FOREWORD

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In *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid and NGOs*, Mark Schuller offers nuanced insight into the mechanisms (and failures) of foreign aid in Haiti. Through his extensive field research, recounted here in a clear, practical prose, Dr. Schuller suggests that the most efficient and effective way to engage in this work is to accompany the intended beneficiaries. “Accompaniment” admits many meanings, but it is not infinitely elastic. To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end. It means listening, working alongside communities, walking with them until their goals become their reality.¹

Foreign assistance is often complicit in the failures of imagination that allow inequities to persist in Haiti and elsewhere. The standard “trickle-down” aid model consistently disappoints those of good will on both sides of the complex donor-recipient equation.² But someone must be benefitting; most systems realize the results they were designed to deliver. We need not return to Max Weber to observe that most bureaucracies excel at self-perpetuation (1946b). There are many complexities and gradations to Weber’s work, however, and ample reason to extend a hermeneutic of generosity to most nongovernmental organizations operating in post-coup Haiti. But some distinctions can (and must) be made.

Dr. Schuller does this by contrasting two NGOs: one with a top-heavy organizational structure (due in part to its dependence on large bilateral funders), and one that operates with an inclusive, collaborative approach informed by accompaniment. He shows that sharing decisionmaking among NGO directors and staff and, above all, the intended beneficiaries, can improve the likelihood that service delivery will be humane and sustainable. He also highlights the importance of integrating efforts into existing programs, building (or rebuilding) local infrastructure, and collaborating with the public sector. Private enterprises are not meant to replace robust public-sector health, water, and sanitation systems. In fact, when foreign aid bypasses the government, evidence suggests that it can weaken the public sector (see, e.g., Collier 2007).

The international humanitarian response—one of the largest in history—to the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti is a case in point: of the more than

\$2 billion in acute relief aid, less than 1 percent went to the Haitian government. One could argue that the fragility and lack of so-called “absorptive capacity” of the Haitian government justifies this distribution of resources; after all, twenty-eight out of twenty-nine federal ministries were damaged or destroyed in the afternoon of January 12, 2010. But could less than 1 percent possibly be an acceptable, much less desirable, amount? There is a vicious cycle at work: aid bypasses the government because it is weak, and then further weakens the government. An accompaniment approach starts with partnerships with the government and other Haitian institutions. It prioritizes job creation and local procurement and the transferring of resources to the poor—forms of “capacity building” (jargon that has been divested of any real meaning).

Dr. Schuller regards Rwanda’s recovery after the 1994 genocide as a model of how governments and aid organizations can work together. (And I agree [Farmer 2011b:217–235].) The Rwandan government’s approach has been clear and firm: NGOs are welcome, but they must work within the frameworks and strategies the government has developed. It is a sensible plan, and unlike most, it has actually been implemented. Claims of causality are, as ever, rife with problems. But Rwanda’s recovery has been nothing short of miraculous: GDP has trebled in the past decade; almost everyone living with AIDS has access to antiretroviral treatment; Kigali is one of the safest places to live in the world. The country has achieved security in two senses: physical security and also human security. Aid organizations and donors and governments would do well to consider how these lessons might be applied elsewhere.

Dr. Schuller’s book suggests new rules of the road for foreign assistance. His prescriptions are the result of dedicated fieldwork and years spent in Haiti living with Haitians, learning their language and cultures, listening to their stories. *Killing with Kindness* is fine scholarly work and a compassionate narrative driven by the lived experiences of Mark Schuller, his colleagues, his friends and neighbors. This book is essential reading for all those interested in a peaceful and truly independent Haiti.