



APPLICATION OF IFRS-CONVERGED IND-ACCOUNTING STANDARDS (IND AS) IN INDIA: BENEFITS, CHALLENGES AND MUST DO REFLECTIONS

Indiael Daniel Kaaya* Abdul Noorbasha**

*Research Scholar; Department of Commerce & Business Administration; Acharya Nagarjuna University and Faculty Member, Institute of Financial Management (IFM), Tanzania.

**Department of Commerce & Business Administration; Acharya Nagarjuna University, Andhra Pradesh.

Abstract

Growth of international business has necessitated the need for coordinated investment decisions through comparable reports worldwide. In response to this need a demand for high quality and globally acceptable standard became vital across countries. India is not an exception consequently the IFRS-like Standards (Ind-AS) were set for application from April, 2015, compelled by among others anticipated benefits. This study is limited to desktop and library review to investigate the benefits and challenges of IFRS application from which India can draw a lesson towards implementation of IFRS converged Ind-AS and recommends must do reflections for a successful takeover. It highlights main benefits of IFRS adoption to include; enhanced transparency and comparability; improved quality of accounting information; reduced cost of capital and cost of processing information; augmented cross border investments and acquisitions; substantiated economic growth and financial stability. Further, the paper reports that the IFRS is not immune of challenges. Main challenges are identified to include a complicated nature of IFRS; inadequate qualified accountants; fair value orientation of IFRS which suffer from illiquidity and inadequate valuation experts; lack of coordination between major financial reporting regulators and frequent amendment of the IFRS standards. We conclude that the benefits of reporting normalization are real but not automatic. It recommends countries to cause all prerequisites necessary for effective application and conformance with IFRS to garner full benefits.

Keywords: International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), Convergence, ICAI.

1. Introduction

Global adoption of premier international standards (IFRS) is extensively observed world-wide. India is not exempt in this move. To follow the suit, the convergence process started a decade ago (World Bank, 2004) and achieved its peak in August (2006) on the formation of the IFRS task force (ICAI, 2006). From this posture, it is clear India followed convergence method of IFRS implementation, as opposed to full adoption. Convergence with IFRS is a process whereby domestic standards such as Indian GAAP are gradually aligned with IFRS with consequent intent to full compliance and changes to IFRS. In this regard a full convergence is achieved through narrowing differences between IFRS and the local standards of the countries that retain their standards such that their requirements become identical to IFRS. It is however, strongly encouraged that countries' ultimate goal for convergence plan should be full adoption of IFRS (Street, 2002) and probably with allowance to minimal exceptional cases pertinent to social-economic settings of a respective country. Other countries which had have used convergence path, include China (Lee et al., 2013); Denmark and Singapore (Street, 2002) and Australia, Canada and South Africa for unlisted Companies (Nobes, 2011).

The need for Local rules convergence with IFRS in India is partly a function of recent opening of its economy which is linked with strong economic growth, rising of foreign exchange reserve and global recognition of its technological competencies (UNCTAD, 2008). This has notably necessitated a move towards making India accounting system internationally acceptable (Bhattacharya, 2012) which is necessary in enabling Indian companies to access and compete in global markets. This has responded to an observed integrated global economies, cross border mergers and acquisition and capital market interdependencies (Dancey, (2012); Tripathi, 2014) which can never be ignored. With this in mind Accounting Standard Board (ASB) of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India decided to form an IFRS task force in August 2006. Moreover, based on the recommendation of this task force, the Council of ICAI in its 269th meeting decided to fully converge with IFRS from the accounting periods commencing on or after 1st April 2011 (Saini, 2009, p.922; Kumar, 2009; Beria, 2010; UNCTAD, 2010; ICAI, 2012; Chauhan, 2012) and expected to end by April, 2014 (ICAI, 2010). Although it did not mean that every entity would follow IFRS in India (Saini, 2009) they were first set to be applicable to publicly accountable and large sized entities. In this case, the convergence process, i.e. adoption of Ind-AS roadmap was segmented in three sequential stages, Phase 1, 1st April, 2011, Phase 2, 1st April, 2013 and final Phase 3, 1st April, 2014 (Beira, 2010, p.964). This was officially notified by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) on 22nd January, 2010¹.

