

# VIS RATING METHODOLOGY

## Oil & Gas Industry

The rating methodology for the oil and gas sector is similar in approach followed for rating industrial concerns. The prime concern is the level and stability of cash flows which provide coverage to debt servicing requirements and to outstanding debt. As unique risk and return drivers affect the oil and gas industry, a number of specific measures are also used to supplement the analysis.

The peculiar factor in rating the oil and gas industry is that the revenue generation capability depends upon the quantum and value of proven reserves of oil and gas which are finite resources with limited availability globally.

The oil and gas industry may be broadly divided into the upstream and downstream segments. The upstream operations comprise exploration and production (E&P) companies while the downstream operations comprise the value-added segment including refiners and marketers.

Though demand for fuel is largely inelastic, it is affected by the level of the economic activity in the country and in the region. In Pakistan, the major consumption of natural gas is in the power, fertilizer, textile and household sectors while that of oil is in the power and transport sectors. Overall, imports nearly account for a third of Pakistan's energy supplies in the form of oil, coal and more recently LNG. The share of imports is expected to increase in the future as Pakistan's own gas fields deplete amidst continuously surging consumption. Additionally, over the long-term cross border pipeline imports are also expected through Iran-Pakistan and Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India gas pipeline.

Member countries of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) produce about 40% of the world's crude oil, with exports representing about 60% of petroleum traded internationally. Previously, global supply for crude oil was governed by OPEC which coordinated the policies of member nations to ensure stability of oil prices in the international markets. However, the supply dynamics have changed considerably with the shale boom, especially in the United States, which has forced the OPEC members to cut the production in recent years to attain an equilibrium in the market.

Globally governments support the oil and gas industry due to the strategic nature of the asset. In Pakistan, the sector falls under the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Resources. Since there has been no auction of E&P blocks in the last five and a half year, the direction of regulatory policies should be favorable through successive governments to promote local and foreign investment in order to accelerate production as an alternative to the high import bill of oil and for generating self-reliance. The sector also holds a great significance due to the fact that it is a major source of revenues to the government owing to the high tax incidence arising from royalties on production and sales taxes at the retail level.

One instance of the favorable policy environment is that sales receipt for the international E&P companies is in US Dollars. This provides a hedging mechanism against exchange rate movements to some extent. The government has also reduced its initial holding in exploratory fields and is now privatizing its shares in producing fields.

The off-take of oil and gas becomes assured for local producers due to the shortfall in supply. The Government of Pakistan has the right to purchase crude oil and natural gas from the producers at the well-head price offered under the prevalent Petroleum Policy. The base oil and gas prices are linked to a basket of Middle East crude oils according to a specified formula and are adjusted accordingly down the value-added chain.

The industry is capital intensive which is a significant barrier to entry. The E&P sector requires continuous investment in exploration and production activities. There is substantial initial cost for refiners and marketers to set up operations. Periodic outlay is also required for the plant maintenance activities essential for cost and quality control and safety assurance.

The sector is heavily subject to environmental regulations. For upstream companies, huge cost is incurred at the time of field abandonment in cleaning and clearing of the sites. For downstream companies, emissions control and safety measures at the storage and supply sites are important. We analyze such exposures on case-to-case basis to judge the level of potential outflow and the presence of sufficient liquidity to finance it.

The price variations and the periodic high capital expenditure requirements introduce significant volatility in cash flows and contribute to the cyclical nature of the sector.

VIS evaluates the capacity of cash flows generation projected each year to repay the outstanding debt of the company. Ideally, the oil and gas companies should maintain a low level of debt leverage and high liquidity to mitigate the sector's business risk.

An integrated company can sustain a riskier capital structure due to their diversified cash flows stream. However, overall none of the industry participants can support an elevated capital structure due to the risk of fluctuations in prices and large and relatively non-discretionary capital spending patterns.

Presence of off-balance sheet financing is also factored into the analysis. In the case of securitization, off balance sheet debt is raised by committing a cash flows stream for debt servicing. For the purposes of analysis, the securitized receivables are isolated from the cash flows of the company being rated to calculate debt servicing ratios.

VIS rates the oil and gas industry through the cycle as temporary fluctuations in performance should not influence the ratings if long-term change in performance is not expected. Sensitivity to cyclical factors also varies along the rating spectrum and the ratings of companies at the lower end of the rating band tend to be more volatile.

The sustainability of ratings is tested in the worst-case scenario based on the stressed yearly cash flows position and the projected debt servicing requirements.

