AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF A LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ON PARTICIPANTS IN TWO RURAL COUNTIES OF ALABAMA, US

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Abstract

The study focused on impact of a leadership and community development program on participants in two rural counties of Alabama, Barbour and Greene. Data were obtained from participants in a series of training workshops through pre- and post-test evaluations to assess knowledge and skills, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired t-test analyses. The socioeconomic characteristics reflected more females than males in both groups; Barbour participants were older compared to the Greene participants; most participants in both groups had at least some college education; Barbour participants had lower incomes compared to Greene participants. The paired t-test results showed a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-tests, confirming that the training workshops improved the knowledge and skills of participants. Thus, this has long-term implications for community development, especially in the targeted counties. Furthermore, as a result of these findings, it is recommended that similar the training workshops should be implemented in other surrounding counties.

Keywords: Leadership, Community Development, Rural Counties, Community Programs, Training Evaluations

INTRODUCTION

Extension programs are of critical importance to rural communities. According to Urbanowitz & Wilcox (2013), an Extension program's mission is to bring relevant human capital and research-based programs to help solve problems of local communities. Further, Urbanowitz & Wilcox stressed that Extension programs consist of coordinated and integrated initiatives that improve and strengthen capacity building through leadership development, business development, management training, and strategic planning, to increase jobs, income, and quality of life in rural communities. They stated that the process of community development has become complex, and therefore, require collaborative and integrated Extension programming to address issues.

Involving community residents in these programs is crucial to the betterment of their communities. For example, Back et al. (2015) stated that nonprofit groups should be involved in attempts to improve of education, health, and social services. They argued that it is important to encourage active participation of community residents in planning, designing, and implementing initiatives. Also, Roth (2011) was of the opinion that community revitalization efforts should involve multiple stakeholders, including community residents, in discussions and identification of

specific areas of focus. Additionally, Lopez-Baez & Paylo (2009) emphasized that having residents contribute to community development constitutes a component of advocacy.

It is also important to involve community residents in training programs, such as leadership and community development programs. To this end, Emery, Fernandez, Gutierrez-Montes, & Butler (2007) argued that leadership training programs seek to provide emerging leaders with experiences that will enhance their ability to lead as well as strengthen their knowledge, skills and self-efficacy. Ultimately, these attributes will enable them to access networks and resources and make a difference in their communities. Thus, leadership training programs bring progress to rural communities. Moreover, Avant, Rich-Rice, & Copeland (2013) stated that leadership is important in advancing communities in the right direction. They mentioned that leadership and the way people feel about their communities are related to the overall success of the communities. They also stressed that it is a process that occurs within a group context and involves influence and goal attainment to achieve rural community development.

Ricketts (2005) also emphasized that effective leadership within the community is necessary to promote successful community action, encourage social well-being, and improve community viability. He argued that Extension programs that integrate leadership and community development can be efficiently introduced into rural communities to accelerate community progress. Furthermore, Okoji (2014) explained community development as a process of community activities that are planned and organized in such a way to improve the quality of life in the community through initiatives and active participation of the community members. According to Ricketts (2005), in general, Southern rural communities have experienced remarkable change and uncertainty within the last several decades, with lower incomes and declines in population in many agriculture-dependent counties. For instance, Webster & Bowman (2008) indicated that the Alabama Black Belt region is characterized by substantial concentrations of African American population, agrarian landscapes, low levels of urbanization, generally limited non-agricultural economic opportunities, high rates of poverty and unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, high dependency ratios, population decline, and low levels of community health, including higher rates of infant mortality.

Also, Avant et al. (2013) emphasized that the challenges in rural communities, such as the Alabama Black Belt, are increasing in frequency, complexity, and intensity, requiring the need for effective leadership and training programs that are practical and capable of addressing various issues in these communities. There is a lack of training programs, dealing with leadership and community development, in the Alabama Black Belt that involves participation of residents. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the effects of a leadership and

community development program on participants in two rural counties of Alabama. The specific objectives were to (1) determine knowledge of participants (2) assess if participants' knowledge changed as a result of participating in the training program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review comprises two sections. The first focuses on leadership, training programs and skills learned, and the second focuses on leadership, community development issues, and related factors. Only selected and/or relevant literature is discussed in a sequential manner.

