradication program over a period of 15 years, starting in 2015. This PPR eradication project is expected to induce high demand for the PPR vaccine. HBL through its manufacturing set-up in Nepal is engaged in manufacturing of PPR and Goat pox vaccines of Nigerian strain, thereby providing growth opportunity. Further, Government of India has launched National Animal Disease Control Programme (NADCP) to control Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Brucellosis to support the livestock rearing farmers and has allocated Rs.13,343 crore to be spent over the next five years which also provides opportunity to grow. Government of India is expected to spend around Rs.90 crore per annum for five years on Brucella vaccine under NADCP. HBL is one of the two suppliers for this vaccine which along with strong new product pipeline augurs well for HBL.

Liquidity: Adequate

HBL has adequate liquidity marked by moderate cash accruals against its debt repayment obligation and cushion available from unutilized working capital limits. On a consolidated basis, HBL is expected to earn GCA of Rs.45-50 crore during FY22 as against debt obligation of ~Rs.17-18 crore. HBL is likely to drawdown debt of ~Rs.120-125 crore (which included emergency line of credit, external commercial borrowing and fund from Bill and Malinda Gate Foundation (BMGF)) during FY22-FY23 which along with its envisaged cash accruals are sufficient to provide adequate cushion for funding the ongoing capex. Liquidity is also supported by cushion available against unutilized working capital limits with avg. fund based working capital utilization remained very low at 10.25% for past 12 months ended as on September 30, 2021. HBL reported healthy cash flow from operation of Rs.54.44 crore during FY21 as compared with Rs.30.05 crore during FY20. Current ratio and quick ratio remained strong at 2.73x and 1.69x respectively as on March 31, 2021. On a consolidated basis, HBL had cash and bank balance of Rs.20.81 crore as on March 31, 2021.

Key Rating Weaknesses

Modest albeit growing scale of operation

HBL's TOI grew by 16.81% on y-o-y basis to Rs.215.64 crore during FY21 (FY20: 184.61 crore) on the back of growth the domestic as well as export business. Sales were impacted during April 2021 month due to 2nd wave Covid 19 pandemic, however, it recovered from May and June 2021. Overall sales grew during FY21 on the back of significant growth in vaccine sales. Overall, HBL's standalone TOI continued to remain major contributor to the consolidated income. TLPL has small albeit scale of operation which is growing steadily in line with growth in the HBL's healthcare products portfolio. HBNPL is largely a tender driven business where as HBKL is trading business which is currently having small operation.

Despite steady growth, HBL continued to operate on modest scale of operation. Furthermore, scale of operation of the HBL is expected grew significantly form FY23 onwards with commercialization of its Africa plant and COVAXIN drug substance plant during early FY23. Completion and commercialization of its capacity expansion project by end of FY23 with addition of new animal vaccine in product basket is expected to aid in growth in scale of operation.

Subdued performance of HBNPL during FY21

During FY21, HBNPL earned TOI of Rs.6.48 crore and loss of Rs.0.98 crore at PAT level as compared with TOI of Rs.16.96 crore and PAT of Rs.3.96 crore during FY20. HBNPL largely caters the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) tenders as well as independent country tender which witnessed decline during FY21 due to Covid 19 pandemic. During H1FY22, HBNPL achieved net sales TOI of Rs.6.10 crore as compared with Rs.0.71 crore during H1FY21. Growth in revenue of HBNPL is dependent on the pickup in flow of tenders.

Large working capital requirement due to inherently high inventory holding requirement

The operations of HBL remained working capital intensive with high inventory requirements considering the nature of its products. High inventory days is largely due to the manufacturing process of the product which requires average two-three months of work in progress for various stages of product development for the formulation, processing, stimulations and quality check, etc. Inventory holding days remained at 175 days during FY21 (FY20: 191 days). Avg. receivable days remained at 91



days during FY21 (FY20: 89 days). Overall operating cycle though moderated, remained elongated at 208 days during FY21 as compared with 240 days during FY20.

Implementation and salability risk associated with on-going projects

HBL undertaking two capex in India viz. capacity expansion project for its manufacturing facility located at Mehsana, Gujarat plant and second project for manufacturing of drug substance for COVAXIN.

Expansion project: Post completion of its expansion project, HBL's (India) vaccine manufacturing capacity will increase from 6.25 billion does to ~12.96 billion does by end of March 2023. Total cost of the expansion project is Rs.50.95 crore which will be funded from debt of Rs.42.24 crore and balance from the internal accruals. The project is expected operationalize by end of FY23. However, risk remains related to the time bound completion of the project and realization of the envisaged benefit thereon. Furthermore, HBL is also exposed to saleability risk considering the presence of the few domestic as well as multinational companies (MNCs) in the domestic vaccine manufacturing industry. Any disruption in the project implementation leading to significant time and/cost overrun is key rating monitorable.

