Recurrent violent conflict undermines the human development of millions: what takes decades to build, can take seconds to destroy. The challenge is to find an effective way of engaging with states to assist in the transition from war to peace. This is the main problem that this book has addressed. It has investigated the post-Cold War policy of peacebuilding where international donors assist war-affected states to rebuild and develop in such a way that war will not recur. While helping other states in this transition is morally the right thing to do, there is now a sense among donors, particularly since 9/11, that the instability created by protracted civil wars poses a real threat to their own. In Sri Lanka, during the Norwegian-negotiated ceasefire, peacebuilding was the overarching policy approach adopted by the main donor organisations. The peace process was unusual because the donors took a prominent role, prioritising economic recovery issues in the hope that a peace dividend would encourage widespread support for a negotiated settlement.

The aim of this book has been to make a genuine contribution to the literature on peace and the ending of civil wars using primary field-based research to focus on a novel aspect of peacemaking: the prioritisation of economic recovery during a peace process. The lessons from the Sri Lankan case are relevant to other societies emerging from protracted conflict. The conclusions of this book are organised around the debates identified in the book. The first is the challenge of clarifying the conceptually vague term ‘peacebuilding’, and the question of whether it should take place before, during or after peacemaking. The second is the question of the kind of peace we are trying to build, is it a ‘liberal’ peace or something else? The third theme is concerned with the overall transformative goal of peacebuilding and the limited results that such
programmes have. The book ends by reflecting on the issues raised in the introduction: the effect of the prioritisation of economic recovery on the survival of the peace process; the ability of the peace process to deal with typical problems of disillusionment and exclusion; its ability to address the underlying causes of the conflict; the role of the stakeholders in the process; and whether the prioritisation of development strategies as an integral part of a peace processes can act as an exemplar to other societies emerging from ethnonational violence.

Peacebuilding in theory

Peacebuilding is an established approach to assisting states in the transition from war to peace. There are two types of peacebuilding, and this has caused confusion. The peacebuilding of the major donors, for example the United Nations (UN), and the European Union, advocates macro-level structural change; activities that might transform the root causes of a conflict in support of establishing positive peace. Peacebuilding is then an overarching approach, which translates into a broad array of activities, dealing with issues of security, reconciliation, political reform, reconstruction and development. These activities are usually set out in the terms of a peace agreement. Although there are many programmes that involve type-one peacebuilding, it is unusual for them to be referred to as peacebuilding. Projects in which peacebuilding is in the title tend to be type-two peacebuilding, where the aim is to reconcile communities and build bridges between opposing groups. This book is concerned with type-one, structural peacebuilding, the type that relates to the transformation of the structural causes of a conflict toward peace.

Peacebuilding is similar to other transformative projects that have taken place since World War II. The Marshall Plan set out to transform post-war Europe and ‘create a stable productive Europe, whose economic and security needs would be tied together by market forces and liberalized trade, and guided by strong supranational organizations’. Development aid has been used to promote economic growth in poor states by encouraging them to rationalise their political and economic institutions along similar lines to those in the West. The Cold War-era nation-building projects ‘imposed domestic institutions’ on 11 sovereign states. Generally these transformative projects have had little success. Where they have tended to work is in states where there are pre-existing and fairly well-developed public administrative systems. Initially, peacebuilding, like development, was justified on the grounds that it is morally the right thing to do; now overseas development, post-war reconstruction