

29th May 2020

Equity Recommendations

Overall Overview

The adverse economic outlook as result of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen prices of most counters decline significantly, into bear market territory. The NASI, NSE20 and NSE25 are down 17.6%, 26.6%, 21.9% YTD to 137.13, 1,948.08 and 3,203.94 respectively.

In the short term, we expect significant pressure on companies' operating performance as a result of economic shocks. In our view, investors with a long-term view (ideally equity investors should have a long-term outlook anyway) and don't have short term liquidity constraints can take advantage of the attractive trading multiples for the capital gains potential.

High dividend yielding stocks are also good investing opportunities. However, with a need to conserve cash, this is a high-risk strategy due to the lower dividend safety (a number of companies have either reduced or deferred dividends or issued stock dividends instead of cash dividends).

A safer alternative for income investors is allocate funds to fixed income securities/money market fund.

Overall, the current market presents a buying opportunity for companies with strong fundamentals. We highlight some of these in the next section.

BANKING SECTOR:

Equity Group Holdings

We recommend a **LONG-TERM BUY** on Equity Group Holdings. The counter is currently trading at a trailing P/B of 1.19x (at a price of KES 35.25) compared to the banking sector P/B of 0.76x as at 29th May 2019. Our recommendation is based on the company's i) Superior digital banking capabilities ii) Agile balance sheet- liquidity ratio of 52.1% and core capital/risk weighted asset ratio of 19.8%.

Key Drivers

- We expect the bank to continue reaping the benefits of its digitization strategy. With the current economic shock due to COVID-19, we expect the bank to leverage on its robust digital capabilities to increase its service offering on digital platforms.

As at FY2019, 97.0% of all transactions took place on alternative channels. We expect to see a significant growth in retail transaction numbers on mobile and internet banking.

- With expected retail migration to alternative channels, we see potential for improved efficiency. The group has recorded a 3-year declining trend in its cost to income ratio (C/I) from 53.5% in FY2017 to 51.0% in FY2019.

Key Risks

- We expect to see asset quality deterioration should the COVID-19s economic impact worsen with expected default to hit SMEs the hardest (59% of Equity's loan book). The NPL ratio and cost of risk as at FY2019 stood at 9.0% and 1.3% respectively. From a sectoral perspective, manufacturing, trade, transport, agriculture and personal loans will bear the brunt. The group's total contribution to these sectors is a total of 62.0%. We expect this to be partially mitigated by the bank's strong liquidity position further supported by its adequate capital adequacy ratios.

In adaptation to challenges brought up by COVID-19, Equity has:

- Increased services on its digital platforms targeting especially retail and SMEs and introduced online forex trading and web banking for 'chamas' (informal cooperative societies).
- Customers with existing loan facilities can renegotiate terms.
- Free bank to mobile transfers.
- No charge on customers using cards to pay bills, utilities, shopping, fuel as well as other services.
- Activation of digital account opening and management of mobile and internet apps.

- Debit and prepaid cards both Visa and MasterCard now contactless.

We expect some of these measures to lead to lower NFI.

FY2019 Results Commentary

- Equity Group reported a 14.1% y/y growth in profit after tax at KES 22.8 billion, in line with expectation. RoAE increased to 21.8% from 21.1% in FY2018 while RoAA was flat at 3.6%.
- Interest income grew by 12.2% y/y to KES 59.7 billion. Interest expenses grew by 24.6% y/y to KES 14.7 billion as cost of funds grew by 20bps y/y to 2.9%. As a result, net interest margin grew by 8.7% y/y to KES 45.0 billion (NIMs declined by 20bps to 8.3%)
- Non-funded income grew by 19.1% y/y, above our estimates driven by bond trading income (+122.0% y/y), Eazzy Platform (+82.0%y/y) and mobile banking income (+15.0%). Non funded income contributed 40.0% to total income from 38.0% in FY2018
- Loan loss provision significantly increased by 51.7% y/y to KES 4.4 billion. Gross NPLs ratio rose to 9.0% from 7.6% in FY2018 driven by the SME (NPL ratio 11.3%) and Large enterprises (NPL ratio 9.4%) segments. As a result, cost of risk went up to 1.3% from 1.0%.
- Other operating expenses grew by 9.5% y/y to 38.2 billion. Despite this, cost to income ratio declined to 51.0% from 52.4% in FY2018 as a result of the digitization strategy, signalling improved efficiencies.
- In line with expectation, there was a reallocation of funds from government securities (y/y growth of KES 7.0 billion) to the loan book (23.3% y/y growth to KES 366.4 billion). Loan book segmentation included: 59.0% SMEs, 22.0% consumers, 13.0% large enterprises, 3.0% agriculture and 3.0% micro enterprises.
- Growth in loan book was also funded by customer deposits, which grew by 14.2% y/y to KES 482.2 billion and 26.0% growth in borrowings.