COVAXIN drug substance project: In July 2021, Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL) and Gujarat covid vaccine consortium (GCVC; comprises Gujarat Biotechnology Research Centre and HBL) entered a contract manufacturing of the drug substance for COVAXIN. As per the MoU, BBIL shall provide the technology to produce drug substance for COVAXIN and HBL will provide the complete infrastructure at its Gujarat plant for the manufacturing of the same. The project is expected to be completed by March 2022 including regulatory compliance and necessary approval and commercial operation is expected during early FY23. Plant has total capacity to manufacture upto 70 lakh doses of drug substance per month. Total cost of the expansion project is Rs.78.45 crore which will be funded from debt of Rs.28.45 crore and balance from the internal accruals. Completion of the project in envisaged time and cost parameter remains crucial for the HBL. Any regulatory issue in the domestic/international market regarding the usage/effectiveness of the vaccine remain crucial as it can affect the vaccine demand and can dampen the return indicators of the HBL.

Presence in regulated industry and risk related to poultry industry

The vaccine industry has very high entry barriers and is a highly regulated market in terms of intellectual property rights (IPR) and other regulatory requirements. Further, the poultry industry is exposed to the risks of outbreak of diseases, which in turn, could affect the poultry vaccine industry. Such instances cause a severe reduction in the consumption of poultry products besides causing a cascading effect on the profitability of poultry companies. Further, the demand of HBL's products is dependent upon the farmer's ability to spend on poultry vaccines and healthcare products. In case of rise in cost of animal feed, farmers may be forced to cut expenditure on healthcare products.

Analytical approach: Consolidated

Consolidated financials with HBL (Standalone) along with its subsidiaries namely HBNPL (65% stake of HBL), HBAL (100% stake of HBL), HBKL (100% stake of HBL) and TLPL (54.85% stake of HBL) as on March 31, 2021. These companies are engaged in similar line of business and are the extension of HBL in different geographies. They also have cash flow fungibility and operate under common management platform. Furthermore, HBL has provided the corporate guarantee of Rs.102.90 crore to the lenders of HBAL i.e. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). Details of subsidiaries consolidated are shown in **Annexure-3**.

Applicable Criteria

Consolidation
Financial Ratios – Non financial Sector
Liquidity Analysis of Non-financial sector entities
Rating Outlook and Credit Watch
Short Term Instruments
Manufacturing Companies
Pharmaceutical
Policy on Withdrawal of Ratings

About the Company

Incorporated in the year 1987, HBL (CIN: L99999GJ1987PLC022333) was promoted by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as a private limited company and subsequently converted into a public limited company in 1993. HBL is one of the largest poultry vaccine manufacturer in the country. It also manufactures animal vaccine and as well as health products for animal and poultry. HBL's manufacturing facility is located at Kadi in Mehsana district of Gujarat with installed capacity of 6.25 billion doses per annum as on March 31, 2021.

Currently, HBL is undertaking the greenfield expansion to increase its vaccine manufacturing capacity to 12.96 billion doses with total cost of ~Rs.50.95 crore. Furthermore, in July 2021, Bharat Biotech International Limited (BBIL) and Gujarat covid vaccine consortium (GCVC) entered a contract manufacturing of the drug substance for 'COVAXIN' under which HBL will provide the complete infrastructure at its Gujarat plant for the manufacturing of the drug substance. The estimated project cost is Rs.78.45 crore. The project for manufacturing of the COVAXIN drug substance is under progress and commercial operation is expected during early FY23. HBL has four subsidiaries namely Texas Lifesciences Private Limited (TLPL), Hester Biosciences Kenya Limited (HBKL), Hester Biosciences Nepal Private Limited (HBNPL) and Hester Biosciences Africa Limited (HBAL).



Brief Financials (Rs. crore)-Consolidated	31-03-2020 (A)	31-03-2021 (A)	8MFY22 (Prov.)
Total operating income	184.61	215.64	126.62
PBILDT	57.27	69.96	38.40
PAT	31.00	34.70	22.15
Overall gearing (times)	0.60	0.43	0.41
Interest coverage (times)	7.47	10.59	24.00

A: Audited; Prov.: Provisional; NA-Not Applicable

Status of non-cooperation with previous CRA: Not Applicable

Any other information: Not Applicable

Rating History for last three years: Please refer Annexure-2

Covenants of rated instrument / facility: Detailed explanation of covenants of the rated instruments/facilities is given in

