

## **ETHNICITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY FROM BALANGODA TOWN\***

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### **Abstract**

Political and economic progress as well as social reconciliation are essential for the development of a country. Through this research, the effect of ethnicity on business development was studied. Many economic development goals can be achieved through the development of enterprises in a country. But depending on ethnicity, entrepreneurs who face different problems can be seen. Accordingly, the primary objective of this study was to identify the effect of ethnicity on entrepreneur activities. There, the research was conducted using 250 entrepreneurs of Balangoda town consisting of different ethnicities. A simple random sampling method was used to select the sample. According to the results of the research, it was clear that ethnicity has a positive effect on entrepreneurial activities. Accordingly, the factor of ethnicity should be considered in order to create a more effective product by encouraging entrepreneurs. Also, it is important to consider all ethnic groups in formulating policies and laws related to business activities so that they all get benefits. It can achieve social reconciliation, and it will directly lead to economic development.

***Keywords:*** *Development, Entrepreneurship, Ethnicity, Reconciliation*

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**Introduction**

In order to carry out a business more successfully, it is more important to be concerned not only about the strategies and policies of that business, but also about the factors related to its start, transmission, and owners (Light and Bhachu, 2008). Especially Sri Lanka is a country that is still developing and is facing many severe economic crises. There, the business sector is more important to take the economy towards development by remedying the economic crisis. It will be possible to take the necessary basic steps to uplift the economy, especially through small-scale entrepreneurs. When considering the success or failure of a business, it can be based on many factors. Especially depending on the ethnicity of the owner, the success or failure of the business can be determined. Also, ethnicity plays a more powerful role in creating entrepreneurs.

Ethnic employers, employees, and self-employed individuals are referred to as the "ethnic economy" (Cook, Ekwulungo & Fallon, 2004). When a minority ethnic group establishes its own private economic sector, this happens. Ethnic entrepreneurs, according to Nwanko (2004), are people who are members of an ethnic minority and who must rely on informal or formal support from their ethnic community in order to conduct business. These entrepreneurs also utilize ethnic resources in their enterprises. Ethnic resources are the sociocultural characteristics of the entire group that co-ethnic entrepreneurs actively use in their businesses or that their businesses benefit from, according to Light and Rosenstein (2008). These consist of members of the same ethnic group in management and staff, as well as ethnic networks and cultures. Additionally, ethnic entrepreneurship necessitates operating in a restricted setting, either geographically or by industry.

Sri Lanka is a country with different ethnic groups. Considering the ethnic composition of Sri Lanka according to Sri Lanka Socio-Economic Data 2023, Sinhalese is 74.9%, Sri Lankan Tamil 11.2%, Indian Tamil 4.1%, Sri Lankan Moor 9.3% and other 0.5% (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2023). Accordingly, through this research, attention has been focused on ethnic entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka.

When we consider Sri Lanka, we can see a tendency of entrepreneurs to leave. Also, it can be recognized that the various ethnic groups in Sri Lanka are spread throughout the country. At present, many countries, including Sri Lanka, have faced a rapid increase in the unemployment rate due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is clear that many of them have turned to work as entrepreneurs outside of their jobs. It can be recognized that there is a difference according to different ethnic groups. Accordingly, whether ethnicity plays a role in running a business has been studied through this research.

Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to study the effect of ethnicity on entrepreneurship. Thus, by studying the effect of ethnicity on entrepreneurship, the existing problems can be identified as a country and it is possible to reduce them through the right policies and decisions. This enables Sri Lanka to achieve its desired development goals in terms of entrepreneurship. It will enable the achievement of economic development goals.

### **Literature Review**

A review of the literature on ethnicity and entrepreneurship reveals that the concept of "ethnicity" gives entrepreneurs "ideological support" for mercantile associations that restrict trade, in addition to offering them a valuable resource—business ideology (Light and Rosenstein, 1995). Research by Werbner (1987) and Yu (2001) shows that ethnicity provides entrepreneurs with a countervailing force by uniting them around an ideology of solidarity, increasing the likelihood of cartelization against the competition of the market. Research shows that ethnic minorities are less likely to be employed, to be in the labor force, and to be qualified for jobs requiring less skill. According to researchers like Salaff (2002), minorities' background traits and place in the labor market drove them to become independent contractors. The push and pull factors are important for entrepreneurs who belong to ethnic minorities.