Oil and gas companies seldom attain high ratings due to the inherent volatility in cash flows that increases their credit risk. However, integrated companies engaged in both upstream and downstream segments operate with greater stability in cash flows and could attain comparatively higher ratings.

### RISK DRIVERS OF UPSTREAM OPERATIONS



The upstream segment is subject to the highest risk and return factors within the oil and gas industry. The volatility in international oil prices mainly due to demand supply dynamics significantly impacts the profitability and cash flows generation of this segment.

The generally higher gross margins in the segment allow the companies to build up cash reserves for conducting exploration activities that entail significant capital expenditure, as availability of external funding is scarce for this purpose.

For comparing the bottom line profitability of different E&P companies, VIS considers their policy to book exploration expenditure on the profit and loss statement. A conservative view is to expense the costs in the year in which they occur. However, this leads to extremely volatile profitability.

Better matching of costs with expenses results with the 'successful efforts' approach which capitalize successful exploration against future production, and expense it in case of a dry hole when it becomes certain. Regardless of the expense policy, the expenditure will be reflected in the cash flows statement in the year in which it occurs.

The credit quality of E&P companies will be led by the returns being generated from operations, the size and quality of reserves which will go in production in the coming years and the company's history of investment and success in exploration activities.

The risk associated with the capital structure is assessed for the maximum stress based on the projected cash flows from proven developed and producing reserves, which can be estimated with reasonable certainty under current pricing assumption, and the exploration plans of the company.

Few E&P companies may attain a high rating band due to the price and reserve replacement risk. However, companies that show sufficient cash flows from proven producing reserves to mitigate these risks and fulfill financial obligations in a timely manner may be rated higher.

External funding may be possible for production and infrastructure development needs due to the comparatively low risk associated, however, it is scarce for exploration activities as they carry high risk. Internally generated funds are utilized for this purpose and the board of directors should formulate a judicious dividend policy to ensure sufficient retention of funds for the purpose of reinvestment in new exploration activities.

### Reserves Position

The focal point of the analysis conducted by VIS for rating E&P companies is the reserve position of oil and gas. The reported financial statements of such companies are unique as these core assets are not reflected on the balance sheets.

Reserve analysis involves measuring the quantum of reserves available to the company and the level of optimal yearly production versus the risk arising from price volatility, periodic need for workovers, high cost acquisitions or over-estimated reserves with potential for reserves write-downs.

E&P companies are dependent upon technology and expertise of manpower for effective interpretation of seismic surveys, reliability of reserves valuation and conduct of efficient production. Independent valuation of reserves by valuers of international repute using advanced technology increases the reliability of the assessed reserves position. Due to the fluctuations in prices, the actual value of the proven reserves may also differ at different points of time apart from the impact of the ongoing production and sale of barrel equivalent of oil (BOE i.e. including natural gas and LPG converted into barrel terms).

Broadly, reserves may be classified as proved developed and producing, proved undeveloped and proved not producing. The proved developed and producing reserves are the cash generators for the company and are utilized for meeting operational and other capital expenditure needs. A balanced mix of oil and gas and the quality of the reserves i.e. higher or lower oils provides protection from adverse fluctuations in the level of demand or price in any commodity. Reserves from which production has been halted are termed as proved, not producing.

The proven, undeveloped reserves require significant capital expenditure to bring them into production. They carry higher risk as compared to the producing reserves as unforeseen problems may arise during production.

The annual production levels can be modeled with reasonable accuracy over the life of the reserves and the periodic capital outlay which may be required. These are evaluated against the company's yearly requirements for cash flows for meeting obligations.

The production curve is generally a parabola and the production levels decline as the reserves fall below a certain level due to low pressure. Also technical problems may arise in production requiring significant expenditure to increase the production levels. There are a number of techniques including uplift techniques and secondary recovery techniques etc. to resolve these situations.

A rough estimation of the life of the reserve may be calculated by dividing the proven reserves by annual production volumes. A longer reserve life will ensure a certain level of cash flows over that period even without new discoveries; however, the NPV of reserves may differ with price fluctuations.

Ideally, a company should replace at least 100% of its production each year with new reserves to ensure future availability of reserves or its operations will decline, however, the replacement rate may vary while depending on the allocation of E&P block, exploration activity and discovery rate. The company's scale of operations, the number of concessions held by it, geographical dispersion of fields, status of depletion of fields and a healthy mix of reserves mitigate the risk of gradual reserve depletion and production disruptions.

