

Rating Methodology – Real Estate Sector

[Issued in February 2020]

Industry Overview:

Real estate sector plays an important role in the Indian economy. It is one of the largest employers after agriculture & textile and has numerous allied industries like steel, cement, glass, to name a few linked with it. Broadly, the sector can be classified into two segments- Residential and Commercial. In case of residential space, demand is determined by a combination of factors like property prices, urbanization, interest rates, economic growth; income levels etc. whereas the demand for commercial space is directly linked to the prevailing macroeconomic environment and foreign investments in India. The sector was not much regulated earlier, however, lately headed towards greater transparency and accountability after the introduction of Real Estate Regulation and Development Act, 2016 (RERA) and various other regulatory initiatives.

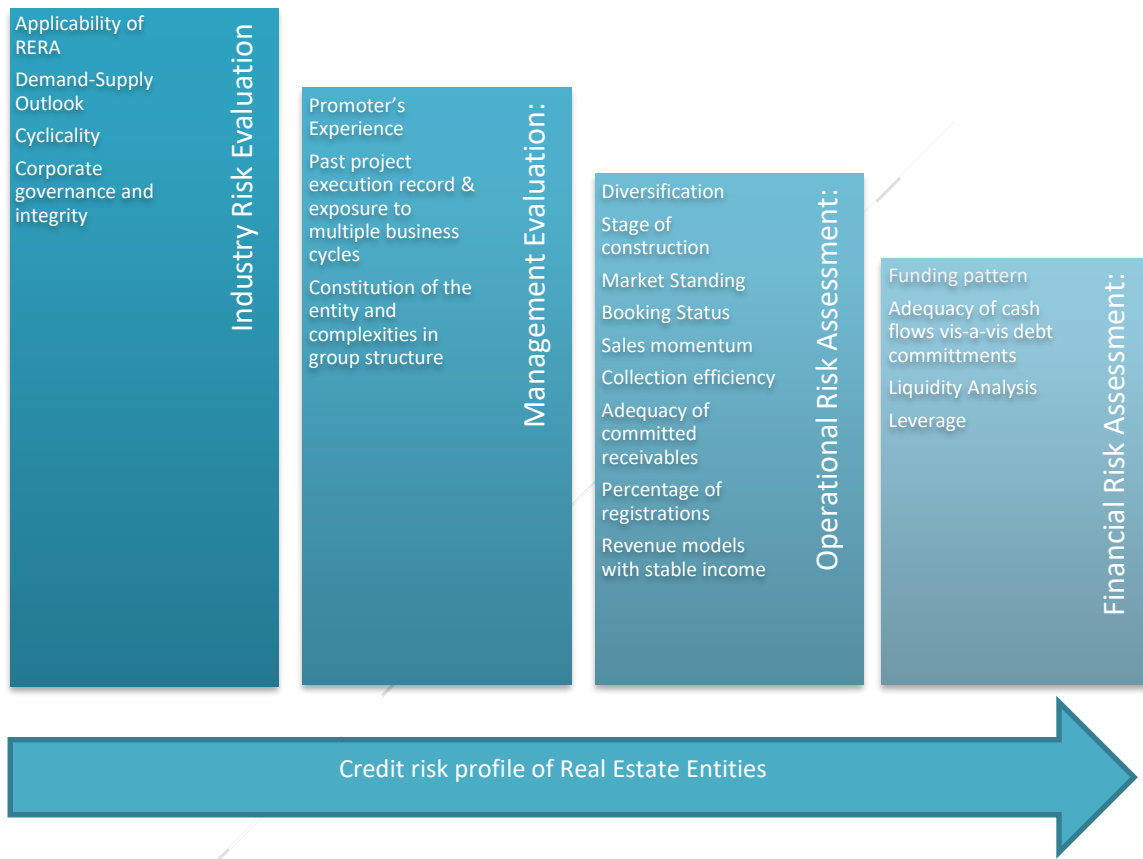
Assessing the credit profile of a real estate entity calls for an entirely different approach when compared to a typical manufacturing concern. The sector is unique as direct comparison of financial performance of different players may not be meaningful due to different revenue recognition policies followed thus placing greater emphasis on cash flow analysis.

