

THE FEDERATION OF SAVINGS AND CREDIT COOPERATIVES OF THAILAND LTD.

No. 145/2021
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FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Issuer Rating: A-
Outlook: Stable

Last Review Date: 28/09/20

Issuer Rating History:

Date	Rating	Outlook/Alert
29/07/14	A-	Stable

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RATIONALE

TRIS Rating affirms the issuer rating on The Federation of Savings and Credit Cooperatives of Thailand Ltd. (FSCT) at “A-” with a “stable” outlook. The rating reflects FSCT’s important role in the savings cooperative system, steady operating performance, consistently high loan quality, and the competitive edge of savings cooperatives from having tax privileges and priority claim against debtors under the savings cooperative law. The rating is, however, constrained by the weak regulatory supervision of savings cooperatives in general, FSCT’s concentration risk in loans and equity investment, as well as its relatively high leverage.

The rating also takes into consideration FSCT’s readiness to cope and comply with regulatory changes following the enactment of new legislation governing the operations of savings cooperatives.

KEY RATING CONSIDERATIONS

Readiness to cope and comply with new regulations

We hold the view that FSCT is well prepared to cope and comply with the new regulations with no serious concerns over its operations since the new law has taken effect in 2019. The new law is basically designed to ensure tighter controls over the deposit taking, lending, and investment activities of savings cooperatives. We view the new law as an important step to alleviate concerns over the long-term stability of savings cooperatives that forms an important part of Thailand’s financial system.

Nevertheless, we expect the new law will constrain opportunities for growth and weaken FSCT’s financial performance to some extent. For instance, more stringent investment criteria and reserve requirements for liquidity and loan losses under the new law will mean less flexibility in FSCT’s investment activities and lower returns on assets. However, we do not expect the potential impact on profitability will materially impact FSCT’s financial profile.

Savings cooperatives enjoy privileges

The privileges granted to savings cooperatives in the forms of tax exemptions and priority claim against debtors remain unchanged. Savings cooperatives and their respective members are exempt from interest savings tax, value added tax, and tax on investment returns. The law also stipulates that a primary savings cooperative has priority claim over any other creditors to receive interest and repayments from its debtors. The priority claim privilege is an important competitive advantage over other lending institutions in lending to cooperative members. Most of the loans extended to ordinary members of primary savings cooperatives are under an arrangement with the borrower’s employer to deduct interest and principal installments from the borrower’s monthly salary. This explains the high loan quality and low credit costs of most primary savings cooperatives which consequently support the loan quality of a secondary savings cooperative like FSCT.

Weak regulatory supervision

Savings cooperatives are not subject to the same degree of close supervision and rigorous examinations as banking institutions. In our view, this is the major weakness that constrains the credit standings of savings cooperatives in Thailand. Although the current law lays out the framework for tighter controls

on savings cooperatives' activities, but effective enforcement of rules and regulations resting on periodic rigorous examinations of savings cooperatives to ensure compliance seems unlikely to happen anytime soon.

Important role as a financial intermediary

We expect that FSCT will continue to serve as a financial intermediary for its cooperative members by taking deposits from and making loans to cooperative members. FSCT also plays a key role in the promotion and development of the savings cooperative movement in Thailand. FSCT plays an important role in two ways: through its responsibility according to the cooperative laws, and by serving as a representative of its cooperative members. FSCT has participated in a number of national committees and in the activities of the savings cooperative movement in order to support, promote, plan for, and develop the savings cooperative sector in Thailand. Primary savings cooperatives provide loans and welfare benefits for their members. In the same way, FSCT lends to its cooperative members and provides benefits in the forms of consulting services, training, and seminars with the main objective to enhance the operations and financial strength of its cooperative members.

Exposure to market risks due to investment portfolio concentration

A key credit concern for FSCT, in our view, is its exposure to market risk due to its investment activities. We view that FSCT has recently shifted towards a more aggressive investment policy by increasing the weight of investment in equity securities, which is a high-risk asset class given the high volatility of asset prices. The ratio of investment to total assets stood at 44% at the end of fiscal year (FY) 2020 (year-ended 31 March 2021). The investment portfolio comprised 47% of equity securities, 40% of fixed-income debentures, and 13% of other investments in FY2020, compared with its previous policy of approximately 5% of equity, 85% of debentures, and 10% of other investments. FSCT changed its investment policy in 2019. We expect that FSCT will limit its exposure in equity investment going forward. The higher equity investment exposure will translate into a higher risk position, which will consequently affect its credit profile.

