International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Promoting Green Products, Strengthening Rural Livelihoods: A Three-Year Evaluation of the Green College Initiative through Annual Rural Fairs in West Bengal, India

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Abstract

Rural fairs remain an under-documented but effective platform for connecting community-based, forest- and agriculture-linked micro-enterprises with consumers. This short communication reports a three-year (2023–2025) case study of the 'Green College' initiative of the Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad (RKMLSP), Narendrapur, which markets green/organic products through marketing outlet and exhibitions at the annual Celebration at R. K. Mission, Narendrapur. Data were compiled from institutional exhibition reports covering the 54th–56th editions of the Mela. The number of participating Green College campuses rose from four to five, sells rose in each successive year and simple advocacy scorecards recorded improvements in packaging, labelling and transaction accountability. Persistent constraints included inadequate stock of popular items and inconsistent sealing of liquid products. The findings underline the value of recurring public fairs as low-cost advocacy and market-access platforms for forest-fringe and marginalised rural producers and point to formation of Farmers' Interest Group and stronger market linkage as the logical next step for sustaining the initiative.

Keywords: Green College; non-timber forest products; rural livelihood; Joint Forest Management; product marketing; advocacy

1. Introduction

Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad (RKMLSP), Narendrapur, together with its Agricultural Training Centre jointly organises the Ramakrishna Mela and Exhibition for over five decades to promote rural talent in agriculture and allied vocational trades. Within this larger fair, the Joint Forest Management (JFM) Unit—originally constituted to protect forest environments in collaboration with the Forest Department, Government of West Bengal—has evolved into the 'Green College' programme, a skill-training and entrepreneurship-grooming model for forest-fringe and economically weaker communities. Four Green College campuses were initially established at Ayodhya and Santuri (Purulia), Motgoda (Bankura) and Gosaba (Sundarban), with a fifth campus at Hingalgunj added in 2025. Trainees are equipped to process locally available natural resources—lac, saal leaf, tasar, honey, herbal products—into marketable goods.

Though primary emphasises is paid to skill up-gradation training to the rural youths, adoption of marketization of green products is also in the radar of green college as sustainability. The present communication consolidates and compares data from the 54th (2023), 55th (2024) and 56th (2025) Ramakrishna Mela reports to identify trends in participation, product range, sells performance and consumer feedback and to draw lessons for the sustainability of the Green College movement.

2. Materials and Methods

This is a descriptive case study based on institutional exhibition reports prepared by the JFM Unit, RKMLSP, for the 54th, 55th and 56th annual Ramakrishna Mela (held during 19–22 January 2023, 18–21 January 2024 and 17–20 January 2025, respectively inside the premises of R. K. Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur. Each year, a selling counter and an exhibition space were set up by the four/five Green College campuses. Information sources included stall-wise sells records, a visitor comment register and a participatory 'advocacy scorecard' exercise in which partner representatives jointly rated the initiative on an 8-indicator, 5-point spider-diagram scale (acceptance, trust and rapport, selling of items, variety and labelling, unique/high-demand items, customer satisfaction, purity, and fairness in consumer dealings) at the start and close of each Mela. Data were extracted, tabulated and compared across the three years; no additional primary survey was undertaken for this communication.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Scale of participation

Table 1 summarises the scale of the fair and of Green College participation across the three years. The overall Mela grew from roughly 200 participating stalls/institutions in 2024 to about 250 in 2025, and the Green College network itself expanded with the addition of the Hingalgunj campus in 2025. Transaction practice also matured: a formal cash memo was flagged as a gap in 2024 and had been implemented as a customer voucher system by 2025.

Parameter	**54th Mela (2023)**	**55th Mela (2024)**	**56th Mela (2025)**	**Observed trend**
Duration	19–22 Jan 2023 (4 days)	18–21 Jan 2024 (4 days)	17–20 Jan 2025 (4 days)	Consistent 4-day format
Participating stalls/institutions	Not enumerated	~200	~250	Growing footprint of the fair
Green Colleges represented	4 (RKMLSP) + 3 partner NGOs (Avibyakti, DRCSC, SRAN) + 2 FPCs	4 (Ayodhya, Santuri, Motgoda, Gosaba)	5 (addition of Hingalgunj Green College)	Network expanding geographically
Customer transaction record	Not formally issued	Cash memo recommended (loophole)	Voucher issued against	Improved accountability practice

			every transaction	
Reported sells trend	High on closing day	Manifold increase over 2023	Manifold increase over previous years	Year-on-year growth in footfall-linked sells

3.2 Product portfolio

Across all three years, the product range clustered into five broad categories: (i) processed foods (jam, jelly, pickles, spice dust, puffed rice, jaggery, mustard oil); (ii) apiary and forest products (single-flower honey, saal leaf, lac and lac by-products, herbal medicines); (iii) textiles and handicrafts (tasar garments, jute products, handmade table linen); (iv) farm produce (scented and normal rice, country-chicken eggs, clarified butter); and (v) a small set of signature/unique items such as lac bangles, neem oil and a plastic-free, seed-embedded paper pen. The consistency of this portfolio across years suggests a stable production base, while the periodic introduction of a novel item (e.g., the seed-pen) indicates incremental innovation within the trainee groups.