Methodology and its scope:

The methodology covers various risks associated with the real estate entities. While all the broad parameters have been covered in the methodology, different business models and group structures may call for deviation in the analysis. For instance, some players in the industry undertake various Real Estate (RE) projects through single entity while others form distinct entities to undertake various projects. This apart, creating altogether a new SPV for undertaking various types of RE projects (residential, commercial projects for sale, commercial projects for leasing etc.) and for carrying out various functions such as construction, marketing, facility management, land aggregation, etc. is also an usual norm in RE industry. Therefore, while analyzing such group structures, major emphasis is placed on the various RE projects being

executed by the rated entity however depending on the criticality of the projects, complexity of business structure, constitution of the entity and level of operational and financial linkages with other group entities, CARE Ratings attempts to evaluate the execution, funding, and marketing risk associated with all the major projects in the group and seeks project related details in this regard from the management.

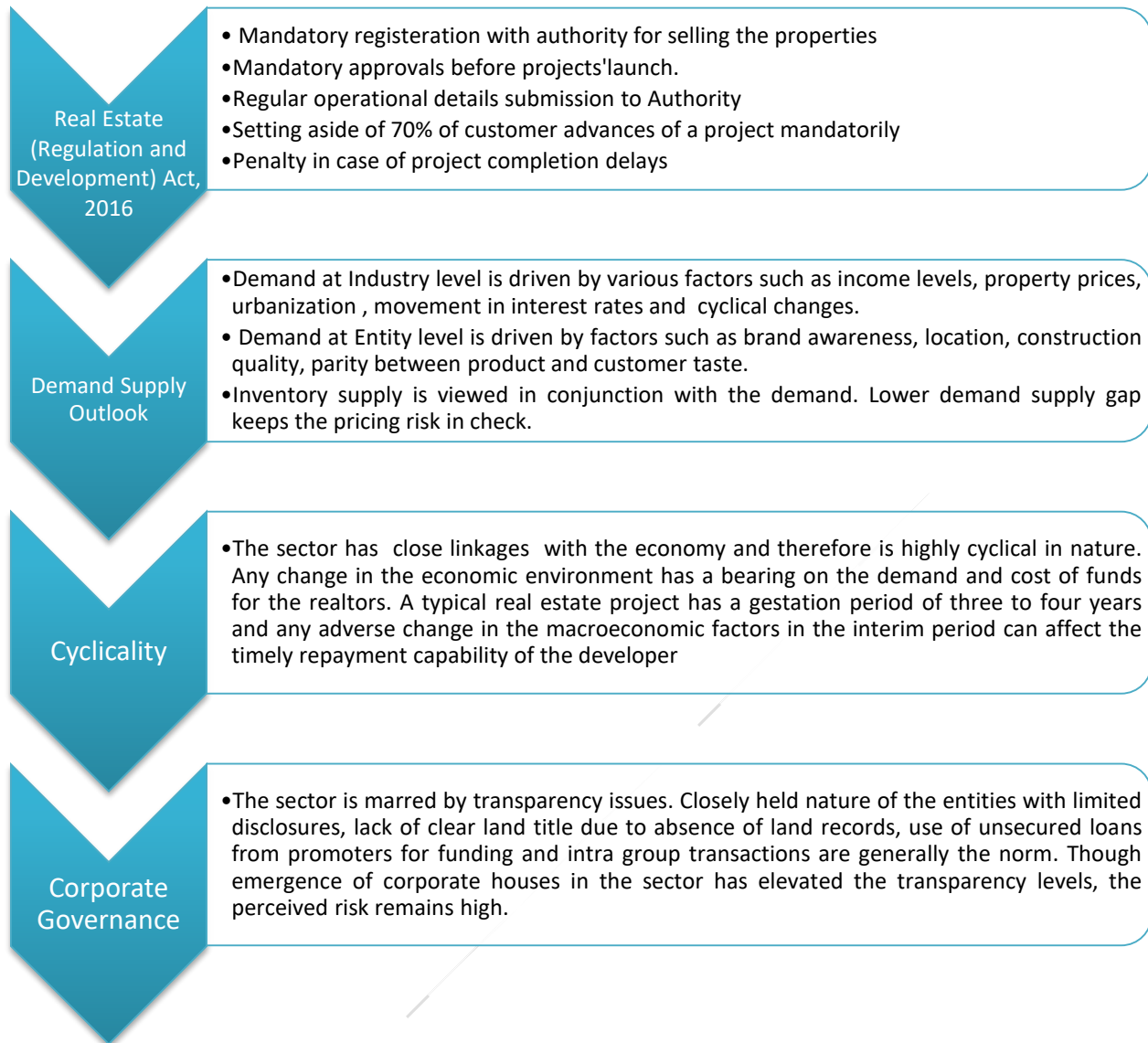
Chart 1: Real Estate Rating Framework:



A) Industry Risk Evaluation

The real estate sector is marked by high competition, fragmentation and capital intensiveness coupled with high cyclicality. These factors aggregately intensify the execution of the projects and call for in-depth industry analysis to be carried out. CARE Ratings evaluates various aspects listed in the below chart to evaluate the Industry risk.

Rating methodology for Real Estate Sector



B) Management Evaluation

A developer with an understanding of local preferences, established brand image in the area of operations, demonstrated track record of quality construction and timely delivery has a competitive advantage. Besides, the companies that have been through various business cycles are generally better placed when compared to peers with limited experience. CARE Ratings takes cognizance of resourcefulness of the management/promoters, financial strength of the group, involvement of the group in other business segments and level of Corporate Governance in its dealings. While the rating exercise is highly focused on cash flow analysis, CARE Ratings also reviews the significant accounting policies, notes to accounts, contingent liabilities/off balance

sheet items, auditor qualifications etc. to analyze the factors such as litigations against developer, long pending projects, substantial unsold inventory in completed projects indicating the unfavourable position of the developer.

Experience of promoters/top management in real estate development

Having the top management and promoters experienced in the main line of business, the rated entity can be steered to achieve its stated goals. They shall be able to resolve the challenges and take critical decisions to achieve the desired success.

Real estate space developed by the group in the past

Completed real estate projects indicate the operational level expertise of the promoters. Significant space developed in the past is an indicator of better execution by the developer in the past and vice versa. CARE Ratings places emphasis on various details of the past projects such as scale, location, types of projects undertaken (villa, gated communities, commercial spaces etc.), etc to better understand the experience of the developer in the past.

Constitution of the entity and complex group structure

Constitution of an entity may determine the levels of disclosure, transparency and the legal comfort that may be derived by the various stakeholders. The company having high number of sister concerns in the form of special purpose vehicles and an inter-corporate dealing requires detailed analysis.

C) Operational Risk Assessment

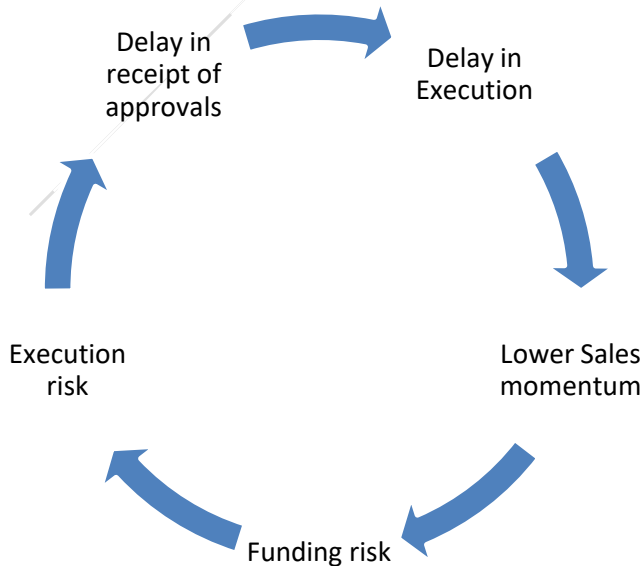
Diversification

CARE takes into account the portfolio of developer to evaluate if the projects are well diversified in terms of revenue streams, geographical positioning, construction stage of the projects and other revenue sharing models such as asset light models. The developer having mix of projects for sale and leasing is viewed favourably as leasing projects provide consistent cash inflows even in the times of slowdown while the projects for sale secures funding from customers during the construction phase of the project. This apart, projects being undertaken by the developer in the established micro-markets are viewed favourably. CARE further evaluates presence across multiple geographies/ jurisdictions during the rating analysis. Further, the mix of projects at initial

stage and advanced stage ensures consistent inflows and exposure to various business cycles. Asset light models, through joint development agreements (JDA), enable developers to significantly increase the scale of operations without excessively leveraging their balance sheets while land aggregation on the other hand ensures that the developer does not have to share part of the revenue/profits with a third party, albeit at the cost of considerable investment for the acquisition. CARE views asset light model positively which reduces the funding pressure thereby reducing strain on the cash flow compared to projects having land being debt funded. However, CARE Ratings also takes note of presence of land bank acquired at historical costs which provides the developer with a competitive advantage in terms of pricing and financial flexibility in terms of sale of land parcels, if required.

