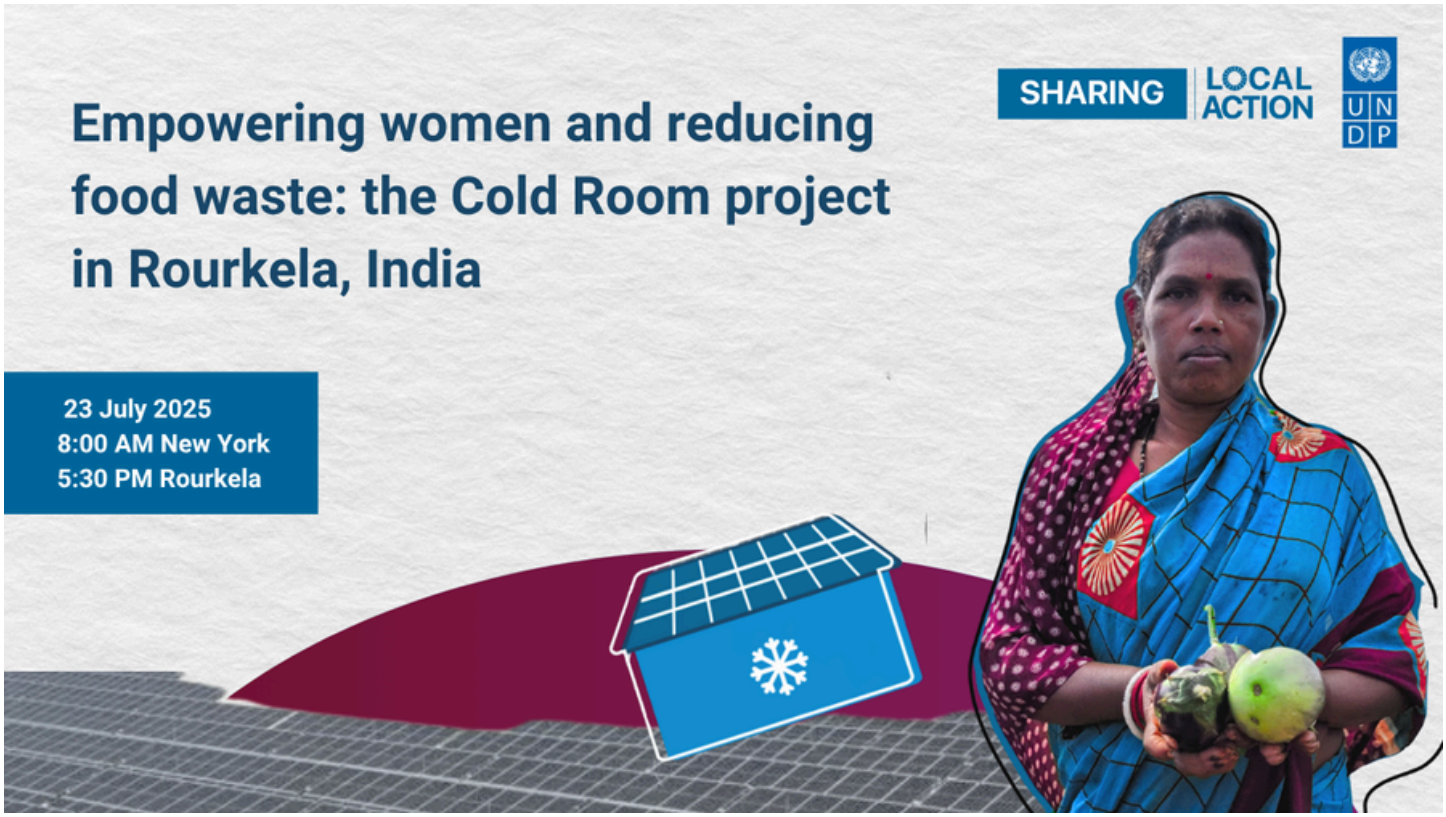
CONCEPT NOTE

SDG Local Solutions



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TOPIC

The Municipal Corporation of Rourkela, in India, has been leading an award-winning Cold Room Project. The project tackles three urban challenges: post-harvest food losses, unstable farm incomes, and women's economic exclusion.