Leadership, Training Programs, and Skills Learned

Garee (1996) evaluated the impact of community leadership programs. The author reported that the participants improved their leadership skills and practices based on pre- and post-assessments. The participants improved their knowledge and skills in communication, networking within the community, understanding and interacting with others, teamwork, and problem solving abilities. Other areas of improvement were community awareness and self-confidence. They also learned to adapt their leadership styles to fit different contexts within the community.

Ladewig & Rohs (2000) examined the issue of Southern Extension leadership development. They found that participants improved in competences for several attributes or factors such as effective decision-making, 54%; planning and scheduling work, 62%; solving problems, 59%; training, coaching and delegating, 58%, and giving clear guidelines, 56%. On average, nearly 52% of the participants improved in setting goals, time management, appraising of people and performance, and disciplining and counseling; 42% improved in thinking analytically, and 48% improved in critical listening and organizing.

Tackie, Findlay, Baharanyi, & Pierce (2004) assessed a participatory approach to leadership training for transforming a community. They conducted an eight-month leadership development training for residents in Barbour County, Alabama, and assessed the effectiveness of the training through a post-assessment about a year later. The participants were rural underserved persons who were interested in gaining the necessary leadership skills to be better prepared in participating in community projects. Most of the participants were middle-aged or older, had either high school or college education, and were mostly females. In the assessment, a majority (60%) indicated they used the information they received from the training; for example, they were more involved in their communities by volunteering in specific roles. When asked what aspects of the training was most beneficial, a majority (90%) indicated all aspects, or at least, one aspect (e.g., understanding leadership styles and grant writing). Furthermore,

when asked one thing that they were doing differently as a result of the trainings, 60% indicated they had improved their communication skills, and 20% had improved their interpersonal skills.

Karki et al. (2012) analyzed the short-term impact and evaluation of Tuskegee University Extension livestock education programs, such as integrated management of parasites in goats, silvopasture practices, and year-round pasture production and management. These programs were instituted to develop leadership skills in specific agricultural practices. They found that participants' knowledge in silvopasture system increased by 42%; their knowledge in integrated management of internal parasites in goat increased by 44%, and their knowledge in year-round pasture production and management increased by 57%. Also, 87% of the participants indicated that they were very likely to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in integrated management of internal parasites in goats to improve their farm practices; 54% were very likely to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the year-round pasture production and management, and 39% were very likely to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in silvopasture practice.

Karakas & Sarigollu (2012) studied benevolent leadership, conceptualization, and construct development. They defined benevolent leadership as a process of creating a righteous cycle of encouraging and initiating positive changes in communities through ethical decision making, creating a sense of meaning, inspiring hope and fostering courage for positive action to leave a positive impact on the larger community. In their assessments, they reported scores of four factors: ethical sensitivity, spiritual depth, positive engagement, and community responsiveness. The means for these factors were, respectively, 4.2, 3.8, 4.1, and 4.0 out of a total of 5, where 1 is the minimum score and 5 is the maximum score. So, the closer the score is to 5, the higher the propensity toward the factors.

Baxter, Thessin, & Clayton (2014) examined communitarian leadership practice acquisition in educational leadership preparation. They explained that in this type of leadership, emphasis shifts from the leader as an individual to the leader as individual in relation to others. Additionally, they identified eight important factors in communitarian leadership, specifically, communication, relationships, values and beliefs, authentic experience, leading a group, collaboration, and flexibility. Of these factors, communication, relationships, and values and beliefs were the most important to respondents. The results revealed that 95% of respondents reported experiences associated with communication as central to their role as leaders; another 95% indicated experiences associated with developing relationships as central to their role as leaders, and 84% reported values and beliefs as central to their roles as leaders.

