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How Multinational Oil Companies and Corrupt Niger Delta Elites Underdeveloped the Niger Delta Region

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ABSTRACT: This study is on the role played by Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) and Niger Delta elites in the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study adopts a descriptive approach drawing data mainly from secondary data such as books, articles in newspapers, journals, internet etc. The study found that the Niger Delta region is endowed with natural resources. Among this is crude oil which is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Despite this oil wealth however, the region is largely underdeveloped. Poverty, massive unemployment, absence of safe drinking water, filth and squalor, lack of access to health care, education and housing among others are some of the features of the region. The problem of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta was traced to MNOCs and Niger Delta elites. The paper therefore argues that oil exploration activities of MNOCs such as gas flares and oil spills which have resulted in environmental degradation have deprived the people of the region their means of livelihood while corrupt practices of Niger Delta elites who embezzle funds meant for development have been responsible for the underdevelopment of the region. The study recommends among others the need for MNOCs to compensate the people for years of environmental degradation while Niger Delta elites found guilty of embezzlement while in office should be sent to jail.

KEY WORDS: underdevelopment; environmental degradation; Niger Delta; conflict, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta is located in the South-South region of Nigeria and as officially defined by the Nigerian Government, it extends over about 70,000 square kilometres and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria‘s land mass. The region is made up of nine states namely: Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. In the past the region was referred to as the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil.

The Niger Delta is one of the World‘s ten most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems and home to some 31 million people. The third wetland in the world, it is also the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by MNOCs.

Since the discovery and exploitation of crude oil in commercial quantity in 1956 in Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa State by Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC), the oil industry in the Niger Delta has brought impoverishment to the people of the region. Pollution and environmental degradation caused by these MNOCs have deprived the people the right to an adequate standard of living, right to gain a living and to health and a healthy environment among others while Niger Delta elites on the other hand have helped in impoverishing their people by embezzling funds meant for development. The result is high rate of unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor and endemic conflict which have not only underdeveloped the region but made it one of _The Wretched of The Earth.'

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The bourgeoisie political economy approach best explains this work. Political economy approach provides for a holistic study of the domineering role, control and impoverishment of the Niger Delta region by MNOCs.

The bourgeoisie political economy approach is one of the theories of underdevelopment. According to Wikipedia, Underdevelopment is a term used to refer to economic underdevelopment symptoms of which include lack of access to job opportunities, health care, drinkable water, food, education and housing. Underdevelopment takes place when resources are not utilized to their full socio-economic potentials as in the case of the Niger Delta. The result is that regional and or local development is slower than it should be. It also results from interplay of internal and external factors which allow less developed countries only a lop-sided development progression.

Bourgeoisie political economy scholars are of the view that the underdevelopment of and consequent dependency of most Third World Countries (TWCs) is a result of their internal contradictions which can be explained from their lack of close integration, diffusion of capital, technology and institutions among others. According to them, the way out therefore for the TWCs is for them to seek foreign assistance, aid, loan, investment, etc and allowed the MNCs to operate without restrictions or hindrance. Though they argued that development can come through the MNCs mechanism for transferring technology, capital, skills in management, design and marketing, this is however not true as the case of the Niger Delta region has shown that the penetration and activities of MNOCs are the major causes of underdevelopment of the region (Mohammed and Hundeyin 1999).

3. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION

Niger Delta region is located in the Southern part of Nigeria. It is bordered to the South by the Atlantic Ocean and to the North by Anambra, Ebonyi, Ekiti and Kogi States. It is also bounded in the East by Cameroun and in the West by Ondo and Ogun States. (Ekpo 2004:1; Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan 2000:49)

The Niger Delta region is the third largest wetland in the world after Mississippi and Pantanol and it covers an area of about 70,000 square kilometers, representing about 12% of Nigeria‘s total surface area According to the official estimation by the Nigerian Government, the region extends over about 70,000 square kilometers and makes up about 7.5% of Nigeria‘s landmass (NDDC 2003:17; NDRDMP 2000:49).