According to the entrepreneurial guiding principles, academics generally agree that without the family's mobilization, the flame of entrepreneurship would not have ignited and grown (Rogoff and Heck, 2003). Scholars have long noted that ethnicity, when paired with a national or cultural tradition, contributes significantly to the acceleration of entrepreneurship when

examining the relationship between "ethnicity" and "entrepreneurship" (Karra, 2017). Furthermore, it has been noted that immigrants who are first and second generation are more likely than other immigrants to launch new businesses. These endeavors have expanded from local companies serving the needs of the same ethnic minorities to global corporations based on ethnic ties (Kara, 2017).

According to Aldrich, & Waldinger, (1990) ethnic entrepreneurs seek to primarily meet the needs of the sociocultural or ethnic class to which they belong, but over time, we witness an expansion of their market area towards a much wider coverage of urban demand. Urban ethnic entrepreneurship has multiple socioeconomic benefits. Flexible methods for attracting staff and funding are made possible by the social ties within cultural networks. Creative ethnic entrepreneurs can carve out markets for particular cultural foods to the point where, in some cases, ethnic products—like Chinese and Italian pizza—even start to pass for mainstream products. One potential benefit of ethnic entrepreneurship could be its ability to help young people from ethnic segments of the urban economy find better employment opportunities.

In addition to these empirical studies, several theories related to ethnicity and entrepreneurship can be identified.

### **Cultural Capital Theory**

Cultural Capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and cultural practices that entrepreneurs from specific ethnic backgrounds bring into their businesses. This includes linguistic abilities, traditions, and values that help them navigate both their ethnic community and the broader market. These elements can provide a competitive edge, particularly in serving niche markets or developing unique products. Cultural theory research was built on the foundation of parental cultural capital, which derives from an individual's immediate familial setting and is significant and influential (De Graaf et al. 2000). One type of capital that parents pass on to their children through money, social position, and employment is cultural capital. Cultural capital is "familiarity with legitimate culture within a society," according to Bourdieu, who also described it as "upper-class culture" that promotes social mobility. Three types of cultural capital may be accumulated: (1) objectified through

words and art; (2) institutionalized via education, training, and employment; and (3) embodied in preferences, language, manners, and other aspects of daily life.

More specifically, the sociological theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986) on the transmission of cultural capital between generations emphasizes the role of parental environmental and intra-familial factors in shaping a person's personality in a variety of ways, such as education and career choice (De Graaf et al. 2000). Because it influences their decisions, a parent's socioeconomic situation has a significant impact on how their children develop as social beings (Bourdieu 1986). According to Bourdieu (1986), children inherit their parents' cultural capital in the form of social standing and line of work. Thus, Bourdieu's perspective on cultural capital can be understood as the generational transfer of parental cultural capital, which promotes persistence in children's social mobility and quickens their desire to pursue a career path along their parents. (Bourdieu 1986; Tubadji et al. 2021a). The cultural capital theory is applicable as a framework for this research to comprehend the causes underlying cultural capital transmission from parents to children, given that social and cultural components of capital also have economic worth. Therefore, a parent's entrepreneurial past can be especially important for facilitating the transfer of cultural capital from parents to their children when it comes to their career decisions, such as whether to join the family firm or launch and operate their own (Lo Bello and Morchio 2021).

It is often known that sons of self-employed fathers have a higher likelihood of starting their own business or inheriting it from their father (Hout and Rosen 2000; Hoffmann et al. 2015). (Burkart et al. 2003). Using data from the 1970 British Birth Cohort, Schoon and Duckworth (2012) concluded that having an entrepreneurial father had a large and beneficial impact on a son's ambition to start his own business at the age of sixteen. Patuelli et al. (2020) conducted a study on young individuals between the ages of 15 and 16, examining the impact of three environmental influences on “entrepreneurial intention”: peer pressure, parental influence, and neighborhood influence. The information is based on a 2015 survey that was completed by teenagers enrolled in a high school in Italy. They discovered substantial proof that parents had a major influence on high school children's plans to launch their own businesses. But

even with a 200-question survey, the study was more concerned with evaluating students' intentions than their actual decisions made after school. The significance of a parental role model in understanding the dominance and transmission of self-employment in a family was highlighted by Hoffmann et al. (2015). A research conducted in Australia (Shoebridge et al., 2012) found similar results for the indigenous population's entrepreneurial success, with a focus on family members such as spouses, extended family members, role models, and mentors.