FSCT had an exposure of THB1.9 billion in senior unsecured debentures of Thai Airways International PLC (THAI) at the end of March 2021, accounting for approximately 1% of its total assets and 5% of its total equity. THAI is currently in a court-approved business rehabilitation. The rating has taken into account the effect of FSCT's probable losses from its investment in THAI's debentures.

High leverage and moderate equity base

FSCT's equity base, including paid-up share capital, legal reserves, reserves mandated under by-laws, unrealized gains or losses from investments, and net profit, has increased steadily. The leverage ratio accounted for 25% in FY2020. However, it is still at a relatively low level compared with the average of around 40% among large, long-established savings cooperatives. FSCT ended March 2021 with a ratio of capital to assets of 27.6%, above the regulatory requirement of 15%.

As required by FSCT's by-laws, the cooperative members need to purchase additional shares in proportion to the paid-up share capital they already own. In a normal situation, FSCT's paid-up share capital will keep increasing. The paid-up share capital of each cooperative member will increase automatically, thanks to the traditional mechanism of monthly share purchases by members. We expect FSCT will be able to strengthen its capital base if needed in order to cope with any adverse changes in the domestic savings cooperative sector or financial markets.

Sufficient liquidity

We expect FSCT will be able to maintain sufficient liquidity as it has secured credit facilities from several financial institutions. The total amount of available credit facilities should be enough to cover any liquidity shortfalls should they arise.

On average, borrowings from commercial banks have accounted for 12% of FSCT's total liabilities or 9% of its total assets in the past few years. Thanks to excess liquidity from member deposits, FSCT had no borrowings from commercial banks at the end of FY2020. In our view, wholesale funding from commercial banks carries a higher level of rollover risk compared with funding from deposits and borrowings from cooperative members as commercial bank borrowings are largely short-term.

FSCT's liquid assets accounted for 49.6% of its total assets as of March 2021. FSCT ended March 2021 with a liquidity ratio of 7.4%, above the regulatory requirement of 6% for the federation of savings cooperatives.

Loan concentration but well managed loan quality

In our view, FSCT is exposed to significant loan concentration risk. The 20 largest loans made to cooperative members accounted for 59% of FSCT's total loans at the end of FY2020. FSCT provided loans to just 204 cooperative members, out of a total of 1,099 members at the end of FY2020. Loans made to cooperative members represented the largest asset class (51%) of FSCT's total assets at the end of FY2020. About 44% of FSCT's total assets were investments while the remaining

5% was made up of cash and other assets. However, FSCT's loans concentration risk is mitigated by the high quality of its loan portfolio.

At the end of FY2020, FSCT had only THB17.1 million of non-performing loans (NPLs), accounting for only 0.02% of its outstanding loans. FSCT's high asset quality reflects the low credit risk in lending to primary savings cooperatives whose lending practices are supported by the priority claim privilege and salary deduction arrangements with the borrowers' employers as mentioned above. We also expect that FSCT will continue to maintain its strict lending criteria to keep its loan quality.

BASE-CASE ASSUMPTIONS

TRIS Rating's base-case assumptions for the performance of FSCT during FY2021-FY2023 are as follows:

- Total equity to grow by 5% per annum on average.
- Loans to drop by 3% in FY2021 and to grow by 3% per annum on average in FY2022-FY2023.
- Spread to be in the range of 0.16%-0.18% per annum.

RATING OUTLOOK

The "stable" outlook reflects our expectation that FSCT will maintain its important role in the savings cooperative system. The outlook also reflects its steady operating performance, high loan quality, and core funding base from its members. We also expect FSCT will be able to comply with the regulatory changes.

RATING SENSITIVITIES

The prospect of a credit upgrade is constrained by the lack of close supervision and rigorous examinations, as well as the uncertainty of regulatory change. In contrast, a downgrade scenario could arise should there be indications of more aggressive investment policies, especially a significant increase in equity investment. In addition, operating and financial policies that lead to a weakening of the overall credit profile, and any regulatory changes that erode the tax and priority claim privileges currently enjoyed by savings cooperatives could also have a negative effect on the rating.