With convergence progress in India two sets of standards are in issue and applicable (Beira, 2010, p. 1964; Gupta, 2012; ICAI, 2015). These are the Indian Accounting Standards (Ind-AS) and Indian GAAP These standards are mandated under

¹ Available on: <http://www.iasplus.com/en/binary/asia/1001indiamea.pdf>



Sec (211) (c) of the Companies Act-1956. The former standards are generally in conformity with IFRS in that no significant differences between Ind-AS and the IASB standards (IFRS) according to World Bank, 2004; UNCTAD, 2008, p.50; Nobes, 2011. Their adoption and subsequent application is thus reckoned to result in the landscape change for financial reporting in India as they embody the most commonly accepted global accounting framework (Astute Consulting, 2015). The Ind-ASs were initially set to be obligatory for listed, public interest entities and large sized organizations with effect from 1st April, 2011. However, despite the excellent budge and hint towards full IFRS convergence in India with effect from 1st April, 2011. The move proved futile (ICAI, 2012). This was observed to be due to failure to meet the timeframe (ICAI, 2011, p. 133) and unresolved tax issues (Dsouza, 2014)² among others.

Albeit the setbacks, Indian Government insisted and proved its unrelenting commitment towards convergence, thus another adoption dates has recently been officially announced (Notification No G.S.R, dated, 16th February, 2015). This follows a call by minister for finance whilst announcing the 2014 budget who urged an urgent need to adopt the current Indian Accounting standards converged with IFRS (Budget speech, 2014, p. 24). Consistent with that a revised timeline for adoption of Ind-AS largely converged but not identical to IFRS (Saurav, 2014) has officially been notified. The revised Ind AS adoption roadmap³ expects to start in 1 April, 2015 and to end in 1st April, 2017 (ICAI, 2015). Besides, according to ICAI to date 39 Ind-ASs (Converged to IFRSs) are in issue and uploaded on MCA website (MCA, 2015)⁴. The adoption of the IFRS converged standards (Ind AS) in India prompts some imperative questions; what are benefits for IFRS convergence? Are the benefits immune of criticisms? What should the ICAI and other reporting stakeholders do for a successful endeavor?

The author's motive for this paper is the need for response to the above questions and inevitable reality that the new adopter has something to learn from the precursors. With this global IFRS acceptance and consequent application it is therefore possible to hoard evidence about the extent to which the IFRS benefits the capital markets and related application bottlenecks. This paper therefore presents a literature review results about the benefits of adoption of IFRS and related implementation challenges. It further provide the must do reflection for successful application of IFRS converged Ind-AS. The rest of this paper presents the significance of IFRS, challenges for implementation and final section concluding remarks.

2. Research Methodology

In order to achieve this end the author conducted a rigorous review of literature and documentary information germane to the subject matter. The paper is thus purely based on desktop and library research methodology. In this regard articles selected from top accounting journals, research papers, diagnostic study reports have been surveyed in making this study.

3. The Benefits of International Financial Reporting Standard

It is argued that IFRS are not fit for all standards (Prather-Kinsey, 2006, p. 142) and that they supposedly lack relevance to some countries especially with no or few listed companies. Despite this argument no land wants to be left behind due to IFRS reckoned benefits. Deloitte (2015) for example suggest that over 130 countries around the world require or allow application of IFRS. The results entail that given 193 countries recognized by UN in the world, about 69% (133 jurisdictions) either permit or require reporting based on IFRS. In effect, even with all odds, the benefits of IFRSs cannot be doubted (Street, 2002; UNCTAD, 2008:2013. In fact, the wide spread adoption of IFRS is attributed with the arguments that the benefits outweigh the costs (Owolabi and Iyoha (2012). But what are the benefits? Do the benefits accrue automatically?

The main purpose of the IASB had been to develop in the public interest a single set of high quality, understandable and enforceable global accounting standards, to ensure *transparency* and *comparability* of financial statement information worldwide for enhanced economic decision making. The proponents of IFRS have banked on this ground and document that, the use of the standards enhances transparency and direct comparability between financial statements across countries (Brown, 2010; Pacter, 2011; Madawaki, 2011; Okpala, 2012; Uwadie, 2012; Lin et al., 2013; Desoky and Mousa 2014). This is because IFRS enables transactions and financial events or effects of the similar nature in different corporate houses to be treated and reflected in the books similarly around the globe henceforth, standardized, uniform and so comparable reports. It is therefore, agreeably posited that IFRS has eliminated multiple international accounting standards differences through standardized reporting requirements and formats (Ball, 2006; Madawaki, 2011). Just as Frits (European Commissioner for the Internal Market) put it, "*adoption of IFRS will mean that investors and other stakeholders will be able to compare like with like*". Certainly, this support a central purpose of IFRS that users all around the world can better compare company financial statements, so that the cost of capital falls because information risks are reduced (Nobes and Zeff, 2008).