- As highlighted in the banking sector report, the group continued to record positive performance in its subsidiaries' performance. Subsidiaries accounted for 18% and 27% of group's total assets and PAT respectively.

KCB Group

We issue a **LONG-TERM BUY** on KCB Group. The counter is currently trading a trailing P/B multiple of 0.85x (at a price of KES 35.45), a 27.4% discount of over its 3-year P/B average of 1.17x. The company has a return on average equity (ROaE) of 20.7% (second highest among listed banks) and a dividend yield of 9.9% above the industry average of 6.5% (as at 29th May 2020).

Our recommendation is based on the following long-term factors:

Growth Drivers

NIM Expansion on Interest Rate Cap Repeal: We expect KCB's Net Interest Margin to benefit from repeal of the rate cap. Since KCB did not materially alter its lending strategy on enactment of the rate cap, we expect the NIM expansion to be driven mainly by repricing of loans (i.e. higher loan yields) rather than loan book growth.

A portion of the loan book is still pegged on the interest rate cap regime (CBR + 4.0%). We expect these loans to be repriced downwards in line with the CBR cuts. This puts more downward pressure on NIM. However, based on management guidance, we are likely to see a much faster maturity in these loans than initially anticipated. Our model initially assumed that 50.0% of these loans would mature by the end of FY2023. However, at the FY2019 results call, management alluded to 50.0% of the loans maturing within one year. Additionally, we see the opportunity to restructure loans to the new interest rate regime. This will benefit the bank over the long term as economic prospects improve.

In light of bleak economic outlook, banks will likely be more cautious in lending. We therefore do not expect higher loan book growth to make up for the lower yields.

Due to the lower interest rate environment we expect the bank to lower its cost of deposits to mitigate the decline in NIMs.

Strategic Partnerships and Investments in Digital channels: We expect strategic partnerships and investments in digital channels (particularly the mobile channel) to play an important role in growing NFI. Notable products from these partnerships include KCB MPESA (with Safaricom) and Fuliza (with Safaricom and NCBA).

For the FY2019, alternative channels accounted for 97.0% of the volume of transactions with the mobile channel alone accounting for 78.0%. Through the strategic partnerships, the mobile channel has facilitated saving and lending. By the end of FY2019, KCB had cumulatively lent KES 212.1 billion (KES 157.7 billion of this amount was lent in FY2019 after addressing capacity constraints with a revamped mobile platform). We expect demand for credit to increase in light of the COVID 19 pandemic. We anticipate that the bank will likely be more stringent to preserve the quality of borrowers.

We expect the initiative by banks to provide free mobile transactions to lead to lower non-interest income growth. For instance, KCB expects to forego about KES 150.0 million on KCB to MPESA transfers in the 3 months. It's not clear whether banks are willing to extend the time period.

Moreover, with lower economic activity we expect lower transactions and lower credit related fees and commissions income.

Risks

Lower Loan Book Growth: For the FY2020, we expect the bank to be more cautious in lending on asset quality concerns.

Asset Quality Deterioration: We anticipate that asset quality deterioration on the adverse economic outlook brought about by the pandemic. Its highest sector exposure (37.8%) is in personal/household segment. Although the pandemic has brought about income losses following job losses, management intimated that they have a large exposure in the public sector (e.g. Teachers Service Commission) which we view as more job secure.