Leadership, Community Development Issues, and Related Factors

Brennan (2005) assessed volunteerism and community development. He found that 62% participants volunteered to help provide better local services; 59% volunteered to acquire new ideas; 53% volunteered as a way of getting informed, and 51% volunteered in order to be good examples for others. The results also showed that socioeconomic factors, such as household size, educational attainment, length of residence, and income were significantly and positively correlated with volunteerism.

Brennan, Barnett, & Baugh, (2007) analyzed the influence of youth involvement in community development. They reported that efficacy and involvement influences had significant effects on community involvement. Also, age and household income were positively and significantly related to community involvement. Older youth and youth from higher income households were more involved in community development. Furthermore, place of residence had a significant effect on community development, with rural youth being more involved in community development. The authors were of the view that active youth community development activities present the opportunity for long-term involvement and ownership of community and Extension programs.

Fox, Hebert, Martin, & Bairnsfather (2009) examined the benefits gained by youth development volunteers from training programs. The results showed that volunteers gained a variety of benefits from training programs, including knowledge, motivation, and enhancing 4-H programs. It revealed that 96% of participants broadened their knowledge of new 4-H areas and projects; 93% increased their knowledge of youth development; 97% were energized and motivated to expand their role in 4-H; 96% believed that their training would enhance their particular 4-H programs, and 95% believed they improved in the area of personal development by improving their skills. The results also showed that 66% planned on using the information to enhance the management of a local 4-H club, parish, area, regional, or state 4-H project; 60% planned to share the information with local volunteers, Extension staff, or others, and 22% planned to actually conduct an information session on the local, parish, area, regional, or state 4-H level.

Meier, Singletary, & Hill (2012) assessed the impacts of a volunteer-based community development program in developing volunteers' leadership skills. They reported that volunteer experience generated enormous benefits, including stronger social networks; healthier lifestyles; improved interpersonal relationships; improved self-confidence, self-esteem, and working relationships with others; how to learn, lead, and build community; and take action as part of a group. They also reported that 60% of participants planned to volunteer with the program for at

least five more years, and 37% indicated they had been volunteers with the program for one to two years.

Nippolt, Pleskac, & Schwartz (2012) evaluated the North Central Region 4-H volunteers' contributions and volunteer development. They identified six key roles in voluntarism, particularly, organizational leader, project leader, resource leader, county committee leader, region, state or national committee leader, and spokesperson or advocate. Thirty-eight percent of the participants served as organizational leaders; 42% served as project leaders; 10% served as resource leaders; 8% served as county committee leaders; 1% served as region, state or national committee leaders, and 2% served as spokespersons or advocates. Also, 42% indicated that their primary role was serving as a project leader, whereas 38% indicated that their primary role was being a club administrative leader. This notwithstanding, 90% indicated their primary setting was within 4-H, and 64% had served at least 6 years with 4-H; 70% spent 1-5 hours per month in planning for activities, and 63% spent 1-5 hours per month in direct contact with the youth. According to the authors, the contribution of the volunteers is facilitating community development.

Okoji (2014) investigated the influence of leadership styles on community development programs' implementation in rural communities. He reported that community leaders who adopted democratic leadership styles usually encourage open communication and teamwork among followers in community development programs implementation. In addition, his findings revealed that there was no effective communication between autocratic leaders and followers. Autocratic leaders were too strict in their thinking and perceptions in the implementation of community development programs. Overall, although both democratic and autocratic leadership styles had positive and significant effects on implementation of community development programs, the former's effect was more pronounced.