It is widely documented that IFRS, *high quality* deemed standards than Local GAAPs (Van Tendeloo and Vanstraelen, 2005; Barth et al., 2008) is highly associated with *increased quality* of accounting *information* (Panglietti, 2009; Khanaga, 2011;

² http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-08-29/news/53362679_1_indian-gaap-indian-mnc-mca

³ http://www.iasplus.com/en/resources/ifrs-topics/use_of_IFRS.

⁴ http://www.mca.gov.in/MinistryV2/Stand.html-Ind_AS.



Dimos, 2011; Arum, 2013; Onalo et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2014). The quality of accounting information is mainly linked with its *relevance* and *Usefulness* and indeed is determined by how well it meets the decision making needs of users (Khanagha, 2011). This is in a row with the objective of general purpose financial reporting which is to 'provide financial information about the reporting entity that is *useful to existing and potential investors, lenders and other creditors in making decisions about providing resources to the entity*' (IASB Conceptual Framework 2010:OB 2).

The quality of accounting information is however, regarded as indirect benefit and measured in assorted ways. These include (i) the increased 'value relevance' (ability of financial information to reflect Corporate market information, such as share price) (See for example., Ohlson, 2002; Bartov et al., 2002; Ohlson, 2005; Clarkson et al., 2009; Suadiye, 2012) and (ii) 'improved quality of earnings' (timely loss recognition, reduced earnings management and income smoothing), (Daske et al., 2008; Barth, 2008; Lin et al., 2012). Thus it is generally consented that effective and consistent application of uniform, high quality rules, the IFRS improves financial information quality and reliability by investors, analysts, lenders and other interested parties in the entities' financial statements.

Further, the IFRSs, leads to increased credibility and understandability of financial statements domestically and across borders (Pacter, 2011). In fact the IFRSs brings about enhanced competitiveness of local Companies (Beria, 2010) and consequently bringing the company to the attention of global investors and access to global market and more importantly facilitate efficient allocation of resources.

Hitherto, another benefit, emanating from application of IFRS, is the greater willingness on the part of investors and Multinational Corporations to invest cross borders (UNCTAD, 2008; Madawaki, 2011). The IFRS assists to remove barriers to cross border acquisition and investments (Ball, 2006) and increases the investors' enthusiasm towards cross boarder businesses (Ikpefan and Akande, 2012; Odia and Ogiedu, 2013). With increased freeness in a global business arena, the entities access to global capital markets is enabled and cross-listing of securities permissible. These suggest that the IFRS application is related to increased foreign direct investments worldwide which are analogous to findings by Iyoha and Owolabi (2012).

Furthermore, quite another range of studies, suggest that IFRS application, backed with effective enforcement, reduce the cost of capital of companies (Brown, 2010; Daske et al., 2008; Iyoha and Owolabi, 2012; Odia and Ogiedu, 2013) and leads to higher share prices (Odia and Ogiedu 2013). Notwithstanding, application of common high quality set of rules, IFRS is connected with economic growth and financial stability. This is because principally, high quality information is influenced by the quality of underlying accounting standards (Blanchetee et al., 2013). Accordingly, high-quality corporate reporting is fundamental to a well-functioning economy, economic growth and development as well as financial system stability (UNCTAD, 2008:2010; Cecil et al., 2014). In this regard, then IFRS has potential of boosting the economic growth and development of the adopting country. This is as a result of credibility of domestic capital market to foreign capital providers and lenders, mobility of country's professional accounting workforce (hence employment) and easy access to investment opportunities (Odia & Ogiedi, 2013).

Similarly the IFRS application has latent to reducing the cost of processing accounting information. As such, the cost of setting standards by a country is lowered (Odia and Ogiedu, 2013) and the investors' across countries construe the financial information with minimum efforts (Ailemen and Akande, 2012). Besides, reporting costs such as the cost for adjustments to achieve comparability is avoided.

However, it is worth noting that the benefits from IFRS are real but not automatic. To be realized depends on numerous variables, chiefly, effectiveness of legal and institutional regulatory structures, which plays a vital role in effectual application and conformance to IFRS (Mande, 2014). For example, UNCTAD (2008) argue that benefits of global reporting benchmark the IFRSs, will be realized only when they are rigorously and consistently implemented around the world. In fact, inconsistency application of IFRS is observable, partly due to dynamics in efficacy of regulatory frameworks in different jurisdictions. Consistent to that Ball (2006) posited that that implementation is the vulnerable spot of IFRS and the conception that IFRS alone will produce uniform financial reporting and so improve the quality seems naive. He further comments that what is needed is the actual financial reporting practice (*de facto*) and not merely having uniform accounting standards (*de jure*).