Apart from the personal segment, the tourism and manufacturing sectors have been key loan book drivers. This is a cause of concern as these sectors have faced significant income losses and have recorded the highest proportion of restructured loans. Should the pandemic continue and measures to restrict spread of the virus extended there is a high risk of default for these restructured loans.

In sum, in the short term, we expect a higher a cost to income ratio to lead to lower profitability for the bank. Over the long term, we see a strong investment case for a buy and hold investor driven by the aforementioned drivers which will outlive the pandemic.

1Q2020 Results Commentary

- KCB Group posted an 8.5% y/y growth in after tax profits for 1Q2020 to KES 6.3 billion (1Q2019: KES 5.8 billion). The growth in profitability was predominantly attributed to a 22.4% y/y growth in total operating income to KES 23.0 billion. The performance also reflects consolidation of NBK first quarter results.
- Total interest income rose by 20.4% y/y to KES 20.2 billion. This growth was mainly driven by a 63.3% y/y increase in income from government securities to KES 5.3 billion (+20.3% q/q), due

to a 52.8% y/y growth in the Group's holding of government securities to KES 203.7 billion.

- Interest income from loans and advances grew by 9.5% y/y to KES 14.7 billion as loans and advances edged up by 19.3% y/y to KES 553.9 billion (+3.5% q/q) with the yield on loans falling to 10.8% (1Q2019: 11.6%).
- Total interest expenses declined by 26.6% y/y to KES 5.2 billion owing to a 31.0% y/y dip in interest expenses from customer deposits to KES 4.7 billion. The lower interest expenses from customer deposits were owing to a marginal decrease in the cost of customer deposits to 2.7% (1Q2019: 2.8%) as customer deposits rose by 31.4% y/y to KES 740.4 billion (+7.8% q/q).
- Despite an 18.5% y/y growth in net interest income to KES 15.1 billion, the net interest margin (NIM) fell to 7.6% from (1Q2019: 8.5%).
- Non-funded income grew by 30.5% y/y to KES 7.9 billion mainly due to a 44.8% y/y rise in other fees and commission income to KES 2.7 billion. The contribution of non-funded income to total income grew to 34.4% (1Q2019:32.3%). According to management, the growth in non-funded income was supported by additional income from National Bank.
- Despite a 22.3% y/y increase in operating expenses (excluding provisions) to KES 11.1 billion, the cost to-income ratio (excluding provisions) remained flat at 48.5% owing to the faster rise in total operating income (+22.4% y/y to KES 23.0 billion).
- Loan loss provisions surged by 149.1% y/y to KES 2.9 billion as gross nonperforming loans edged up by 70.5% y/y to KES 66.2 billion. According to the bank this was to cover for downgraded facilities, with an expected growth in defaults across key sectors of the economy attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic that has

negatively affected the country's, regional and global economy.

- Cost of risk increased by to 2.1% from 1.0% in 1Q2019 owing to the rise in loan loss provisions. Asset quality deteriorated as the NPL ratio (gross NPL/ gross loan book) rose to 11.1% (1Q2019: 7.7%). This was attributed to consolidation with National Bank. We expect asset quality to be adversely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic due to loan defaulting.
- National Bank of Kenya (NBK) posted a profit before tax of KES 233.0 million from loss of 961.0 million in the 1Q2019. Its loan book grew by 3.1% y/y to KES 47.3 billion over the same period.

Stanbic Holdings

We assign a **LONG-TERM BUY** recommendation on Stanbic Holdings. The current market price of KES 85.00 (as at 29th May 2020) presents a buying opportunity for investors with a long-term investment horizon. Stanbic is currently trading at a trailing P/B of 0.69x a discount of 14.8% over its 3-year P/B average of 0.81x. The counter also has a dividend yield of 8.3%, higher than the industry average of 6.5%.