In the past, the region was limited to the geographical area occupied mainly by minorities of Southern Nigeria but today it is synonymous with the Nine Oil producing states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers (Niger Delta Standard Feb 14, 2008:39).

The Niger Delta is a densely populated area. It was once known as the Oil Rivers because it was a major producer of palm oil. The population of the region was estimated at above 30 million people in 2005 accounting for more than 23% of Nigeria‘s total population. The population density is also said to be the highest in the world with 265 people per kilometre-squared. The population is said to be expanding at a rapid 3% per year.

The Niger Delta is rich with diverse mosaic ecological zones five of which are; Mangrove Forest and Coastal Vegetation Zone, Fresh Water Swamp Forest Zone, Lowland, Rain Forest Zone, Derived Savannah Zone and the Montane Zone. The climate of the region varies from the hot equatorial forest type in the Southern lowlands to the humid tropical in the Northern highlands.

The Niger Delta people have a rich culture and heritage with 5000 communities, 50 ethnic groups speaking 250 languages and dialects. Some of the ethnic groups include; the Ijaws, Ogonis, Ikwerres, Etches, Ekpeyes, Ogbas, Engennes, Obolos, Isoko, Nembes, Okrikans, Kalabaris, urhobos, Itsekiris, Igbos, Ika-Igbos, Ndoni, Oron, Ibeno, Yoruba, Ibibios, Anang, Efiks, Bekwarras, Benins etc (Niger Delta standard Feb. 14 2008: 21; NDRDMP 2000: 53).

The Niger Delta region is rich in oil and gas production. It produces the bulk of Nigeria‘s oil. About 2 million barrels a day are extracted in the region. Since 1975, the region has accounted for more than 90% of the country‘s export earnings from oil and gas and about 60% of federally distributed revenue. It also accounts for oil reserve of about 30 billion barrels and gas reserves of about 160 million cubit feet. The region also accounts for 40% gross domestic product {GDP} and 80% gross revenue for the country (www.nigerdeltafoundation.org).

The region is also endowed with several solid minerals such as: granites, barites, marble, clay, gypsum, phosphate rock, feldspar, limestone, sand, gravel and natural resources. including oil palm, rubber, cocoa, coconut and a diversity of aquatic resources and fertile land for agriculture (NDRDMP 2000: 29)

The highest proportion of the people are engaged in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industries which account for 44.2% while others are engaged in trade or selling activities 17.4%, education and health 7.1%, services 9.8%, administration, 5.4%, transport 2.2%, construction 2.8% and other activities 11.1%. Traditional industries exist in the region such as canoe – carving, cloth- weaving, mat-making, thatch-making, palm-oil processing, food processing (garri, fufu, starch from cassava), and local gin distillation (Ibid:68).

The Niger Delta region has a wide variety of tourists attractions in Ogoni land in Rivers state, and Kaiama and Odi in Bayelsa State among others.

4. ORIGIN OF OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES IN THE NIGER DELTA

Nigerian Bitumen cooperation, a Nigeria subsidiary of a German Company carried out the first Niger oil exploratory work in Nigeria between 1908 and 1914. The company was however forced to withdraw in 1914 following the outbreak of the First World War and was disallowed from further operations after the war. In 1938, a joint venture between the two major British Oil Companies Shell and BP was granted a license to explore oil covering the entire territory of Nigeria. Shell – Bp therefore began its drilling activities in 1951 and in 1953 about 450 barrels of oil were discovered at the Akata – I well. In 1955, Mobil Oil Corporation started operations in Nigeria but oil was found in commercial quantities for the first time in 1956 at Oloibiri, about ninety kilometers West of Port-Harcourt in the present Bayelsa State by Shell D'Arcy which later changed its name to Shell-Bp Petroleum Development. Shortly after the discovery at Oloibiri, other important discoveries were made at Etche and at the Bomu Oil field in the Ogoni area in 1958 and other MNOCs like Texaco Overseas, Elf, Nigeria Agip Company, Phillips Oil Company among others started operation in Nigeria. Of these, Shell is the main operator on land.