Tackie et al. (2016) analyzed the relationship between leadership styles and community development in selected counties of the Alabama Black Belt. They found that the leadership style used most by respondents was the participating leadership style, followed by telling and selling leadership styles. They mentioned that the most selected economic improvement alternatives were improving physical infrastructure and providing a 24-hour health facility. The most selected educational factor alternative was providing afterschool programs, and the most selected social factor alternative was providing recreational facilities. They also found out, based on regression analysis, that overall, democratic leadership style had the most relative impact on community development. The implication was that the democratic leadership style was more amenable to community development than the other leadership styles.

Summary

Assessing the above literature, there appears to be a paucity of research regarding the effect of leadership and/or community development training programs on rural counties or communities, especially in Alabama; hence, the motivation of the authors to undertake the study. It is hoped that the study will yield interesting insights not only for Alabama in particular, but also for the South in general.

METHODOLOGY

Pre- and post-questionnaires were developed and sent to the Institutional Review Board for approval before being administered. The questionnaires were identical in style except the post-questionnaire was framed in the past tense. There were two main sections of the questionnaires, namely, value added leadership statements, Part I, and demographics, Part II. Items on the value-added leadership statements were rated from 1 to 4, where 1 means "no knowledge" and 4 means "excellent knowledge." The demographics section comprised questions on gender, race, age, education, and income.

The authors conducted a six-week leadership and community development series of workshops, known as Leadership for Economic Development, in two rural counties, Barbour County (Clayton) and Greene County (Eutaw), Alabama. These two counties are also a part of a group of counties known as the Alabama Black Belt, with relatively poor socioeconomic statistics. The workshops covered fundamental of leadership, leadership for advancing organizations, strategic planning, grant writing, developing 501(c) (3) organizations, and leadership and volunteerism. The workshops in Barbour County were held, once a month, from July 1 to December 2, 2013. The Greene County workshops also covered the topics covered in the Barbour County workshops. However, for week six, in addition to leadership and volunteerism, personal work ethic and leadership was covered. The latter topic was included based upon a request by the participants. The Green County workshops were held, once a week, from May 4 to June 8, 2016.

At the beginning of each set of workshops, a pre-test was conducted to ascertain the knowledge base of participants. Fifteen (15) participants completed the pre-test for Barbour County and 19 participants completed the pre-test for Greene County. Also, at the end of each the training (six sessions), a post-test was conducted to ascertain the knowledge and skill set of participants. The questions for the first section of the Greene County questionnaires were slightly modified to12 questions compared to the 10 questions on the Barbour County questionnaires. That is, they included the 10 questions on the Barbour County questionnaires plus two more questions. Nine (9) participants completed the post-test for Barbour County, and

13 participants completed the post-test for Greene County. Six participants dropped off in each case, or were not present at the final training session. Thus, the data for both pre- and post-tests were obtained.

The reliability coefficient (or Cronbach's alpha) for the Barbour County pre-test questionnaire was 0.70; for the post-test questionnaire it was 0.63; for the Greene County pre-test questionnaire it was 0.84, and for the post-test questionnaire it was 0.79. Thus, the average reliability coefficient for the pre-test questionnaires was 0.77, and that for the post-test questionnaires was 0.71. These reliability coefficient values are in agreement with Goforth (2015) and Tavakol & Dennick (2011) who, respectively, reported acceptable ranges of 0.65 to 0.80 and 0.70 to 0.90.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired t-tests using SPSS 12.0 (Mapinfo Corporation, Troy, NY). The paired t-tests were conducted to determine if there were significant differences between the two administrations of the test.

RESULTS

Tables 1-3 reflect results for the evaluations of the Barbour County workshops. Table 1 shows the socioeconomic characteristics of the participants. Exactly 20% of pre-test participants were males and 80% were females; 11% of post-test participants were males and 89% were females. All participants for either test were Blacks. About 73% of pre-test participants were at least 51 years of age; whereas, nearly 89% of post-test participants were at least 51 years of age. For education, 80% of pre-test participants had at least a technical degree; of these, 53% had either some college education or a four-year college degree; 89% of post-test participants had at least a technical degree; of these, 67% had some college education or a four-year college degree. For income, 67% of pre-test participants had annual income of $29,999 or less, and another 67% of post-test participants had annual income of $29,000 or less.