Our recommendation is informed by the following factors:

In light of the challenging economic climate brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we expect to see some downward pressure on NIMs influenced by the effect of a low interest rate environment (CBR is currently at a 9-year low) acting on a loan book majorly pegged on the previous interest rate regime (69.1% of the loan book matures after 12 months). However, we expect the group to take advantage of restructuring opportunities to reprice the loans on the basis of the current risk environment and we opine this should provide growth momentum for NIMs in the long-term. Additionally, we expect to see Stanbic aim to lower its cost of funds to shore up NIMs.

As a result of the pandemic, loan book growth is expected to be significantly subdued in FY2020 and this may adversely affect fees and commission income.

We expect the efficiency enhancing measures adopted by Stanbic before the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate against the expected lower net interest income, consequently supporting the bottom-line.

Our main concern regarding Stanbic continues to be its deteriorating asset quality which has generally been weakening since FY2011. Given the economic challenges arising from current pandemic, we don't expect to see any improvement in 2020. In the past, the poor asset quality was mainly attributable to the Corporate and Investment Banking (CIB) segment due to sector-wide asset quality issues and issues with few large corporate clients. However, in FY2020 we also expect asset quality challenges from the Personal and Business Banking (PBB) segment (which accounts for 54.0% of the loan book) due to job losses and a struggling SME sector.

In view of the foregoing, we expect to see improved performance in the long-term and recommend investment in the counter to investors with a long-term investment horizon.

ABSA Bank Kenya

We recommend a **LONG-TERM BUY** on ABSA Bank with the counter trading at a P/B multiple of 1.30x (at a price of KES 10.80) against an industry average of 0.76x as at 29th May 2020. The counter has a high ROaE of 16.7%, which is above the industry average of 15.6%. Additionally, the counter has a high dividend yield at 10.2%, higher than the industry average of 6.5%. Our recommendation is based on:

Key Drivers

- We expect that if applied successfully, the new 5-year strategy would see the bank grow its non-funded income contribution to total operating income.
- We also expect the new strategy to boost operational efficiency. The Bank has been leveraging its investments in technology to improve operational efficiency. This has notably been evidenced through the reduction in the number of traditional branches and focus on alternative banking channels (mobile and internet banking).
- We note that the bank has the potential to maintain its market share as it pursues the new five-year strategy which partly focuses on increased lending.
- Following the separation from Barclays PLC we expect the bank to utilize this new 'freedom' to pursue new products more tailored towards the local market.
- We note that the two years (FY2018 and FY2019) into implementation of the new 5-year strategy the bank has recorded improvements in ROaE, cost to income ratio and non-funded income contribution.

Key Risks

- The bank's market share growth is dependent on the bank's ability to grow ahead of competition or at least not lose any more ground. Given the bank's conservative approach in the past, this is likely to be a challenge.

1Q2020 Results Commentary

- ABSA Kenya reported a 3.0% y/y growth in after tax profits to KES 2.0 billion (1Q2019: KES 1.9 billion). The performance was characterized by a 15.8% y/y increase in non-funded income to KES 3.0 billion and a 5.4% y/y decline in operating expenses (excluding provisions) to KES 4.1 billion.

- Total interest income grew by 2.8% y/y to KES 7.6 billion primarily driven by a 7.5% y/y increase in income from government securities to KES 2.1 billion (the bank's holdings of government securities edged up by 7.2% y/y to KES 125.4 billion while the yield on government securities dropped to 6.7% from 7.4% in 1Q2019).
- Income from loans and advances rose by 1.0% y/y to KES 5.5 billion on the back of a 12.4% y/y growth in the net loan book to KES 203.0 billion
- Total interest expenses declined by 1.9% y/y to KES 2.0 billion predominantly owing to a 13.2% y/y decrease in interest expenses from customer deposits to KES 1.6 billion. Although customer deposits increased by 6.6% y/y to KES 238.7 billion (1Q2019: KES 224.0 billion), the cost of deposits fell to 2.6% from 3.3% in 1Q2019.
- Consequently, net interest income edged up by 4.5% y/y to KES 5.6 billion. The net interest margin dipped to 6.9% (1Q2019: 7.5%) due to a faster growth in interest earning assets (+10.1% y/y to KES 330.4 billion).
- Non-funded income realized a 15.8% y/y growth to KES 3.0 billion supported by a 47.4% rise in foreign exchange trading income to KES 1.1 billion. Fees and commissions on loans and advances grew by 8.8% y/y to KES 390.7 million. However, other fees and commissions declined by 3.0% y/y to KES 1.1 billion. The contribution of non-funded income to total income grew to 34.5% (1Q2019: 32.2%).
- Operating expenses (excluding provisions) fell by 5.4% y/y to KES 4.1 billion owing to: i) an 18.4% y/y dip in other expenses to KES 1.1 billion and ii) an 84.0% y/y drop in rental charges to KES 23.7