Execution risk

CARE takes into account experience of the developer in the region and the construction contractor, associated if any, stage of execution of the project and status of approvals to analyze project execution risk. The real estate projects require multiple approvals from various State and Central Government Authorities at various stages of project execution. Delays in getting such approvals often hamper the progress of the projects as per the envisaged schedule. This, can impact sales, collection in the projects hampering execution. It may also trigger funding risk as major reliance is often placed on customer advances. Developers with high brand awareness are more likely to withstand such cycles.



Scale of projects under implementation vis-à-vis development track record till date

The scale of ongoing projects is compared with the aggregate scale implemented in the past to assess whether the projects undertaken are not very large compared to the past projects executed by the developer. If the proportion of area under development as compared to the aggregate area developed till date is reasonable, it implies smoother execution of the projects. The type of projects viz. affordable, mid segment, luxury is also considered to assess if developers have adequate experience in dealing with different project genres. Furthermore, the existence of tight regulations, volatility in demand, contraction of liquidity from the banks and financial institutions makes it imperative to perform the project specific analysis. Accordingly, stage of construction, regulatory approvals, sales details and means of funding are evaluated project wise.

Booking Status

Higher booking ratio implies favourable market standing of the project leading to smooth cash inflows. Percentage of area/ units booked to launched area/ units and percentage to construction area is looked into. Evaluation of marketing strategy of the developer is thus essential as often the intention is to hold the inventory in order to take advantage of rising prices; however at the same time huge unsold inventory imparts pressure to sell the inventory at lower prices in order to secure the payments thereby exposing the developers to pricing risk. Further, the ratio is analyzed in combination with the construction status as the nascent stage of construction is often linked to higher unsold inventory. Location of the projects, product offering, and price quoted vis-a-vis current market rate, competition from projects in the vicinity are the parameters looked into to determine off-take risk. Significant deviation in quoted prices from market prices may indicate superior/inferior market standing of the developer.

Quantum of registered units

Higher percentage of registrations (wherever registrations are done at construction stage) out of sold units is positively correlated to lesser number of cancellations and it further indicates high level of confidence of buyers in the project, primarily being end users. However, legislatures in different geographies stipulate different rules and regulation, thus registration of units is not mandatory norm in all the states. CARE Ratings emphasizes on the track record of cancellations in such cases. The mix of customers into end users and investors is also assessed as these have

bearing on the overall cancellations. Higher proportion of end users in a project is viewed favorably.

Sales momentum

The strong market standing of the developer ensures quick sales velocity and regular cash inflows. The estimated period within which unsold inventory gets converted into sales based on the current sales momentum is also looked into. Lower estimated cycle indicates greater sales velocity or insignificant quantum of unsold units lying with the developer.

Funding Structure and Collection efficiency

CARE Ratings looks at the funding mix wherein the proportion of funding through debt, customer advances and promoters fund is thoroughly assessed. Higher reliance on customer receipts is viewed unfavourably as this could lead to cash flow mismatch and later developer may have to rely on debt for funding the balance project cost. Reputed developers with favorable market standing of the projects usually receive decent bookings even if the project execution is at initial stage. The construction of the projects in accordance with the timelines envisaged would ensure timely collection of customer advances by the entity based on construction stage thereby safeguarding the funding for future construction. Offlate, RERA has also defined construction linked payments to be made to developers. Assessment of collection efficiency is critical as higher collection efficiency is linked to lower reliance over debt/ other funding sources.

Adequacy of committed receivables

CARE Ratings focuses on the adequacy of committed customer advances (receivables) from confirmed sales in order to fund the balance cost of the projects under implementation & repayment of outstanding debt. Further, evaluation of cash flow position is undertaken to assess if cash inflows in the projected period are adequate to meet the cash outflows.