Table 2 presents responses of participants' understanding of leadership and community development factors. Almost 53% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of leadership attributes (e.g., problem-solving skills and self-sacrifice) that shape leaders to perform their job effectively; whereas, 27% of pre-test participants indicated having excellent knowledge. For post-test participants, the percentages were 56 and 44%, respectively. About 73% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of leadership traits (e.g., cooperative and decisive) and skills (e.g., creative and persuasive) needed to develop the community; 13% indicated having excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants were also 56 and 44%, respectively. Exactly 60% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of the importance of ethics in community leadership; 27%

indicated having excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants were 67 and 22%, respectively. Nearly 47% of pre-test participants indicated having good knowledge of communication in leadership; 13% indicated having an excellent knowledge. Percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 56 and 33%, respectively. About 27% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of the importance of interpersonal skills in leadership; 13% indicated having an excellent knowledge. Percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 0 and 100%, respectively.

Table 1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Participants, Barbour County

Variable	Percentage Pre-test (N = 15)	Post-test (N = 9)
Gender		
Male	20.0	11.1
Female	80.0	88.9
Race/Ethnicity		
Black	100.0	100.0
Age		
20 years or less	0.0	0.0
21-35 years	6.7	0.0
36-50 years	20.0	11.9
51-65 years	60.0	66.7
Over 65 years	13.3	22.2
Educational Level		
High School Graduate or Below	13.3	11.1
Two-Year/Technical Degree	26.7	22.2
Some College	26.7	22.2
College Degree	26.7	44.4
No Response	6.7	N/A
Annual Household Income		
Less than $10,000	20.0	22.2
$10,000-19,999	26.7	22.2
$20,000-29,999	20.0	22.2
$30,000-39,999	20.0	11.1
$40,000-49,999	6.7	11.1
$50,000-59,999	0.0	0.0
$60,001 and above	6.7	11.1

Table 2. Responses Showing Participants' Understanding of Leadership and Community Development Factors, Barbour County

Variable	Percentage Pre-test (N = 15)	Post-test (N = 9)
Understanding Leadership Attributes		
No Knowledge	0.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	20.0	0.0
Good Knowledge	53.3	55.6
Excellent Knowledge	26.7	44.4
Understanding Leadership Traits and Skills		
No Knowledge	0.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	13.0	0.0
Good Knowledge	73.3	55.6
Excellent Knowledge	13.3	44.4
Understanding the Importance of Ethics		
No Knowledge	6.7	0.0
Average Knowledge	6.7	11.1
Good Knowledge	60.0	66.7
Excellent Knowledge	26.7	22.2
Understanding the Importance of Communication in Leadership		
No Knowledge	6.7	0.0
Average Knowledge	33.3	11.1
Good Knowledge	46.7	55.6
Excellent Knowledge	13.3	33.3
Understanding the Importance of Interpersonal Skills		
No Knowledge	6.7	0.0
Average Knowledge	53.3	0.0
Good Knowledge	26.7	0.0
Excellent Knowledge	13.3	100.0
Understanding the Leadership Skills Needed to Get Good Results		
No Knowledge	6.7	0.0
Average Knowledge	53.3	0.0
Good Knowledge	20.0	0.0
Excellent Knowledge	20.0	100.0
Understanding the Strengths and Skills of Others		
No Knowledge	6.7	0.0
Average Knowledge	46.7	0.0
Good Knowledge	40.0	0.0
Excellent Knowledge	6.7	100.0

Table 2....