In the same stand, it seems difficult to achieve identical IFRSs implementation due to diverse institutional setting and related efficacy which result to uneven usefulness of IFRS. Correspondingly, Ball (1995, p. 29) concludes that "internationalization will reduce some or much of the diversity in accounting rules and practices across nations it will not eliminate it. Nor should it" as cited in (Odia and Ogiedu, 2013). It follows therefore that the benefits for IFRS adoption are real. But may not be realized in the same levels in all countries due to among others difference in, and effectiveness of IFRS enforcement mechanisms.

4. The IFRS Application Challenges and Bottlenecks

Change is probably the only thing which is inevitably constant. Change is not a threat but comes with new challenges and new ways of looking at things in fact it also opens door for new opportunities and paybacks. In the same way change to global standards and implementation of IFRS or IFRS like standards worldwide is not impervious of challenges and application setbacks.

At the outset, one of the widely documented challenges for IFRS implementation is 'the complicated nature of some IFRS', its voluminous nature and enormous requirements (Street 2002; UNCTAD, 2008) such as standards on financial instruments (Tibe, 2012). Actually, the IFRS are considered dreadfully complex compared to national GAAPs with bountiful disclosures requirements (D'souza, 2007). In effect full IFRS has over 3000 pages and roughly 3000 disclosures requirements. In this stance given the IFRS complexity and its voluminous nature accountants have difficulty to fully comprehend them. This complexity is highly perceived as a colossal barrier towards application and compliance with the standards (UNCTAD, 2008). It is in these lines that it is argued that the IASB that "it should continue to make IFRS both functional and operational" (Street, 2002) by reducing the deemed complexities.

Besides, despite the fact that highly qualified human resources is essential towards successful implementation of IAS and codes (UNCTAD, 2013) meeting this need is a notable challenge in implementing IFRS. This is consistent to UNCTAD (2008) which posit that among technical related challenges in application of IFRS is lack of adequate accountants and auditors who are technically competent. For example, in China during convergence in 2007, over 1000 listed companies adopted IFRS, henceforth demand for professionals rose and a shortfall of 300,000 qualified accountants was recorded (D'ouza, 2007) and indeed expected to be on the rise especially with anticipated exponential growth of the economy. However, this was associated with among others insufficient preparedness due to short time between adoption and actual implementation (UNCTAD, 2008) as well as limited availability of training materials and experts in IFRS at affordable costs (UNCTAD, 2008, p.91).

Fair value measurement requirements in IFRS is yet another big challenge especially where trading volumes are low and capital markets are not sufficiently liquid (UNCTAD, 2008,p.18) such as India (Rudra and Bhattarchajee, 2012). IFRS are considered to significantly rely on fair value which requires a pool of valuation experts by implementing country. In effect accountants finds it difficult to obtain reliable fair value measure data, especially, in low volume and illiquid markets whereas auditors face the difficulty in assessing the reliability of fair value measurement, used in financial reports. For example (Ball, 2006, p. 12) report that there are seven standards that allow or require the fair value measurement suggesting that it may expand over time.

Moreover, inconsistency application of IFRSs across countries is yet another practical challenge for its implementation. This defeats the purpose for comparability being advocated by proponents of IFRS. This application discrepancy is widely associated with country wide divergence in enforcement mechanisms (such as sound institutional and legal reporting frameworks) and related effectiveness (Street, 2012); numerous options in IFRS (Nobes, 2011), which allow for judgment and subjectivity in choices, cultural and accounting norms differences (such as conservatism and secrecy attitude) and language translation which impedes rigorous interpretation and application of IFRSs (Tsakumis et al., 2009). In fact, the motives that led to differences between national reporting arrangements may still impel variations in ways in which IFRSs are implemented and practiced.

Lack of coordination between the major reporting regulators such as ICAI and sector regulators such as SEBI (UNCTAD, 2008, p. 16) is yet another notable challenge towards implementation and IFRS enforcement in many countries. This leads to inconsistencies between prudential sector reporting regulations and IFRSs measurement and reporting requirements. In this case the coordination, concerted efforts and team playing of these regulators cannot be overemphasized, taking a note that IFRS enforcement lie on the hands of the same.