Nigeria joined the rank of oil producers in 1958 when its first oil field came on stream producing 5,000 bpd. After 1960, exploration rights were extended to other foreign countries and with the oil boom in 1970; it began to reap instant riches from its production. Petroleum production and export play a dominant role in the country's economy and accounts for about 90% of its gross earnings. However, the Niger Delta region which is home to vast oil reserves which make the country one of the world's biggest oil exporters remains poor, underdeveloped and ridden with conflicts. The activities of MNOCs which include gas flaring has had a negative impact on the Niger Delta people. It is on record that the oil industry in the Niger Delta is one of the worst cases in the world of gas flaring (Worgu 2000). Gas flaring in the region emits about 70 million tones of Co_2 a year, higher than the emissions in Norway and according to a report by the Environmental Rights Activists (ERA), and the climate Justice Programme (CJP): *More gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else in the World (Nore P.C and Turner T.1980:233)* while Van Dessel, Shell's former head of environmental studies in Nigeria agreed that: ***…the most serious environmental damage of oil exploration and production activities is caused by: oil Spills, gas flares, oily and other waste, land take and production/drainage of water…(Jedrzey 1999)***

6. Many people in the Niger Delta use the heat from pipeline gas flares for cooking in the absence of fuel. These flares are dangerous and **harmful to the health of the people and are known to cause** respiratory problems**,** leukemia, **other blood-related diseases,** premature deaths and pollute farmlands **(Wikipedia, the Free encyclopedia; Worgu op cit).**

7. Another report by the International Friends of the Earth (ERA) (n.d) states that: ***The gas flaring in the Niger Delta causes more greenhouse gases than all of sub-saharan Africa combined. (thenationonline,eng.net/../page/.html)***

8. Gas flare causes noise and heat, air pollution, vibration which destroys economic trees and houses and also sleeplessness. According to a report in the Niger Delta Standard (Feb 5, 2008:20): ***Anyone under the age of 29 who lives in the small Fishing village of Akaraolu, deep in the tropical jungle of Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region, has never known a dark and peaceful night's sleep. They've lived their entire lives knowing that once the sun sets behind the Mangrove Swamps of the Niger Delta that its light would be almost entirely supplanted by that of a roaring gas flare on the edge of a town that's been turning the night into day unhindered for nearly 30 years.***

The flare, owned by Italian oil company Agip Petroli, reveals the impact of gas flare by the oil industry on the region.

The educational sector is not spared as according to Ebere, a teacher in the village: ***…When the sun is high, we feel the heat of the flare because it is close. Sometimes the noise disturbs, so we have to shout for the students to understand (Niger Delta Standard Feb 5, 2008:20).***

Oil Spills on the other hand, cause damage to the soil and pollute the people's drinking water. According to Na'Allah: „oil spills are like spilling blood'. (Na'Allah 2008) and in the words of Ransome-Kuti (1999): ―For oil, Nigeria is prepared to drown the country in blood.''

A recent UNDP (2006) report reveals that more than 6,800 spills were recorded in the Niger Delta between 1976 and 2001. Another report issued by the NNPC (1983), long before popular unrest surfaced had this to say: *We witnessed the slow poisoning of the waters of this country and the destruction of vegetation and agricultural land by oil spills which occur during petroleum operations. But since the inception of the oil industry in Nigeria, more than twenty-five years ago, there has been no concerned and effective effort on the part of the government, let alone the oil operators, to control environmental problems associated with the industry.*

Between 1997 and 1998, a number of oil spills occurred in the region resulting in the death of aquatic life, livestock, damaged farmland and polluted drinking water among others. During this period also, Cash crop and food crops estimated at 500 million were destroyed in Okpeku in