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

FSCT is the first savings cooperative federation in Thailand. The Cooperative League of Thailand (CLT) and 81 savings cooperatives established FSCT as a national savings cooperative federation in 1972. FSCT started operations in 1973. According to the Cooperatives Act, FSCT is a secondary savings cooperative, or a savings cooperative which has primary savings cooperatives as its members.

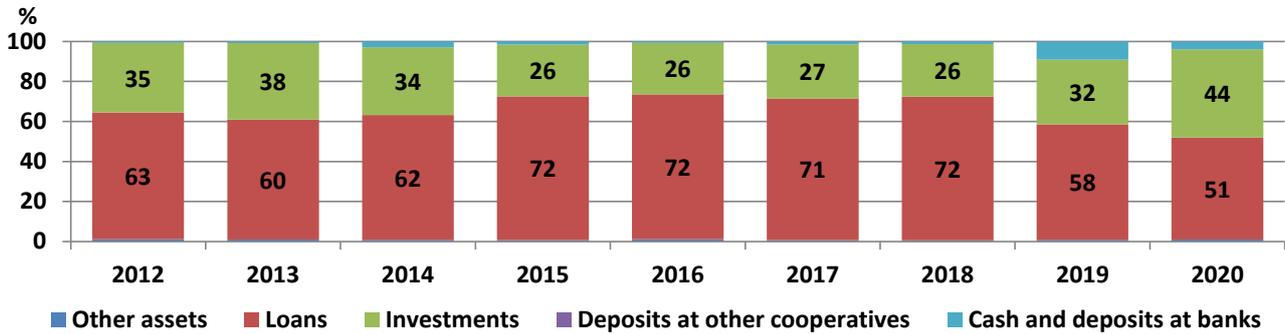
Over 40 years, the number of members has increased steadily, from 81 cooperative members when it was founded to 1,099 by the end of March 2021. More than two-thirds of all primary savings cooperatives in Thailand are members of FSCT.

FSCT is the largest savings cooperative federation in Thailand, in terms of both asset size and the number of members. FSCT serves as a funding intermediary for its cooperative members by taking deposits from and making loans to its members. FSCT also provides additional benefits for its members, mostly in the forms of consulting and training services.

FSCT plays an important role in the promotion and development of savings cooperatives in Thailand. In addition to striving to fulfill its responsibility in accordance with the cooperatives laws, FSCT also serves as a representative of its savings cooperative members.