3.3 Sells indicator

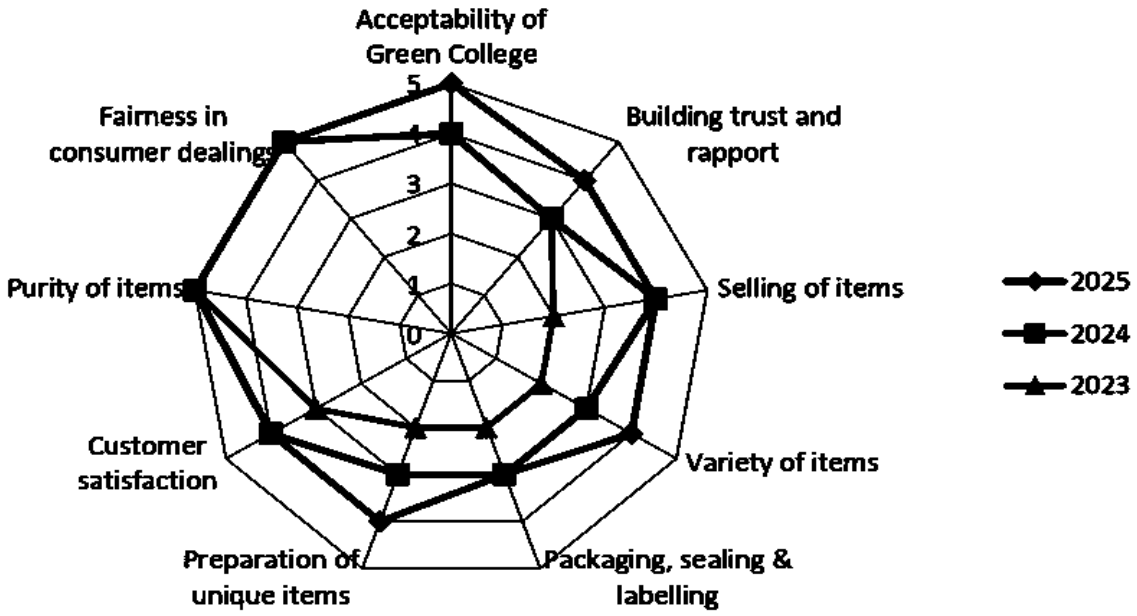
Stall-wise average daily sells were recorded for the first time in the 2025 report (Table 2). Combined average daily turnover across the four reporting entrepreneurs was approximately INR 29,500, with the highest-performing product outlet (offering the widest product range) recording about INR 13,000 per day against a meagre INR 2,500 per day for a counter limited to herbal/NTFP items alone – a roughly five-fold difference that points to product diversification as a key driver of counter-level revenue. All three reports independently state that selling activity rose ‘in manifold’ terms relative to the preceding year, consistent with the expanding footfall and stall count documented in Table 1.

Sl. No.	**Location**	**Product range**	**Avg. sell/day (INR)**
1	Canning, S 24 Pgs.	Honey, pickles, snacks, jaggery, spice dust, pulses, rice, mustard oil	13,000
2	Gosaba, S 24 Pgs.	Honey, pickles, snacks, jaggery, spice dust, pulses	6,000
3	Patharpratima, S 24 Pgs.	Eggs, honey, pickles, handmade table cloths/mats, jaggery, scented rice	8,000
4	Ayodhya, Purulia	Herbal and non-timber forest products only	2,500
Approximate combined daily turnover			**29,500**

3.4 Advocacy scorecard and consumer feedback

The 2023 baseline scorecard (mean score across eight indicators ≈ 3.6/5) identified fairness in consumer dealings and purity of items as strongest and variety/attractive labelling as weakest. Though subsequent reports (2024, 2025) repeated this exercise, both years describe visible improvement in packaging and labelling, and both flag inconsistent sealing of liquid/semi-liquid products (honey, jaggery) as a recurring

weakness. Visitor comment registers each year recorded appreciation from retired government officers, university professors, research scholars and monks, indicating that the exhibition succeeds in building credibility with influential, high-profile visitors even where retail logistics remain imperfect.



3.5 Constraints identified

Three constraints recur across all three years and merit priority attention: (i) inadequate stock of popular items relative to demand, indicating a production–demand mismatch rather than a marketing failure; (ii) inconsistent sealing/packaging of liquid or semi-liquid products, a quality-control issue with direct bearing on shelf life and consumer trust; and (iii) absence of standard dosage/ingredient labelling on herbal products, which limits acceptability among a more discerning, urban visitor segment. These are operational rather than conceptual gaps and are, in principle, addressable through low-cost interventions such as pre-event demand estimation, standard packaging protocols and simple printed labels.

4. Conclusion

Three consecutive years of exhibition data show that the Green College model is generating measurable, growing retail demand for forest- and farm-based green products while simultaneously serving as an effective, low-cost advocacy platform. Year-on-year gains in stall numbers, geographic spread (addition of Hingalgunj), and transaction accountability (adoption of vouchers) indicate a maturing enterprise, even as packaging, stock planning and product labelling remain unresolved. Given that individual entrepreneurs already record daily sells in the range of INR 2,500–13,000 during the four-day fair, formal aggregation of producers into Farmers' Interest Groups or a Farmer Producer Organisation, coupled with a permanent (not only annual) retail/market linkage and government recognition, appears to be the most direct route to converting this seasonal exhibition success into year-round livelihood security for Green College trainees.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the Green College partner organisations, Farmers' Clubs and Farmer Interest Groups for sharing information and data used in this communication, the Ramakrishna Mission

Lokasiksha Parishad and Agricultural Training Centre/SAMETI, Narendrapur, for institutional support and Welthungerhilfe (WHH) for financial support.

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