Etsako-East LGA of Edo State as a result of fire emanating from oil spills (*Environmental Rights Action (ERA); Vanguard March 12, 2008)*

The most annoying part of the issue is that the spills are neither cleaned nor are compensations paid. The host communities complain that oil companies shortchange them by not paying compensations for the degradation of their environment. They insist that these companies must plough something back to areas where they are making immense wealth from, if not by obligation but in the spirit of good neighborliness but the oil companies maintain that what they pay as compensation is adequate. The inability to identify actual representatives of the people often leads to payment of double compensation or frequent delays in payment on the part of the oil companies which the people view as deliberate efforts to frustrate them by refusing to pay. In addition, they blame the government for the _unholy alliance' between it and the oil companies giving the latter the impression that the Niger Delta people do not matter but collaboration with the oil companies (Vanguard: September 6, 2004; NDS Feb 4, 2008: 2).

For the Niger Delta people, oil in the land has indeed become more of a curse than a blessing as aptly captured by the people of Oguagba in Edo State: ***Our joys have become sorrows because the oil production activities have completely destroyed the ecological system of our clans. Aquatic life is almost completely destroyed, the soil completely eroded and flora and fauna badly affected almost to the level of extinctions. In addition, oil exploration and production activities have subjected us to devastating erosion and permanent pollution, forcing us against our will to live permanently in a toxic atmosphere.*** Another villager summed this up when he said; _'**We suffer here, we plenty suffer. The effect of the light is too much … we need help from our Federal Government, we are crying out and writing letters''** ***(Ekpo 2004).***

4.1 How Corrupt Niger Delta Elites Contribute to the Region's Underdevelopment

The Niger Delta which should be a gigantic economic reservoir of national and international importance because of its rich endowments of oil and gas resources is in reality faced with the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty because the region suffers from administrative neglect and poor governance among others. While the region deserves greater attention and revenues to deal with the poverty and infrastructural needs, it also pertinent to acknowledge that even though the percentage allocated to the region from the Federation Account seems small, in real terms it amounts to substantial sums of money enough to improve the lot of the people. Despite huge allocations to the NDDC which include contributions from the Federal Government, MNOCs operating in the region, the Ecological Fund, and member states in the region, the lack of development in the region is still glaring. It is on record that between June 1999 and March 2002 a total of N299.648 billion was allocated to the region from the Federation Allocation. Between 2001 and 2004, a total of N44 billion or US $341.1 million was disbursed to the NDDC of which the Federal Government accounted for 78.03 per cent. Annual federation allocations to the

Commission from 2000 to 2004 are respectively, N0.944 billion (US $ 7.3 million), N10.0 billion (US $77.5 million), N13.9 billion (US $107.8 million), N9.0 billion (US $69.8 million) and N14.0 billion (US $108.5 million). Data provided by the Federal Ministry of Finance shows that between May1999 and October 2005, about 1050000 billion was allocated as revenue to the region (see table 1.8). While there was a huge increase in the revenue accruing to the region between 1999 and 2003 and an increase in the total expenditures during the same period, the quality of such spending was invariably low considering the low level of human development. This pattern was due to bad governance and corruption (dawodu.com; UNDP 2006:13, 62).

Isabella Abidde who hails from the region has the following questions for the Niger Delta elites: ***Considering the state of the nine oil producing states, one must ask; where have all the monthly allocations gone? Where are the roads, school and clinics and hospitals? Where are the libraries, the science laboratories and the parks? Where are the water works, the bridges and industries? where are the social services these governments are supposed to provide to citizens? Stolen? Mismanaged? Where? Where has all the money the various states in the Niger Delta states received since 1999 gone? (www.nigeriaplus.com/niger-delta...)***

Former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole also believes the Niger Delta region leaders has failed their people for not using the allocations given them judiciously for the purpose they were meant. According to him, Bayelsa receives 9.2 times more money than Lagos State from the Federation Account while Rivers state collects more money than the entire North. Akwa Ibom collects more money than the entire North and Western part and Bayelsa than the entire North Central. Speaking to the leaders of the region he said: ***Nobody is going to come to from Abeokuta to ask you what you did with your money in the creeks… you should ask yourselves about how your money was spent (www.earthrights.net/../moreinfo.html).***