million. The cost to income ratio (excluding provisions) improved to 47.1% (1Q2019: 53.9%).

- According to management, following the separation from Barclays PLC, the bank will continue to make substantial investments in systems and rebranding over the course of the next two years; as well acquire various services from Barclays PLC.
- Loan loss provisions surged by 75.2% y/y to KES 1.1 billion as gross non-performing loans increased by 12.45 y/y to KES 17.3 billion. The NPL ratio (net gross/net loan book) grew marginally to 3.0% (1Q2019: 2.8%).
- The separation costs increased by 126.8% y/y and amounted to KES 552.1 million. According to the bank, adjusting for this non-recurring “exceptional” item (non-recurring in the long-term), the bank posted after tax profits growth of 13.0% y/y to KES 2.3 billion.

Standard Chartered

We issue a **SELL** recommendation on StanChart. The stock is currently trading at a trailing P/B ratio of 1.19x (based on a market price of KES 166.00 as at 29th May 2020), a 11.9% discount over its 3 – year average P/B of 1.35x. Its dividend yield of 12.0% is significantly higher the industry average dividend yield of 6.5%. The stock is however, trading ex-dividend (i.e. the company has already closed the register for dividend payments).

Our recommendation is based on the following factors:

While StanChart's loan book recovered in FY2019, growing by 8.5% y/y to KES 128.7 bn, we don't expect this growth momentum to be sustained in F2020 due to the anticipated challenges relating to the

COVID-19 pandemic. We opine the pandemic will compel StanChart to revert to its conservative lending approach in order to reduce their exposure to bad loans. However, given the FY2019 loan book performance, we are cautiously optimistic of renewed growth in the loan book once conditions improve.

Some of the loans are still pegged to the previous interest rate regime (CBR + 4.0%). Given the low CBR of 7.0%, we expect the yield on loans to come under pressure in FY2020. Moreover, given the introduction of repayment breaks and loan extensions, we expect interest incomes on loans to take a further hit. However, we believe StanChart will use the restructuring opportunities to reprice part of its loan book to match the current risk profile of borrowers. Already, StanChart has announced that it has restructured loans worth over KES 8.0 bn.

We expect StanChart to continue to leverage its high liquidity levels (62.6% in FY2019) to keep its cost of funds low.

StanChart's NPL ratio (as measured against net loans) reduced to 15.6% in FY2019 from 18.3% in FY2018. Despite this improvement in asset quality in FY2019, we expect asset quality to deteriorate in FY2020 – owing to the challenges occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to company management, the sectors that have been adversely affected by the pandemic include: the hospitality and tourism sector, property market, trade and SMEs.

Safaricom

We recommend a **HOLD** on Safaricom based on the current market prices. The counter is currently trading at a P/E multiple of 15.35x (at a price of KES 28.55, as at 29th May 2020) a 15.5% discount of over its 3-year P/E average of 18.17x. The company is a market leader in the telecommunications industry with a mobile subscription market share of 64.8% (2Q2019/20).

The key revenue drivers for the company are MPESA and mobile data, contributing 33.6% and 16.2% to service revenues respectively for the FY2020.