Annexure-4

Complexity level of various instruments rated for this company: Annexure- 5

Annexure-1: Details of Instruments / Facilities

Name of the Instrument	ISIN	Date of Issuance	Coupon Rate	Maturity Date	Size of the Issue (Rs. crore)	Rating assigned along with Rating Outlook
Fund-based - LT/ ST-Cash Credit	ı	-	-	-	50.00	CARE A-; Stable / CARE A2
Fund-based - LT-Term Loan	-	-	-	December 2027	27.76	CARE A-; Stable
Fund-based - ST-Standby Line of Credit	-	-	-	-	0.00	Withdrawn
Non-fund-based - ST-Credit Exposure Limit	-	-	-	-	0.22	CARE A2
Fund-based - LT-External Commercial Borrowings	ı	-	-	January 2028	90.00	CARE A-; Stable

Annexure-2: Rating History of last three years

		Current Ratings			Rating history			
Sr. No.	Name of the Instrument/Bank Facilities	Туре	Amount Outstanding (Rs. crore)	Rating	Date(s) & Rating(s) assigned in 2021- 2022	Date(s) & Rating(s) assigned in 2020- 2021	Date(s) & Rating(s) assigned in 2019- 2020	Date(s) & Rating(s) assigned in 2018- 2019
1	Fund-based - LT/ ST- Cash Credit	LT/ST*	50.00	CARE A- ; Stable / CARE A2	-	1)CARE A-; Stable / CARE A2 (11-Nov- 20)	1)CARE A-; Stable / CARE A2 (10-Jan-20) 2)CARE A-; Stable / CARE A2 (27-Sep-19)	1)CARE A-; Stable / CARE A2 (25-Dec- 18)
2	Fund-based - LT- Term Loan	LT	27.76	CARE A- ; Stable	-	1)CARE A-; Stable (11-Nov- 20)	1)CARE A-; Stable (10-Jan-20) 2)CARE A-; Stable (27-Sep-19)	1)CARE A-; Stable (25-Dec- 18)
3	Fund-based - ST- Standby Line of Credit	ST	-	-	-	1)CARE A2 (11-Nov- 20)	1)CARE A2 (10-Jan-20) 2)CARE A2 (27-Sep-19)	1)CARE A2 (25-Dec- 18)
4	Non-fund-based - ST- Credit Exposure Limit	ST	0.22	CARE A2	-	1)CARE A2 (11-Nov- 20)	1)CARE A2 (10-Jan-20) 2)CARE A2 (27-Sep-19)	1)CARE A2 (25-Dec- 18)
5	Fund-based - LT- External Commercial Borrowings	LT	90.00	CARE A- ; Stable	-	-	-	-

^{*} Long Term / Short Term



Annexure -3: List of subsidiaries of HBL getting consolidated

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Sr. No.	Entity Name	% stake as on March 31, 2021		
1.	Hester Biosciences Kenya Limited	100%		
2.	Hester Biosciences Africa Limited	100%		
3.	Hester Biosciences Nepal Private Limited	65%		
4.	Texas Lifesciences Private Limited	54.85%		

Annexure-4: Detailed explanation of covenants of the rated instrument / facilities:

Name of the Instrument	Detailed ex	Detailed explanation		
A. Financial covenants				
I	HBL to maintain following:	HBL to maintain following:		
	Covenant	Threshold		
	Long term debt/EBITDA	<=2.00		
	Fixed Asset Coverage Ratio	>=2.00 (for ECB)		
	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	>=2.00		
	Interest cover	>=5.00		
B. Non-financial covenants				
I	assets other than in the ordinary co	HBL shall not sell, lease, transfer or otherwise dispose of any of its assets other than in the ordinary course of business, or the net book value of such assets, individually or in the aggregate exceeds USD 1 million.		

Annexure -5: Complexity level of various instruments rated for this company

Sr. No	Name of instrument	Complexity level
1	Fund-based - LT-External Commercial Borrowings	Simple
2	Fund-based - LT-Term Loan	Simple
3	Fund-based - LT/ ST-Cash Credit	Simple
4	Fund-based - ST-Standby Line of Credit	Simple
5	Non-fund-based - ST-Credit Exposure Limit	Simple

Annexure -6: Bank Lender Details for this Company

To view the lender wise details of bank facilities please click here

Note on complexity levels of the rated instrument: CARE Ratings Ltd. has classified instruments rated by it on the basis of complexity. Investors/market intermediaries/regulators or others are welcome to write to care@careedge.in for any clarifications.



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About CARE Ratings Limited:

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With an established track record of rating companies over almost three decades, we follow a robust and transparent rating process that leverages our domain and analytical expertise backed by the methodologies congruent with the international best practices. CARE Ratings Limited has had a pivotal role to play in developing bank debt and capital market instruments including CPs, corporate bonds and debentures, and structured credit.

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