There is a strong belief that most of the governors within the region are not true representatives of the people but divert most of the fiscal allocation from the Federation Account and Derivation Fund to their states for their private use. This is glaring from the disparity between allocations and the low of infrastructural development. The local government which should be the most democratic and responsible to the people is even more problematic. In many of the core delta states, many of the local government officials do not reside in the locality and hardly visit their offices at all for months on end yet they collect and disburse the monthly allocations from the Federation Account (UNDP 2006:41). Many past governors and officials of the states of the delta are currently being charged to court for money laundering within and outside the country. Below are some examples.

- Former Governor of Bayelsa state Diepreye Alamieyesigha was arrested in London for money laundering and after his conviction was jailed for 2 years. He was also made to forfeit assets worth billions of naira in addition to local and foreign currencies more than #600 million.
- Lucky Igbinedion former governor of Edo state was also arraigned before a federal High court sitting in January 2008 on more than 150 count charges including money laundering and

abuse of office. He has also been accused of stealing more $25 million Edo state government money which he used for personal property acquisition at home and abroad.

- Peter Odili of former Rivers state was also accused of corruption and money laundering. He was said to have acquired more than two aircrafts and one helicopter for his personal and official use while in office
- James Ibori ex-governor of Delta state was also arraigned before a federal high court in 2007 on 103 count charges of money laundering and abuse of office. Part of the allegation included fraudulent acquisition of several mansions in the Uk, south Africa and Nigeria. He is also said to have more than$35 million in foreign currencies.
- Even at the local government level, the issue of corruption is rife. Many of the local government chairmen are known to have embezzled funds earmarked for development. For instance, Mr. Christopher Ogolo chairman of Opobo/Nkaro LGA was said to have consistent withdrawn council funds which he deposited in private company account, awarded several contracts to himself between 2005 and 2006 to the tune of #12 million, in addition to that he awarded to his brother and other nefarious deeds.
- Sam Edem, former chairman of the NDDC was accused in 2008 of embezzling billions of naira belonging to the commission #800 million of which he gave to a native doctor to aid his continued stay in the commission.

Source: Nwachukwu 2008:75

The foregoing shows that the Niger Delta elites have contributed to impoverishing their people. The truth is that the entire fund embezzled would have been used for meaningful development in the region and prevented the crisis from escalating.

4.2 Indices of Underdevelopment in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta is a paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty. Despite the vast wealth produced in the region, the people remain poorer than the national average with GNP per capita is below the national average of US $ 280.

About 70% of the Niger Delta people live below the poverty line which is above African Standard making the Niger Delta one the poorest parts of the world.

A UNDP report on the Niger Delta (2006:36), describes the poverty of the region in the following term: The poor person is one who cannot pay school fees for his children; cannot meet any needs, including food; has no farm land and cannot farm well; cannot take part in age-grade activities; cannot afford to send his children to school; wears tattered clothes; is very lean; and has no house to live in. in short, a poor person is one who has nothing. Consequently, he has no voice‘ in the community.

Poverty in the region means; hunger, being sick and not being able to see a doctor, not having access to school and not knowing how to read, not having a job, fear for the future, living one day at a time, losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water etc.

9. Table 1:2: incidence of poverty in the Niger Delta, 1980-2004

Country/state	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta	45.35
					Edo	33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9	41.61	
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo	27.39
					Abia	22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6	42.15	
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers	29.09
					Bayelsa	19.98

Source: NBS 2004

The problem of the Niger Delta is not just that of increasing incidence of poverty but also the feeling among the people that they ought to fare better considering the enormous resources within the region and the display of ostentation by states in the country which owe their wealth to crude oil.