The reserve booking practices of companies being rated are analyzed for their degree of conservatism. If there have been frequent downward revisions of reserve estimates in the past, then the management would appear to be optimistic in their estimations.

An important exercise is to analyze the source of reserve increase over the last few years i.e. whether it has come from new discoveries, extension of fields or field acquisitions. Generally, it is seen that increases in reserves of E&P companies arise mainly from field extensions and enhanced recovery techniques. This may give comfort on the depth

of the un-booked reserves for new fields to be realized in future.

In assessing the risk of exploration activities being conducted, certain factors should be considered. The geographical characteristics of the area in which exploration is being carried out is studied for probability of discovery, proximity of the exploratory areas to any existing reserves and the successful outcome of any study carried out in the past etc.

The country's historic success rate in exploratory activities has been 1:3 as compared to 1:10 internationally due to the low scale of operations and targeted exploration locally. The company's past success rate is evaluated by estimating the number of successful wells drilled by the company as a ratio of the total wells drilled. The management's expertise and credentials in this area are important including the credentials of the companies to which different functions are out-sourced including geological and seismic surveys, drilling.

Finding and development costs per BOE of reserves i.e. total cost incurred to add and develop a barrel of new reserves to the point of production, are estimated over a period. Cost efficiency is critical in cyclical companies as the low cost operators have a greater chance of survival during a downturn.

VIS stress tests the value of proven reserves and the yearly production projected for different price scenarios.

### **The State of Production Facilities**

Oil and gas production is a continuous process and the high degree of automation of the plant will provide the management with timely information on the production status. The state of production facilities and the adequacy of the maintenance practices will determine the current and future efficiency of the plant and hence, is looked into closely by VIS. A rough measure to determine adequate level of expenditure for maintenance of plant facilities is the capital expenditure to depreciation ratio.

The age of the plant and the expected life dictate when the company will have to incur large capital expenditure for replacement. Corrosion control in the equipment is also an important factor as the equipment is of long-life and is mostly installed underground.

Safety measures are of supreme importance in appraising plant facilities due to the inflammable nature of the product. Fire and other safety precautions at the plant should be clearly indicated and strictly enforced. Proper firefighting systems should be installed at the production facilities, processing plants and storage facilities.

The control system should have early warning signals and alarms with remote emergency shut down switches for wells at various locations. Any past accidents are noted by VIS including the reason for the occurrence and the steps taken to avoid it.

The amount and extent of insurance coverage on plant and facilities are important cash flows protection factors examined by VIS. Some companies also take insurance for interruption in production along with damage to properties which safeguards against production loss in case of any disruptions.

### **RISK DRIVERS OF DOWNSTREAM OPERATIONS**

Downstream operations include refiners and marketers/retailers. While associated risks are comparatively less as compared to E&P companies, return margins are also narrower and vulnerable to price fluctuations. The cost efficiency of operations is the key success factor for the downstream industry.

#### **Level of Technology**

VIS appraises the adequacy of technology employed by the company to be operationally competitive. The degree of plant automation, plant efficiency, quality control systems, and the capability of MIS to integrate operations and support decision-making are appraised.

Marketing companies operate mostly on cash and / or with a large number of small accounts which have to be managed prudently. Therefore, the cash management and control systems are critical for these companies and should be managed prudently.

The cost efficiency of the refineries depends largely upon the type of technology employed; hence, the refineries

are vulnerable to technological changes. Refinery margin per barrel of output is considered to determine production efficiencies.

### Refinery Size & Reliability



Economies of scale in production are necessary to generate profits for refineries due to their high fixed costs. Since it is a volume driven business, the economic size of the plant coupled with plant reliability and capacity utilization are considered.

Plant reliability depends upon the age of the plant, adequate maintenance and safety procedures. VIS analyzes the breakdown time of the plant which occurred during the year from regular maintenance activities and from technical problems or accidents to determine the reliability of the plant operations. Low reliability will increase production costs as well as hurt client relationships. On the other hand, replacement costs are significant due to the capital intensive nature.

The product slate i.e. the mix and grade of oils and gases produced are considered to evaluate the market demand and prices of the products. High production of low margin and low demand products will decrease the profitability of the refinery.

### Retail Configuration for Marketers

Investment in real estate for retail outlets typically forms the biggest outlay for marketing companies. On the other hand, it does not necessarily contribute to the profitability of the company. A cost-benefit analysis is required to determine the feasibility of establishing owner-operated stations as compared to dealer-operated outlets.