Variable	Percentage	
	Pre-test (N = 15)	Post-test (N = 9)
Understanding the Importance of Servant Leadership		
No Knowledge	33.3	0.0
Average Knowledge	53.3	11.1
Good Knowledge	13.3	77.8
Excellent Knowledge	0.0	11.1
Understanding the Importance of Working Together		
No Knowledge	33.3	0.0
Average Knowledge	53.3	11.1
Good Knowledge	13.3	66.7
Excellent Knowledge	0.0	22.2
Understanding the Importance of Having a Vision		
No Knowledge	20.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	53.3	11.1
Good Knowledge	20.0	88.9
Excellent Knowledge	6.7	0.0

Also, exactly 20% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the leadership skills and abilities that are needed to get good results; another 20% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 0 and 100%, respectively. Exactly 40% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the strengths and skills of others in the community; only 7% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 0 and 100%, respectively. About 13% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the importance of servant leadership; reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 78 and 11%, respectively. Almost 13% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the importance of working together to solve community problems; again none reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 67 and 22%, respectively. Exactly 20% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the importance of having a vision for community progress;

only 7% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 89 and 0%, respectively.

Table 3 shows the paired t-test results for the pre- and post-tests. They reveal a statistically significant difference (p = 0.000) between the means of the factors for the two tests. The mean for the pre-test was 2.471 and that for the post-test was 2.955. The results confirm that the training had an impact on the knowledge and skills of participants.

Table 3. Paired T-Test Result for the Two Tests, Barbour County

Test	Mean	t-value	p
Pre-test	2.471	4.956***	0.000
Post-test	2.955		

***Significant at the 1% level

Tables 4-6 show the results for the evaluations of the Greene County workshops. Table 4 presents the socioeconomic characteristics of the participants. About 26% of pre-test participants were males, and 74% were females. Only 8% of post-test participants were males, and 85% were females. In this case also, all the participants were Blacks. Nearly 58% of pre-test participants were between 21-50 years, and 69% of post-participants were between 21-50 years. For education, 53% of pre-test participants had either some college education or a four-year college degree; whereas, 69% of post-test participants had at least a technical degree; of these, 62% had either some college education or a four-year college degree. For income, 54% of pre-test participants had annual income of between $10,000 and 49,999; another 54% of post-test participants had annual incomes of between $20,000 and $49,999.

Table 4. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Participants, Greene County

Variable	Percentage Pre-test (N = 19)	Post-test (N = 13)
Gender		
Male	26.3	7.7
Female	73.7	84.6
No Response	N/A	7.7
Race/Ethnicity		
Black	100.0	100.0
Age		
20 years or less	5.3	0.0

Table 4....

Variable	Percentage Pre-test (N = 19)	Post-test (N = 13)
21-35 years	31.6	38.5
36-50 years	26.3	30.8
51-65 years	31.6	30.8
Over 65 years	5.3	0.0
Educational Level		
High School Graduate or Below	42.1	30.8
Two-Year/Technical Degree	0.0	7.7
Some College	26.3	23.1
College Degree	26.3	38.5
No Response	5.3	N/A
Annual Household Income		
Less than $10,000	15.8	30.8
$10,000-19,999	26.3	0.0
$20,000-29,999	21.1	23.1
$30,000-39,999	15.8	15.4
$40,000-49,999	10.5	15.4
$50,000-59,999	5.3	7.7
$60,001 and above	5.3	0.0
No Response	N/A	7.7

Table 5 depicts responses of participants' understanding of leadership and community development factors. About 32% each of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge, and an excellent knowledge of leadership attributes (e.g., problem-solving skills and self-sacrifice) that shape leaders to perform their job effectively; while 31% of post-test participants indicated having a good knowledge, and 62% indicated having an excellent knowledge. Almost 53% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of leadership traits (e.g. dependable and consistent) and skills (e.g., socially skilled and organized) needed to develop the community; 21% indicated having excellent knowledge; 31% of post-test participants indicated having a good knowledge, and 62% indicated having an excellent knowledge. About 32% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of the importance of ethics in community leadership; 42% indicated having an excellent knowledge; 46% of post-test participants indicated having a good knowledge, and 54% indicated having an excellent knowledge. About 26% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of communication in leadership; 47% indicated having an excellent knowledge; 39% of post-test participants indicated having a good knowledge, and 62% indicated having an excellent