Due to the many forms of oil-generated environmental pollution evident throughout the region, farming and fishing have become impossible or extremely difficult in oil-affected areas and this has heightened unemployment. Over two million youths (in the region) are unemployed while MNOCs employ ghost workers which they pay for nothing. Militants in the Niger Delta region often use these unemployed youths to carry out their activities as a way of telling the world, that if the oil companies fail to provide jobs for them they can engage themselves. Some of the youths absorbed are mostly on part-time basis or as casual workers.

Table 1.5: Unemployment and Underemployment Rate in the Niger Delta, 2000

COUNTRY/STATE	UNEMPLOYMENT %			UNDEREMPLOYMENT %		
	Composite	Urban	Rural	Composite	Urban	Rural
Abia	2.9	8.7	2.4	7.7	NA	8.4
Akwa Ibom	18.2	12.6	18.3	18.5	9.2	18.8
Bayelsa	6.5	13.0	5.5	6.0	NA	6.9
Cross River	NA	NA	NA	16.6	7.3	18.3
Delta	10.3	16.2	8.8	13.0	23.6	10.2
Edo	1.5	7.3	NA	4.6	1.8	5.3
Imo	6.8	2.7	7.2	15.5	21.1	25.0
Ondo	4.1	4.7	3.6	12.9	9.3	15.5
Rivers	19.1	18.2	19.3	14.1	2.7	15.9
Ngeria	4.7	7.2	3.7	12.9	5.8	16.0

Note: An unemployed person did not do any work during the period of survey; an underemployed person worked less than normal hours for voluntary reasons.

***Source**: Labour Force Sample survey December, 2000 FOS/ILO, Federal Office of Statistical News N.o 322, June 2001*

Another indication of underdevelopment is the absence of safe drinking water because of the pollution of water by oil spills. Water supply in the majority of the states in the region comes from unsafe supply facilities including rivers, lakes or ponds, unprotected wells and boreholes. The lack of potable water makes people to drink water polluted with oil spills which is hazardous to their health. The few hospitals in the region are very far from people in the rural centres and even where they are available, absence of good roads pose as an obstacle to getting to the hospitals on time for treatment in the event of an emergency. The Niger Delta has the worst post-neonatal mortality rate in Nigeria. In the estimates derived from the Nigeria Democratic Health Survey (NDHS) for 1999, carried out by the National Population Commission, the infant and child mortality rates for the Niger Delta region were estimated at about 48 and 35 per 1,000

respectively compared with national rates of 71 and 67 per cent per 1,000 respectively (see table 1.4 for the situation as at 2003).

Table 1.3 Child and Infant Mortality Rates by the Regions of Nigeria

	Neonatal Mortality	Post-neonatal Mortality	Infant Mortality	Child Mortality	Under-five Mortality
National	53	56	109	121	217
North-Central	53	49	103	70	165
North-East	61	65	125	154	260
North-West	55	59	114	176	269
South-East	34	32	66	40	103
South-South	53	68	120	63	103
South-West	39	30	69	47	113

Source: *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2003*

Roads in the region are mostly bad and impassable during the rainy season. Although urban road transportation development has in recent times been given priority attention, less regard has been shown for rural transportation, especially water transport which the most of the rural populace depend on. Because of the bad situation of the roads which has made them death traps, motorists avoid them and as a result people trek long and excruciating distances due to the high cost of motorcycle transport which has become a popular means of transport.

Housing in the region is mostly of poor quality especially in the swamps and creeks where dwellings are made of mostly mud walls, and stilt and strip foundations.

