

*Power or Programs? Two Paths to Community Development*

By Randy Stoecker, [rstoecker@wisc.edu](mailto:rstoecker@wisc.edu), March 2001,

Keynote Address Delivered to the International Association for Community Development Conference, Rotorua, New Zealand, 2001

ABSTRACT

There are two basic approaches to community development. The *power approach* emphasizes poor communities organizing themselves and using confrontational strategies to demand the removal of barriers and biases so they can receive the same opportunities as more affluent communities. The *programs approach* emphasizes poor communities cooperating with resource providers such as government or corporations to develop programs focused on helping individuals in poor communities. These two approaches are rooted in two different theories of society. The *power approach* sees society as divided between haves and have nots, requiring the have nots to organize their people power to counter the greater political economic power of the haves. The *programs approach* emphasizes the common interests of all people. Among the former British settler colonies--Canada, the United States, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand--the United States stands out as having a much stronger history of power-based community development, called community organizing. In contrast, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and Canada have historically had much stronger government and much more of a programs approach to community development. But the present and future holds questions. Are the two approaches both necessary for successful community development?