Wyrwich (2015) studied the transfer of entrepreneurial values between generations as a means of fostering entrepreneurship growth through a natural experiment. He discovered that, despite the lack of institutional support from the outside world for entrepreneurship, children of self-employed dads must internalize entrepreneurial ideals in order to continue their entrepreneurial activities. Grandfathers may also be directly or indirectly impacted by parental cultural capital in connection to entrepreneurial inclination, as noted by Laspita et al. (2012). This effect extends beyond a single generation. A study by Lo Bello and Morchio (2021) has added to our understanding of father and son career choices. It suggested that fathers and sons have a high level of occupational persistence, which helps sons enter the workforce more quickly and with lower wages. Stated differently, an individual's decision to work for themselves is influenced by the presence of an entrepreneurial occupational milieu (Sorgner and Fritsch 2018).

### **Social Capital Theory**

Social Capital emphasizes the role of relationships, trust, and social networks within ethnic communities. Ethnic entrepreneurs often rely on strong ties with family, friends, and community members to access resources such as labor, information, and capital. These social connections are crucial for the survival and growth of ethnic businesses, especially during their early stages. According to Jacobs (2016), social capital is an interpersonal bond that develops over time and serves as a solid basis for collaboration, group trust, and coordinated action. According to the social capital hypothesis, a network's members can benefit greatly from the development of interpersonal interactions over time.

The most valuable resources for entrepreneurs are gathered under the umbrella of social capital, which includes both personal and societal social capital. Originally defined as "the sum of actual or potential resources associated with an enduring network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual understanding and recognition," social capital was originally identified by Bourdieu (1977). Social resources are social capital from a functional standpoint (Coleman, 1988). Societal resources are separated into personal and societal categories by Lin (2001). According to his perspective, social resources are formed only when a person interacts with other members of society. They are imbedded in a network of personal interactions and stem from an individual's interpersonal relationships. On the basis of this, he put up the idea of social capital, which he defined as "the social resources that exist in social network relationships and can bring returns." The social capital of entrepreneurs is defined in this study as their diverse networks of contacts and the consequent social resources they have while launching a firm, drawing on research by Lin (2001).

Social capital for entrepreneurs comes from two sources: external networks and relationships, and the resources embedded in them, which have weak relational characteristics and are called bridging social capital; and internal networks and the resources they bring with them, which have strong relational characteristics and are called bonding social capital (Sajuria et al., 2015; Ceci et al., 2019). The former fosters trust among internal members, communicates information, and offers emotional support through interactions within the firm; the latter helps entrepreneurs find opportunities, get knowledge from outside the company, and make better decisions. In order to categorize social capital in social media environments into bonding and bridging social capital, this article depends on Putnam (2000) and Phua et al. (2017). Among these, the term "bonded social capital" describes the range, regularity, mutual trust, and reciprocity of the network of communication and interaction that occurs through social media between entrepreneurs and their close friends and family members as well as within the entrepreneurial team.

The term "bridging social capital" describes the social capital that business owners build through social media and various networks of suppliers, consumers, the general public, government agencies, service providers, the

media, and intermediaries in the outside world. These networks include the breadth, depth, degree of trust, and reciprocity of relationships.

### **Methodology**

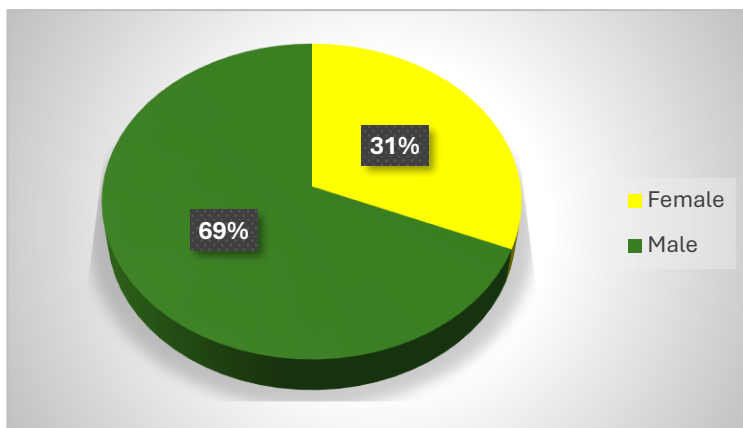
This study focuses on the effect of ethnicity on entrepreneurship. Balangoda town in Ratnapura District of Sabaragamuwa Province was selected as the sample. Considering Ratnapura district, it is an area mainly inhabited by Sinhalese, Tamil and Sri Lankan Moors. Its distribution is Sinhalese 87.1%, Tamil 10.7%, Sri Lanka Moor 2.1% and other 0.1% (Census of Population and Housing – 2012). Accordingly, this study was conducted based on Balangoda town of Ratnapura District. When considering the town of Balangoda, it could be recognized that all the ethnic people, Sinhalese, Tamil, Sri Lankan Moor, are engaged in business activities. Accordingly, the sample for this study consists of 250 entrepreneurs operating in various sectors in Balangoda town. A simple random sampling method was used to ensure the inclusion of participants from different ethnic groups.