Branding is also an important aspect of marketing. Since the government regulates prices, the consumers differentiate between different brands on the basis of quality for increased mileage, low maintenance costs, environment impact and quality of service at the pumps.

High throughput per outlet i.e. volumes sold in each retail outlet will also drive profitability with consideration to the level of investment required in operations. The mix of products being provided at the outlets is also considered for this purpose. For instance, sale of lubricants carries higher gross margins and the prices are also not regulated. The retail market share of the marketers is determined within its niche market and in the region of operations.

### Geographical Diversification & Logistics

Geographical diversification for marketers may decrease cost efficiencies. However, they are more vulnerable to the change of pace in economic activity which may impact demand in particular regions at particular times.

Presence in geographically diverse area guards them against both supply and demand shocks as re-location entails problems of developing new supplier relationships and generating customer loyalty from scratch.

### Inventory Management

Inventory management is most critical to the downstream oil and gas operations for two reasons. Firstly, the carrying cost of inventory tends to be substantial due to the nature of the asset. Secondly, there is price risk to the refiners and marketers in periods of decreasing prices.

Proximity to suppliers and customers is important to reduce the inventory volume through periodic supply rather than bulk storage. However, run-out may significantly hurt business, especially for the marketers at the retail outlets. On the other hand, transportation costs can become high in case of periodic supply depending upon the location of the supplier and the mode of transportation. The run out costs and the transportations costs have to be considered to determine the optimal inventory levels to be maintained.

VIS also assesses the management's role and performance in managing the cash flows in cyclical companies. They have to understand and plan for the potential magnitude and time frame for downturn for their company and manage finances accordingly. Their strategies for conducting operations and achieve business growth, financial policies and internal control systems are analyzed for reflection of the risk appetite.

## RATING SCALE & DEFINITIONS: [ISSUES / ISSUERS](#)

### Medium to Long-Term

#### **AAA**

Highest credit quality; the risk factors are negligible, being only slightly more than for risk-free Government of Pakistan's debt.

#### **AA+, AA, AA-**

High credit quality; Protection factors are strong. Risk is modest but may vary slightly from time to time because of economic conditions.

#### **A+, A, A-**

Good credit quality; Protection factors are adequate. Risk factors may vary with possible changes in the economy.

#### **BBB+, BBB, BBB-**

Adequate credit quality; Protection factors are reasonable and sufficient. Risk factors are considered variable if changes occur in the economy.

#### **BB+, BB, BB-**

Obligations deemed likely to be met. Protection factors are capable of weakening if changes occur in the economy. Overall quality may move up or down frequently within this category.

#### **B+, B, B-**

Obligations deemed less likely to be met. Protection factors are capable of fluctuating widely if changes occur in the economy. Overall quality may move up or down frequently within this category or into higher or lower rating grade.

#### **CCC**

Considerable uncertainty exists towards meeting the obligations. Protection factors are scarce and risk may be substantial.

#### **CC**

A high default risk

#### **C**

A very high default risk

#### **D**

Defaulted obligations

**Rating Watch:** VIS places entities and issues on 'Rating Watch' when it deems that there are conditions present that necessitate re-evaluation of the assigned rating(s). Refer to our 'Criteria for Rating Watch' for details. [https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/backupsqvis/docs/criteria\\_watch.pdf](https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/backupsqvis/docs/criteria_watch.pdf)

**Rating Outlooks:** The three outlooks 'Positive', 'Stable' and 'Negative' qualify the potential direction of the assigned rating(s). An outlook is not necessarily a precursor of a rating change. Refer to our 'Criteria for Rating Outlook' for details. [https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/backupsqvis/docs/criteria\\_outlook.pdf](https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/backupsqvis/docs/criteria_outlook.pdf)

**(SO) Rating:** A suffix (SO) is added to the ratings of 'structured' securities where the servicing of debt and related obligations is backed by some sort of financial assets and/or credit support from a third party to the transaction. The suffix (SO), abbreviated for 'structured obligation', denotes that the rating has been achieved on grounds of the structure backing the transaction that enhanced the credit quality of the securities and not on the basis of the credit quality of the issuing entity alone.

### Short-Term

#### **A-1+**

Highest certainty of timely payment; Short-term liquidity, including internal operating factors and /or access to alternative sources of funds, is outstanding and safety is just below risk free Government of Pakistan's short-term obligations.

#### **A-1**

High certainty of timely payment; Liquidity factors are excellent and supported by good fundamental protection factors. Risk factors are minor.