D) Financial Risk Assessment

In view of different accounting methods and principles followed by the entities, it becomes challenging to assess the financial risk by considering the financial statements. As per traditional accounting practice, certain entities followed percentage of completion method while others followed project completion method for revenue recognition. However, with the introduction of

Ind AS-115, the real estate entities (on which Ind-AS is applicable) will need to recognize the revenue on the basis of whether performance obligation is satisfied 'over time' or 'at a point in time', thus the revenue would be recognized once the company performs all its obligations. Resultantly, timing difference in the completion of various projects would potentially increase the time lag in recognizing the revenue which further impacts the financial position of the entity. The companies with higher proportion of lease income are however less impacted. Thus, greater emphasis is placed on evaluating the cash flow positions of the entity and therefore combination of below factors becomes crucial for assessing the financial risk:

Cash Coverage Ratio (CCR)

The real estate inventory requires longer timeframe for selling, thus cash flow management and financial flexibility is of paramount importance for timely servicing of debt obligations. Cash flow adequacy is determined by considering cash flow visibility against committed payments. CARE Ratings, while making the assessment, generally considers the consolidated cash flow position of all the projects being executed by the group/entity for the entire tenure of the debt to understand the inflows and outflows of real estate entity. Inflows are usually in the form of project receipts, debt, promoter's contribution, and support from group companies while outflows includes project expenses (construction expenses, finance cost, land cost, administration & marketing expenses), corporate expenses (at consolidated level) and repayment of debt obligations. CCR indicates the level of cushion available to the company in meeting the debt obligations. The actual cash flows generated are also compared with the initially projected cash flows and the reasons for shortfalls are carefully evaluated. The ratio being critical indicator of cash flow position of the entity is sensitized to accommodate various scenarios such as delays in project completion leading to lower cash flows from unsold units, fall in collections from sold units, decline in price of unsold units, increase in finance cost or construction costs etc.

Availability of Liquid balances

The availability of adequate liquid funds can protect the company against any unprecedented downturn in the economy, impacting cash flows. CARE Ratings analyzes the percentage of repayments due in the following year being covered by the available unencumbered liquid

investments and accordingly evaluates if significant buffer is available to meet the repayments due in subsequent year.

Availability of land bank

The size of available land bank is crucial for the entity as developers often acquire lands in advance at lower cost and use it later for the projects under pipeline which provides flexibility to the entity in pricing the projects. Further, the projects executed on the owned lands provide higher margin as compared to the projects where the land sharing rights are acquired. Additionally, the prime location and lower acquisition cost vis-a-vis the current market rates are viewed favourably.

Project funding pattern

The real estate business is capital intensive in nature and the entities require huge capital during various phases of project construction. The development of project initiates with acquisition of land which is more often funded through promoter's contribution while the construction of projects is funded through external sources. The funding pattern (Promoter Funds: Debt: Customer Advances) is a function of the sales momentum of the project and the reputation of the developer.

The developers with better market standing have the ability to achieve higher bookings and thus would place higher reliance on customer advances for funding the balance project cost. While lower sales momentum induces the developer to approach other sources of funding such as debt or unsecured loans from promoters/ group companies. However, extremely higher proportion of external funding through debt or customer advances as against promoter funds could result in substantial leveraging and thus needs a thorough assessment.

Leverage

As covered earlier, the proportion of debt often remains low if the competitive position of the entity is strong and accordingly inflows from customer advances is adequate enough to meet the project cost. To analyze the debt position, CARE Ratings looks into the ratios of debt to equity and overall gearing and the results are compared with the peer firms with the similar asset portfolios.

Lower ratios imply better financial discipline of the developer and strong ability to withstand economic cycles. The various financial ratios are correlated for analysis and are not seen in isolation.

Conclusion

The rating outcome is ultimately an assessment of the fundamentals and the probabilities of change in the fundamentals. Rating determination is a matter of experienced and holistic judgment, based on the relevant quantitative and qualitative factors affecting the credit quality of the issuer. CARE Ratings analyses each of the above factors and their linkages to arrive at the overall assessment of the credit quality of a real estate entity. CARE Ratings also considers future estimation of company's financials based on past trends and future strategies, competition, industry trends, economic condition and other considerations.

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