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this research. The primary data was collected through surveys and interviews. A structured questionnaire was developed, containing both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire focused on the demographic details of the entrepreneurs, the nature of their businesses, challenges faced, and factors contributing to their success or failure. Additionally, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted to gain qualitative insights into the experiences of ethnic entrepreneurs. Secondary data sources, such as books, journal articles, and reports, were used to support the analysis and contextualize the findings within the broader literature on ethnic entrepreneurship.

### **Results and Discussion**

Here the data collected by the study was analyzed. Demographic information of the survey population assists strategists in their decision-making responsibilities related to future small business talent development strategies. Therefore, it is important to consider those characteristics.

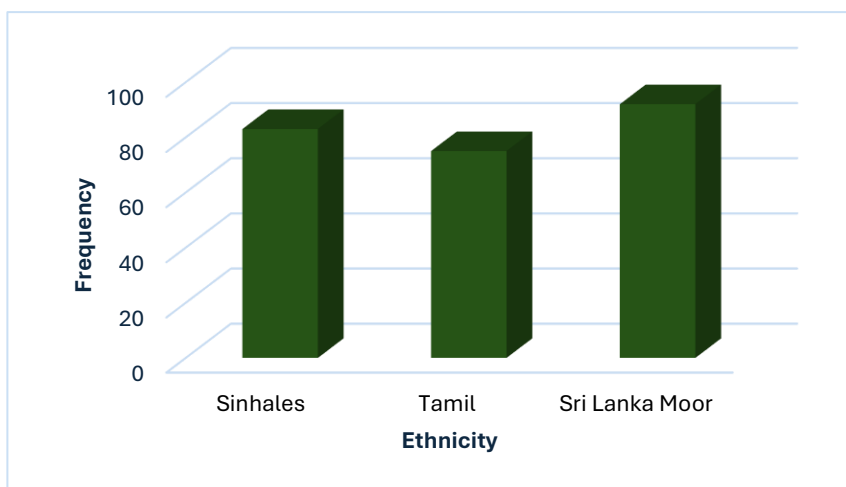




Source: Survey data, 2023.

Figure 1: Gender of the respondents

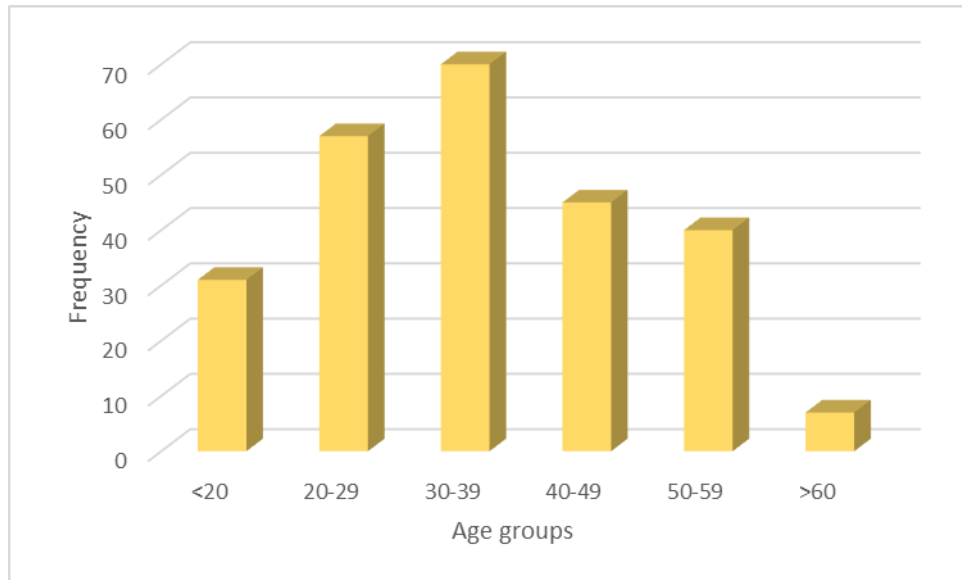
Considering the gender of the respondents, it is clear that 69% are men and 31% are women. Accordingly, compared to women, it is clear that men are more inclined towards the entrepreneur process. This gender disparity could be attributed to cultural norms and societal expectations, which may limit women's participation in business activities.