#### **A-2**

Good certainty of timely payment. Liquidity factors and company fundamentals are sound. Access to capital markets is good. Risk factors are small.

#### **A-3**

Satisfactory liquidity and other protection factors qualify entities / issues as to investment grade. Risk factors are larger and subject to more variation. Nevertheless, timely payment is expected.

#### **B**

Speculative investment characteristics; Liquidity may not be sufficient to ensure timely payment of obligations.

#### **C**

Capacity for timely payment of obligations is doubtful.

**(blr) Rating:** A suffix (blr) is added to the ratings of a particular banking facility obtained by the borrower from a financial institution. The suffix (blr), abbreviated for 'bank loan rating' denotes that the rating is based on the credit quality of the entity and security structure of the facility.

**'p' Rating:** A 'p' rating is assigned to entities, where the management has not requested a rating, however, agrees to provide informational support. A 'p' rating is shown with a 'p' subscript and is publicly disclosed. It is not modified by a plus (+) or a minus (-) sign which indicates relative standing within a rating category. Outlook is not assigned to these ratings. Refer to our 'Policy for Private Ratings' for details. [https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/backupsqvis/docs/policy\\_ratings.pdf](https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/backupsqvis/docs/policy_ratings.pdf)

**'SD' Rating:** An 'SD' rating is assigned when VIS believes that the ratee has selectively defaulted on a specific issue or obligation but it will continue to meet its payment obligations on other issues or obligations in a timely manner.



### **Faheem Ahmad**

*President & CEO, VIS Credit Rating Company Limited*

*Founder, VIS Group*

*Chairman, Association of Credit Rating Agencies in Asia*

Mr. Ahmad possesses 30+ years experience in financial risk assessment with focus on Islamic finance, venture capital and general management. He has top level management experience at international level in the fields of credit ratings, Islamic and conventional financial risk assessment modeling, industrial management and construction engineering. Mr. Ahmad is an active participant at international forums on Credit Ratings. He obtained his B.S in Civil Engineering from NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi. He also has Masters Degrees in Engineering and Business Administration from USA.



### **Syed Fahim Haider Shah**

*Assistant Manager*

Syed Fahim Haider Shah has been associated with VIS since April 2018. During the course of his career, he has been involved in ratings assignments of various sectors, including Textile, Sugar, Edible Oils, Consumer Electronics, Dairy, Microfinance and Banking. Previously, he has worked at AKD Investment Management Limited in the capacity of Investment Analyst. Fahim is an ACCA affiliate.

Jahangir Kothari Parade (Lady Lloyd Pier)

Inspired by Her Excellency, The Honorable Lady Lloyd, this promenade pier and pavillion was constructed at a cost of 3 Lakhs and donated to the public of Karachi by Jahangir Kothari to whose generosity and public spirit the gift is due. Foundation stone laid on January 5, 1920. Opened by Her Excellency, The Honorable Lady Lloyd on March 21, 1921.

*Dome: A roof or vault, usually hemispherical in form. Until the 19th century, domes were constructed of masonry, of wood, or of combinations of the two, frequently reinforced with iron chains around the base to counteract the outward thrust of the structure.*

*Origins: The dome seems to have developed as roofing for circular mud-brick huts in ancient Mesopotamia about 6000 years ago. In the 14th century B.C. the Mycenaean Greeks built tombs roofed with steep corbeled domes in the shape of pointed beehives (tholos tombs). Otherwise, the dome was not important in ancient Greek architecture. The Romans developed the masonry dome in its purest form, culminating in a temple built by the emperor Hadrian. Set on a massive circular drum the coffered dome forms a perfect hemisphere on the interior, with a large oculus (eye) in its center to admit light.*



Jahangir Kothari Parade

## National Excellence, International Reach

VIS Credit Rating Company Limited is committed to the protection of investors and offers a blend of local expertise and international experience to serve the

domestic financial markets. With its international reach, VIS is positioned to aim for an international mark. In this regard, the global experience of our principal, Japan Credit Rating Agency, Ltd. has been invaluable towards adding depth to our ongoing research endeavors, enriching us in ways, that enable us to deliver our responsibilities to the satisfaction of all investors.

The edifice of the Jahangir Kothari Parade has stood proudly through the years and is a symbol of our heritage. Its 'Dome' as the most stable of building structures, exemplifies architectural perfection. Committed to excellence, VIS continues its endeavor to remain an emblem of trust.

# VIS Credit Rating Company Limited

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