Either, rapid and frequent amendment and changes on existing and new IFRS facades a serious challenge on its implementation. This is because it may take quite substantial period of time before the changes are implemented hence delays in complying with such IFRSs. This is seriously remarkable where amendments need to be translated, or go through a long procedural process before adoption of changes or new standard (UNCTAD, 2008). This series of procedures causes delays in application of related IFRS. For example, France use French IFRS-version as endorsed by EU, new or amended IFRS however must be approved by a legal mechanism in place and may take up to one year (Whittington,2005) as cited in Zeff and Nobes (2008).

With this it is advisable to national regulators to prompt the application of new IFRSs and subsequent amendments by IASB as quickly as practicable to avoid unnecessary delays. As for IASB it should as practically possible involve the national



standard setters and financial reporting regulators in standards developing or revising process, so that they feel part of the process and so source of the standard right from the beginning since lack of participation in the standard setting process is also documented as one of the challenge (UNCTAD, 2013).

5. The IFRS Convergence in India, Plausible Stage, ‘a must do Reflections’

Prince Philip, once said “*A change is a challenge and opportunity, not a threat*”. Thus India convergence toward IFRSs is indeed a signpost stride. As Street (2002) put it “intention to adopt or converge with IFRS is highly admirable and to be applauded”. It is in this mode that this achievement is appraisable and anticipated to strengthen India's ability to attract foreign capital and access to global capital markets (Beria, 2010; Dsouza, 2014). It is further expected to bring transparency in reporting and disclosures, facilitate cross border movement of capital as well enhance mobility of Indian professionals internationally, among other benefits.

However, a call for full embrace of IFRS in order to claim full benefits is at its crest (Street, 2002; Pogson, 2012; Hoogervorst, 2015). This is consistent to Nobes (2011) who posit that jurisdiction should consider adopting the IASB's process rather than producing national versions of IFRS like what has happened in India. This tags on the fact that the adoption form of standardization is highly probable beneficial for investors who act globally as well as Multinational Corporations. However, ICAI (2015) clearly maintain India conscious decision to *converge with IFRS* and *not fully adopt it* due to its peculiarities. This signifies the plan of Government of India towards adaption of IFRS to the economic and social realities of the country (UNCTAD, 2008) rather than full adoption.

Nonetheless, it should be taken on a serious note that IFRS is not an accounting change only. It is a versatile business initiative linking to systems and processes, people change management and other business considerations (AICPA, 2009). In effect it has regulatory, legal and tax implication; it has human resource management implication, via, employees benefit and above all it has implication on assets risk management (Uwadié, 2012). It thus, demands a plunge ground work to be done to make the country ready for the new regime (ICAI, 2010) and make it a success. For this reason it is imperative for all stakeholders in the process to take active role towards a successful endeavor.

The adoption of Ind-AS by companies, indeed, demands changes in accounting policies, procedures and systems in existing reporting regime. At national level, it requires a significant change, inclusive the need to align legal and statutory reporting requirements with IFRSs requirements. This is necessarily important so that the Ind AS requirements do not conflict with reporting provisions in the Companies Act (1956) or other sector regulations. It is with that in mind as an important step towards the convergence ICAI revised schedule VI of Companies Act, for presentation of financial reports to reflect IFRSs requirements in 2010 (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Mantri, 2012; Gupta, 2012)⁵. The revised schedule is widely regarded as complying with IFRS (IAS1) and became effective to all companies in India from the financial year 2011/12 (ICAI, 2011).

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study is limited to desktop and library review to investigate the benefits and challenges of IFRS application from which India can draw a lesson towards implementation of IFRS converged Ind-AS. The paper reveals notable IFRS benefits to include; improved quality of reporting; comparability and enhanced global investment decision making; improved cross border investment and reduce cost of capital. Further, the paper reports that the IFRS is not immune of challenges. The main challenges are inclusive of complicated nature of IFRS; inadequate qualified personnel; fair value inclination of IFRS which suffer from availability of liquid data and valuers; possible lack of coordination between major financial reporting regulators such as ICAI; and frequent IFRS amendment. With these challenges the change to IFRS regime is more than accounting change and requires concerted efforts of all stakeholders. The paper concludes that the benefits for IFRS convergence (application) are real but not automatic. It is thus recommended that all stakeholders to take active role for a successful budge.

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⁵ Ref. Notification S.0447E of 28/2/2011.

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