Quality education poses a big challenge in the region. 40 per cent of the people are illiterates. Across the region, nearly all school facilities are in a state of extreme disrepair and require major rehabilitation. There are schools in the region where pupils still sit on bare floors and leaking roofs to learn. Statistical estimates put the proportion of children attending primary school at 80 per cent which compares favourably with the estimated national average of 54 per cent. However, across the region, nearly all school facilities are in a state of extreme disrepair and require major rehabilitation. It is surprising to note that there are schools in the region where

pupils still sit on bare floors and leaking roofs to learn. The secondary school system suffers from a shortage of quality teachers. An NDES report (2000) revealed that in the Niger Delta states covering some 30,000 square kilometers and with over 3,800 settlements and an estimated eight million living there, there were only 2,169 primary schools and 545 secondary schools. For primary schools, this implies one school per 3,700 people serving in an area of 14 square kilometers, and one school for every two settlements. For secondary, the ratio is one school per 14,679 people serving an area of 55 square kilometers and one school for every seven settlements. No wonder 40 per cent of the people are said to be illiterates. The Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan (NDRDMP) report (2008) states that the major constraint to good quality administration and schooling at the primary, secondary, adult and tertiary levels is poor funding with attendant poor infrastructure maintenance. One wonders why this should be the case with huge allocations to the region and money that accrue to the MNOCs, as well as compensations except that some elites within the region embezzle such funds.

Table 1.4: Net Enrolment Ratios in Primary and Secondary Schools in the Niger Delta

States	**Net Primary School Enrolment Ratio (2004) %**			**Net Secondary Enrolment ratio (2004) per cent**		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Abia	98.1	98.08	98.10	97.05	98.85	97.75
Akwa Ibom	99.56	93.06	96.31	99.66	98.48	99.07
Bayelsa	95.68	96.46	96.07	99.58	98.86	99.22
Cross River	93.92	92.35	93.13	95.77	100.00	97.89
Delta	93.88	96.88	95.38	99.05	98.76	98.90
Edo	97.35	96.43	96.89	99.52	100.00	99.76
Imo	98.33	98.25	98.29	99.29	98.95	99.12
Ondo	98.48	100.00	99.24	100.00	100.00	100.00
Rivers	97.47	97.92	97.69	98.55	100.00	99.28
Niger Delta	97.0	96.6	96.8	98.72	99.32	99.02
Nigeria	82.21	60.17	81.19	88.51	83.59	86.07

Source: *National Bureau of Statistics, 2004:86-87*

The foregoing shows that the Niger Delta is underdeveloped in relation to the wealth generated from its oil and unless something is done, the trend will continue.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this paper, we have been able to establish that the problem of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta is caused by the MNOCs oil exploration activities with their attendant hazards which have resulted in poverty, massive unemployment, absence of safe drinking water, filth and squalor, lack of access to health care, education and housing which are symptoms of underdevelopment. In addition, embezzlement of funds meant for development by corrupt Niger Delta elites also contributes to underdevelopment of the regions. In view of this, the following recommendations are made.

In the first place, efforts should also be made by the MNOCS to meet the genuine needs of the people of the region. In this regard, rapid and massive socio-economic development must be put in place; qualified Niger Delta people should be given management-related positions in oil-related parastatals to give them a sense of belonging while unemployed youths in the region must be employed as full time workers and well-articulated skills acquisition programme put in place. Furthermore, amenities such as portable water, constant electricity, state of the art schools and hospitals with qualified medical personnel among others must be put in place for the people to make life comfortable for them. Also, there must be construction of roads and bridges to key towns and communities, coastal roads to link the entire region and creation of development centres in the most inaccessible areas of the region.

MNOCs should also ensure that oil production does not continue at the cost of violations of the rights of those who live in the area. They should take responsibility for their actions by a definite plan to clean the environment and adequately compensate the people for many years of environmental degradation just as obtains in advanced countries of the world. In addition, gas flaring which has a lot of havoc to the Niger Delta people should be eliminated as has been done in Europe and America. It is also important that these companies engage the services of environmentalists who would find out the extent of damage and relocate the people for effective rehabilitation where necessary.

Western nations with oil interests in Nigeria should supervise the activities of MNCOs in the country ensuring that they operate according to international best practices. Strict environmental standards should be enforced. They should also ensure that a certain percentage of the funds generated be re-invested in the region to encouraged development.

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