knowledge. Almost 21% of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge of the importance of interpersonal skills in leadership; 37% indicated having an excellent knowledge; 46% of post-test participants indicated having a good knowledge, and 46% indicated having an excellent knowledge. About 42% each of pre-test participants indicated having a good knowledge and an excellent knowledge of the leadership skills and abilities that are needed to get good results; 46% each of post-test participants indicated having a good knowledge and an excellent knowledge of the leadership skills and abilities that are needed to get good results.

Table 5. Responses Showing Participants' Understanding of Leadership
and Community Development Factors, Greene County

Variable	Percentage	
	Pre-test (N = 19)	Post-test (N = 13)
Understanding Leadership Attributes		
No Knowledge	5.3	0.0
Average Knowledge	31.6	7.7
Good Knowledge	31.6	30.8
Excellent Knowledge	31.6	61.5
Understanding Leadership Traits and Skills		
No Knowledge	0.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	26.3	15.4
Good Knowledge	52.6	30.8
Excellent Knowledge	21.1	53.8
Understanding the Importance of Ethics		
No Knowledge	0.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	26.3	0.0
Good Knowledge	31.6	46.2
Excellent Knowledge	42.1	53.8
Understanding the Importance of Communication in Leadership		
No Knowledge	0.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	26.3	0.0
Good Knowledge	26.3	38.5
Excellent Knowledge	47.4	61.5
Understanding the Importance of Interpersonal Skills		
No Knowledge	10.5	0.0
Average Knowledge	26.3	7.7
Good Knowledge	21.1	46.2
Excellent Knowledge	36.8	46.2
No Response	5.3	N/A

Table 5....

Variable	Percentage	
	Pre-test (N = 19)	Post-test (N = 13)
Understanding the Leadership Skills Needed to Get Good Results		
No Knowledge	0.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	15.8	7.7
Good Knowledge	42.1	46.2
Excellent Knowledge	42.1	46.2
Understanding the Strengths and Skills of Others		
No Knowledge	0.0	0.0
Average Knowledge	21.1	15.4
Good Knowledge	47.4	30.8
Excellent Knowledge	31.6	53.8
Understanding the Importance of Servant Leadership		
No Knowledge	5.3	0.0
Average Knowledge	36.8	0.0
Good Knowledge	42.1	46.2
Excellent Knowledge	15.8	53.8
Understanding the Importance of Working Together		
No Knowledge	5.3	0.0
Average Knowledge	10.5	0.0
Good Knowledge	21.1	38.5
Excellent Knowledge	63.2	61.5
Understanding the Importance of Having a Vision		
No Knowledge	5.3	0.0
Average Knowledge	15.8	0.0
Good Knowledge	26.3	61.5
Excellent Knowledge	52.6	38.5
Understanding the Importance of Good Grant Writing		
No Knowledge	36.8	7.7
Average Knowledge	26.3	15.4
Good Knowledge	15.8	38.5
Excellent Knowledge	21.1	38.5
Understanding the Power of Volunteerism		
No Knowledge	5.3	0.0
Average Knowledge	21.1	11.1
Good Knowledge	31.6	88.9
Excellent Knowledge	36.8	61.5
No Response	5.3	N/A

Furthermore, 47% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the strengths and skills of others in the community to get the job done; 32% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 31and 54%, respectively. About 42% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge; 16% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 46 and 54%, respectively. Almost 21% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the importance of working together to solve community problems; 63% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 39 and 62%, respectively. Approximately 26% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the importance of having a vision for community progress; 53% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 62 and 39%, respectively. Almost 16% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge of the importance of good grant writing; 21% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 39 and 39%, respectively. Approximately 32% of pre-test participants reported having a good knowledge on the power of volunteerism as an effective tool in community development; 37% reported having an excellent knowledge. Corresponding percentages for post-test participants for good knowledge and excellent knowledge were 31and 62%, respectively.