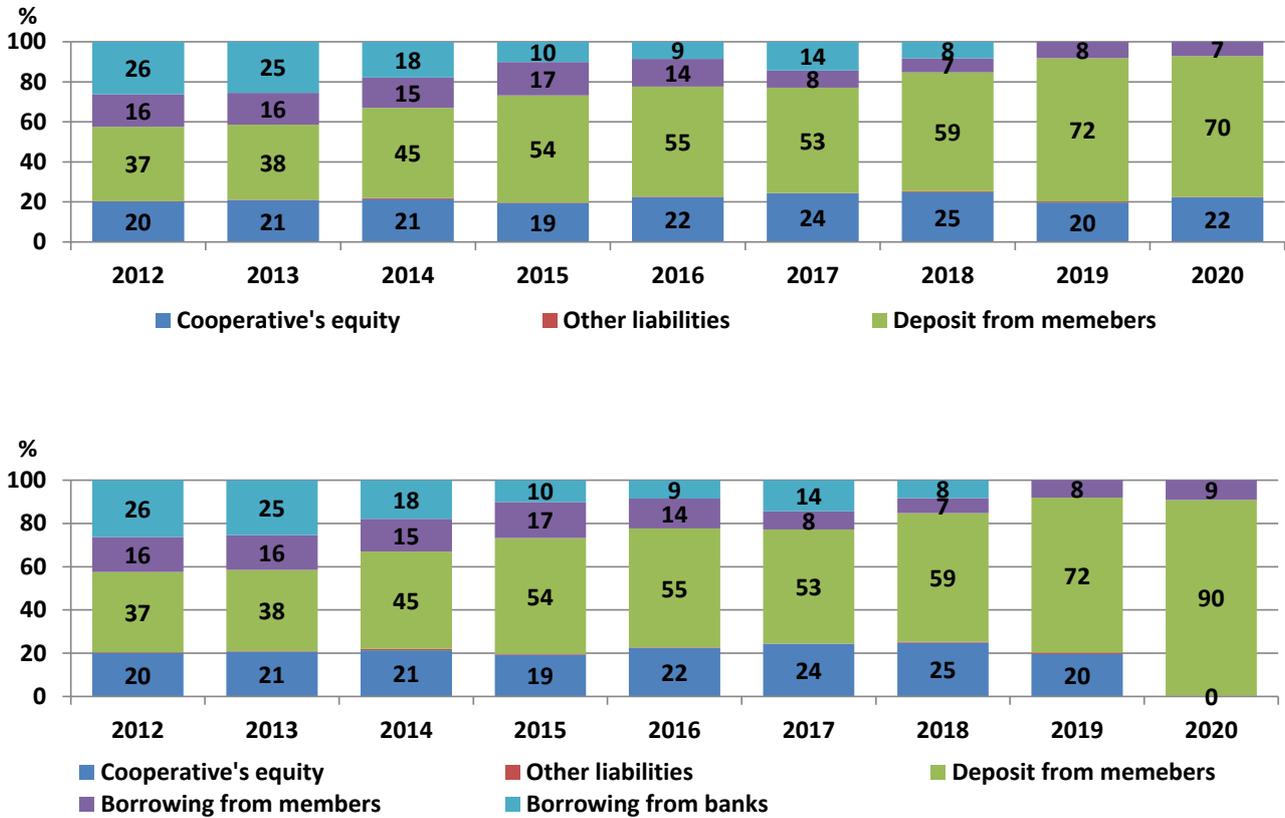
KEY OPERATING PERFORMANCE

Chart 1: FSCT's Asset Structure



Source: FSCT

Chart 2: FSCT's Funding Structure



Source: FSCT

FINANCIAL STATISTICS AND KEY FINANCIAL RATIOS
Unit: Mil. THB

	-----Year Ended 31 March -----				
	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Total assets	141,218	153,781	133,289	122,032	110,018
Total loans	72,085	88,788	95,595	86,306	79,707
Total investment in securities	62,164	49,671	35,008	33,105	28,268
Allowance for doubtful accounts	14	16	5	6	7
Deposits	95,822	110,240	79,240	64,264	60,546
Borrowings	9,639	12,429	20,317	27,874	24,551
Equity	35,336	30,228	33,099	29,688	24,640
Net interest and dividend income	1,212	1,791	1,795	1,481	1,332
Bad debts and doubtful accounts	(2)	(1)	(1)	(1)	0
Non-interest income	963	351	80	295	189
Operating expenses	149	165	162	164	165
Net income	2,029	1,966	1,713	1,612	1,356

Unit: %

	-----Year Ended 31 March -----				
	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Profitability					
Net-interest and dividend income/average assets	0.82	1.25	1.41	1.28	1.28
Non-interest income/average assets	0.65	0.24	0.06	0.25	0.18
Operating expenses/total income	2.45	2.85	3.20	3.53	3.52
Return on average assets	1.38	1.37	1.34	1.39	1.30
Return on average equity	6.19	6.21	5.46	5.94	6.22
Asset Quality					
Non-performing loans/total loans	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Bad-debts and doubtful accounts/average loans	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Allowance for doubtful accounts/total loans	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Allowance for doubtful accounts/non-performing loans	79.95	86.79	99.24	99.34	99.42
Capitalization					
Equity/total assets	25.02	19.66	24.83	24.33	22.40
Equity/total loans	49.01	34.04	34.61	34.39	30.91
Funding and Liquidity					
Member deposits/total funding	90.86	89.87	79.59	69.75	71.15
Liquid assets/(deposits+borrowings+paid-up stocks)	49.60	41.56	28.99	29.96	27.59

RELATED CRITERIA

- Savings Cooperative Rating Methodology, 28 September 2020

The Federation of Savings and Credit Cooperatives of Thailand Ltd. (FSCT)

Issuer Rating:	A-
Rating Outlook:	Stable

TRIS Rating Co., Ltd.

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