In FY2020 the company's after-tax profits grew by 16.2% y/y in FY2020 to KES 73.7 billion (FY2019: KES 63.4 billion) mainly driven by MPESA and mobile data. See a breakdown of the results of [here](#):

The 12.5% y/y growth in MPESA revenues to KES 84.4 billion was underpinned by 12.1% y/y growth in 30-day active MPESA customers to 24.9 million while chargeable transactions (including betting) grew to approximately 13.0 from 12.0 transactions in FY2019. MPESA's P2P (Person to Person transfer) and new business grew by 14.6% and 43.4% respectively. The company is focused on increasing P2P use cases to encourage more transactions being done within the MPESA ecosystem (which will result in fewer withdrawals). Savings and Lending (Fuliza, Mshwari, KCB MPESA) was the biggest contributor to new business growth. The company is planning to extend lending to SMEs.

Safaricom is keen to expand MPESA outside Kenya. In FY2020 the company together with Vodacom South Africa purchased MPESA intellectual property rights from Vodafone. This now gives it flexibility to provide MPESA services within the continent in partnership with Vodacom. Proposed regulatory laws on mobile lending (agent to agent interoperability which would quickly grow competitors' agent networks) and the disruption of the betting industry are some of the challenges the company is facing with regard to MPESA. We are optimistic that the company's large M-PESA ecosystem (agent network, customers and business vendors) coupled with product innovation (e.g. MALI), better coverage and reliability will deter users from shifting to other networks.

Mobile data (+12.1% y/y to KES 40.7 billion) saw an improvement in Average Revenue per User (ARPU) in FY2020 as the company achieved strong uptake of its new "No expiry" bundle, with 30 day active customers growing by 14.0% to 22.0 million. Customer usage grew by 65.3% to 1,204.0 megabytes with data customers using over 100mbs grew by 23.7% to 9.1 million. We opine that there is room for growth in

this segment. In addition, movement restriction will likely lead to increased usage of data as most people work from home.

With the current economic shock owing to the COVID-19 pandemic the company is likely to experience a slowdown in MPESA revenue growth in the short term. Although data usage is likely to increase with most people working from home, spending on bundles may be limited by job losses and pay cuts.

Bamburi

We place a **SELL** recommendation on Bamburi Cement. The company has a price of KES 44.00 as at 29th May 2020 and is trading at a P/E ratio of 17.96x. Although the company's cost management initiatives have proven effective, we note that this is not sufficient to sustain long term growth. We note that the Group has been experiencing a contracting market in Kenya since 1H2017. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic's economic impact, suspension of operations in Rwanda and competitive pressures within the region, we expect Bamburi to register subdued revenue growth (as compared to historical trends).

Summary

Counter	Recommendation	YTD Change	Price as at 29th May 2020
Equity Group Holdings	Long-term Buy	-34.11%	35.25
KCB	Long-term Buy	-34.35%	35.45
ABSA Bank Kenya Plc	Long-term Buy	-19.10%	10.80
Stanbic	Long-term Buy	-22.20%	85.00
Standard Chartered	Sell	-18.02%	166.00
Safaricom	Hold	-9.37%	28.55
Bamburi	Sell	-45.00%	44.00

For Online Share Trading (OST) via browser, please click [here](#):

For the Faida M-Trader Application, please click [here](#):



E-mail: research@fib.co.ke

Recommendation Guide:

LONG-TERM BUY: The company has strong fundamentals (strong financial performance, clear/reasonable strategy, competent management team etc.). However, there are certain investments or strategies that would require an investor to have a long-term view of the company to allow for capital appreciation. Also, the company may be facing headwinds which we view as short term.

BUY: Strong fundamentals. Minimal risks to the catalysts/growth drivers

NEUTRAL: This is where the positives and negatives in a company almost balance out. You can accumulate for the long term.

SELL: Deteriorating fundamentals. Risks outweigh the catalyst/growth drivers.

HEAD OFFICE:

Crawford Business
Park,
Ground Floor
State House Road
Tel: 0207606026-37
P.O Box 45236-00100
Nairobi