Table 6 reflects the paired t-test results for the pre- and post-tests. These results also show a statistically significant difference (p = 0.000) between the means of the factors for the two tests. The mean for the pre-test was 2.975 and that for the post-test was 3.442. Again, the results confirm that the training had an impact on the knowledge and skills of participants.

Table 6. Paired T-Test Result for the Two Tests, Greene County

Test	Mean	t-value	p
Pre-test	2.975	7.388***	0.000
Post-test	3.442		

***Significant at the 1% level

DISCUSSION

There were more female participants than male participants in both counties. The Greene County participants were younger than the Barbour County; most participants in both counties

had identical educational level, at least some college education. However, the Barbour County participants had lower annual incomes than the Greene County participants; a majority of the former participants had incomes below $29,999 and a majority of the latter participants had incomes between $20,000-49,999. Generally, the participants converged in terms of gender and race, but divergent on age, education, and income. This may be reflective of specific geographic location.

For Barbour County, pre-test responses for basic leadership were dominated by "good knowledge", for example, 73% for traits and skills and 60% for ethics. However, for core leadership and development issues, there were sizeable responses for "average knowledge", and in cases of servant leadership, teamwork, and vision "no knowledge" was at least 20%. For Greene County, pre-test responses reflected a more consistent spread between "average knowledge" and "excellent knowledge", though "good knowledge" slightly dominated, and "average knowledge" had a respectable proportion. Responses were especially strong (excellent knowledge) for teamwork and vision; the "weakest link" was in grant writing, which had about 40% "no knowledge."

The trend for the post-test results for Barbour County show more responses in the "good knowledge" and "excellent knowledge" categories than otherwise; in some cases (interpersonal skills, skills needed to get good results, and strengths and skills), responses were 100% in favor of "excellent knowledge." Furthermore, the trend for the post-test results for Greene County also showed more responses for "good knowledge" and "excellent knowledge." In a few cases, (communication, teamwork, and volunteerism), "excellent knowledge" was at least 60%.

The results of the study are consistent with Garee (1996), Ladewig & Rohs (2000), and Tackie et al. (2004) who also reported increases in knowledge and skills about leadership attributes such as communication, teamwork, decision-making, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. Also, the results are in agreement with Fox et al. (2009) who indicated that participants in volunteer training programs gained skills or benefits, specifically, interpersonal skills, social networks, self-confidence, teamwork, and skills in how to lead.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the effects of a leadership and community development program on participants in two rural counties of Alabama. Specifically, it determined knowledge of participants, and assessed if participants' knowledge changed as a result of participating in the training program. The socioeconomic characteristics reflected more males than females in both counties; all Black participants; many older participants in Barbour County than Greene County; a highly educated pool of participants, and participants in Greene County had higher incomes

than those in Greene County. The results of the pre- and post-tests showed relatively more responses for the "good knowledge" and "excellent knowledge" categories for the post-test compared to the pre-test. Hence, the paired t-tests in both cases (Barbour and Greene Counties) showed statistically significant differences between the means.

From the foregoing, it can be surmised that systematic training does impact the knowledge and skill levels of participants involved in such training. Particularly, it improved core leadership values and skills, such as problem solving, ethics, communication, and interpersonal skills. Also, it improved community developments skills, such as vision, servant leadership, teamwork, harnessing strengths of residents, and encouraging volunteerism. This has implications for long-term community development as such trainings get residents involved in their own affairs. The more they get involved, the more they own processes and actions, and hence, it accelerates community progress. As their community progresses, they feel even better about their communities. It is suggested that the aforementioned training should be instituted in other nearby counties in the study area, as a result of the obvious implications. The contribution of the study is the affirmation that structured curricular training of residents can improve the knowledge and skill levels of participants. Future studies may include a wider geographic area or repeating the study to see if results will replicate.

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