Source: Survey data, 2023.

Figure 2: Ethnicity of the responders

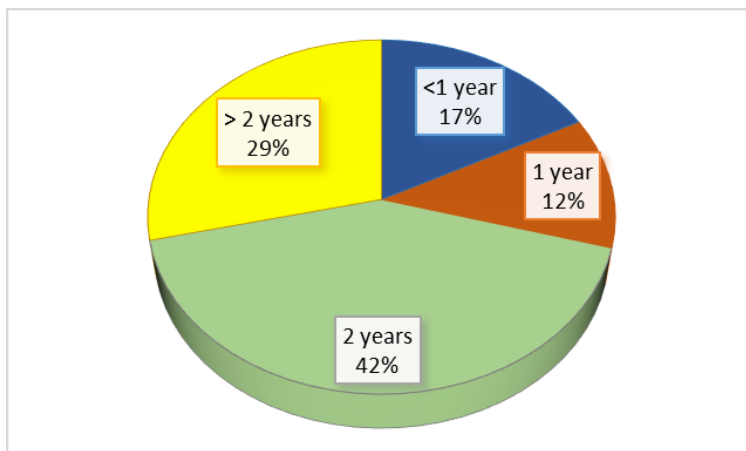
Considering the ethnicity of the entrepreneurs based on the sample, there were 83 Sinhala entrepreneurs, 75 Tamil entrepreneurs and 92 Sri Lankan Moor entrepreneurs. When considering the entrepreneurs of Balangoda town, it was clear that mostly Sri Lankan Moor people are involved in it.



Source: Survey data, 2023.

Figure 3: Age of the respondents

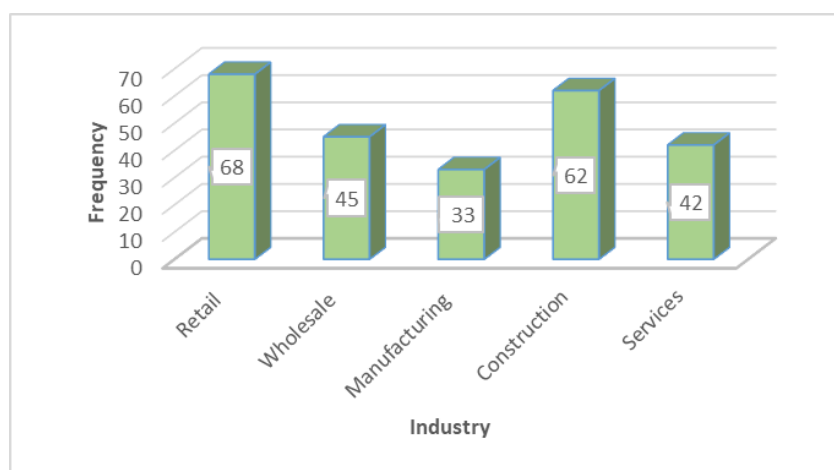
According to Figure 3, the number of entrepreneurs under 20 years of age is 31 and the age group of 20 to 29 years is 57 of the sample population. The majority of the 250 respondents who participated in the survey were between the ages of 30 and 39 (70 entrepreneurs). Also, there are 45 entrepreneurs in the age group of 40-49 years, 40 entrepreneurs in the age group of 50-59 years and 7 entrepreneurs in the age group of more than 60 years. As seen in Figure 3, 28% of the respondents are in the age range of 30 to 39 years. This age group is one of the largest. According to research, the majority of successful business owners are between the ages of thirty and forty-nine.



Source: Survey data, 2023.

Figure 4: Age of the business and number of years in operation

The study looked at whether the success rate of a small business is affected by the length of its operation. A company's age indicates how long it has been in the market and has an impact on its capacity to expand and reach the next size class. A company's size and experience in the market are other crucial factors that affect its ability to obtain financing. Figure 4 presents the results of the survey findings. The number of years small businesses have been in operation is displayed in Figure 4. The data makes it clear that most of the businesses are fairly mature. The majority of businesses (79 %) have been in operation for more than two years, as shown in Figure 4.



Source: Survey data, 2023.

Figure 5: Nature of industry

27 % of the respondents work in the retail sector, according to Figure 5. Also, 18% of the entrepreneurs engaged in wholesale and 13% are employed in the Manufacturing sector. 25% work in the construction sector and 17% are sought in the service sector.

### **Problems experienced by ethnic entrepreneurs**

It appears that business environment ignorance persists among ethnic entrepreneurs. The outcomes of the issues faced by ethnic entrepreneurs

Lack of clarity, 31%

Lack detail, 23%

Unrealistic assumptions, 18%

Lack of marketing strategy, 34%

Lack of marketing skills, 85%

Using resources to create links with suppliers, 28%

Overly optimistic, 5%

Differentiating products or services, 17%

Weak competitive analysis, 9%

The most common mistake is not having a marketing strategy. Ethnic entrepreneurs fail to recognize who their customers are and how to communicate with them. It is clear that linguistic problems take the first place. 67% of the respondents were of the opinion that they lack marketing skills. Therefore, the survey concludes that entrepreneurs should not underestimate the importance of marketing.

### **Measurements of successful ethnic entrepreneurs**

The following metrics were used to measure the success of ethnic entrepreneurs.

Table 1: Measurements of successful ethnic entrepreneurs

	Sinhala	Tamil	Sri Lankan Moors
Employee satisfaction	51%	61%	68%
Entrepreneur satisfaction	71%	48%	56%
Growing customer base	51%	58%	51%
Customer satisfaction	67%	69%	76%
Profitability	67%	71%	85%

Source: Survey data, 2023.

Here, using the 5 criteria of Employee satisfaction, Entrepreneur satisfaction, Growing customer base, Customer satisfaction, Profitability, the opinions of the entrepreneurs based on the sample were examined as to whether they are profitable. Here they were given the opportunity to evaluate their opinion for themselves. It was stated that Sinhalese people are 67% profitable, Tamil people are 71% profitable and Sri Lankan Moors are 85% profitable.

The primary purpose of the research was to study how ethnicity affects entrepreneurship. The hypothesis built for that is as follows.

H1: Ethnicity has a 60% probability of influencing entrepreneurship.

With a 95% confidence level,  $z = 1.96$ . This means that there is a 7.8% deviation from the sample proportion ( $1.96 \times 0.04$ ). Accordingly, this means that at least 62.5% of the respondents believe that ethnicity has a positive effect on entrepreneurship. Accordingly,  $H_0$  was rejected. According to these results, it is clear that when considering Balangoda town, the factor of ethnicity has a positive effect on entrepreneurship.

### **Conclusion**

This research explored how ethnicity influences enterprise growth, with a focus on Sri Lanka, a country with a rich tapestry of ethnic diversity. The study revealed that ethnicity plays a positive role in fostering enterprise growth, highlighting the importance of entrepreneurship in achieving a nation's development goals. Entrepreneurship is not just a vehicle for individual economic success, but a critical element for national development, creating jobs, fostering innovation, and accelerating production. These outcomes contribute to the broader development objectives of the country by strengthening its economy and addressing challenges such as unemployment, income inequality, and poverty.

In the context of Balangoda, where entrepreneurs from different ethnic groups are prominent, it becomes evident that these entrepreneurs contribute not only to the local economy but also to social cohesion. Their businesses serve as bridges between different communities, facilitating interactions and mutual dependence. This contributes to a sense of unity, as economic collaboration

often leads to improved social relationships. For instance, shared business interests can transcend ethnic differences, fostering understanding and reducing tensions between communities. Such reconciliation is crucial for sustained economic growth, as it creates a stable environment where businesses can thrive without the fear of social unrest or discrimination.

The study further emphasizes that ethnicity should not be seen as a barrier to enterprise growth but rather as a vital component of it. Ethnic entrepreneurs bring unique perspectives, skills, and networks that enrich the entrepreneurial landscape. To fully harness this potential, policymakers must ensure that all ethnic groups are treated equally and have access to the same opportunities. Discriminatory practices or unequal access to resources can stifle the entrepreneurial spirit and limit the contributions of certain ethnic groups to the economy. Therefore, the creation of policies and rules that promote equal opportunity for all ethnic groups is essential. Such policies should focus on providing access to capital, training, and markets, ensuring that entrepreneurs from all ethnic backgrounds can succeed. Further research is needed to explore the role of gender, education, and geographic location in influencing ethnic entrepreneurship. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how ethnic businesses evolve over time and what factors contribute to their long-term success.

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