Since 2022, the city has installed **five solar-powered, temperature-controlled cold rooms** in local markets, operated by women-led cooperatives. The model couples climate-smart infrastructure with new market linkages to institutional buyers and last-mile home-delivery services, all moved by **electric rickshaws**. Early results include a **31 % cut in food waste, five-fold revenue growth for cooperatives, and formal jobs for 40+ women**, more than 90 % of whom now report greater influence over household finances.

UNDP's new report, **"The Rourkela Cold Room Project",** summarizes the city's experience into a step-by-step guideline for local governments that want to replicate this integrated, gender-responsive approach to food-system resilience.

The document shows how an intermediate city in India (Odisha's state third-largest city) turned the lack of a food cold chain into an opportunity for climate-smart infrastructure and women-led entrepreneurship. Before 2022, up to a third of Rourkela's fruits and vegetables spoiled daily during peak temperatures; today, most of that produce reaches markets, homes, and institutional kitchens at stable prices.

The solution was built on three mutually reinforcing pillars:

- **Green technology:** modular cold rooms powered by rooftop solar with grid backup, plus electric rickshaws that transport crates between farms, cold storage facilities, markets, and buyers.

- **Human capital and governance:** women's cooperatives manage operations after completing three weeks of classroom training and 18 months of hands-on mentoring in refrigeration, marketing, leadership, and digital order management.

- **Finance and scale-up pathway:** a three-phase rollout that began with a feasibility study and pilot unit, then expanded to four new sites through a combination of municipal coordination, UNDP support, and community involvement.

By combining renewable energy, inclusive governance, and community-led business models, the project advances SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) in one integrated initiative.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION

- Present the guideline methodology, results, and lessons learned.
- Explore how cities can combine renewable energy, inclusive governance, and community entrepreneurship to reduce food waste and enhance livelihoods.
- Discuss how this initiative aligns with Rourkela city's broader model, which aims to create local economic opportunities for women.

SPEAKERS

Roma Sahoo

Roma Sahoo is an Urban Livelihoods specialist serving as City Mission Manager at Rourkela Municipal Corporation, where she oversees social mobilization, skills and livelihoods, and financial inclusion strategies under the DAY-NULM mission—managing Self-Help Group formation, market-linked skill training, and micro-enterprise credit linkages for urban poor communities. With over eight years of experience, she has also led AMRUT urban infrastructure projects as a Team Leader, driven livelihood programs for the Centre for Environment and Development, and previously held HR leadership roles in the private sector, supported by a Post-Graduate Diploma in Management and experience in translating national urban development mandates into measurable, community-centered results.

Bewin Tom

Bewin Tom is the Supervisor of Rourkela Cold Room Project at UNDP SDG Local Action in India. He is a mechanical engineer with a master's degree in Energy and Environmental Management. Bewin is an experienced project coordinator and has previously served as a junior energy analyst and consultant. His international work experience spans Denmark, Germany, Saudi Arabia, and India.

MODERATOR

Angela Mwai

Angela Mwai serves as Chief of the Human Rights and Social Inclusion Unit at UN-Habitat. She leads the agency's portfolio on gender, youth, children, older persons, and people with disabilities since January 2020. Prior to this, she spent nearly eight years as UN-Habitat's Gender Adviser and Focal Point, where she spearheaded global gender-mainstreaming, parity, and anti-harassment initiatives. Angela holds a Master's in Organizational Leadership from Azusa Pacific University and a BA in Economics from York University's Schulich School of Business. She is known for her strategic planning, capacity-building, and rights-based urban development leadership.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Which design choices (technical, financial, institutional) were decisive for Rourkela's success?
- How did women's cooperatives transition from trainees to independent cold-room managers?
- What incentives ensured farmers and vendors adopted the new storage and market system?
- What other similar initiatives has the Rourkela government implemented to enhance women's economic independence?

AGENDA

5 min	Presentation of the initiative: "Local solutions for local SDG action", by Diana Lopez Caramazana, Advisor, cities and local governments, UNDP.
10 min	Angela Mwai's introduction to the session.
15 min	Rourkela's gender inclusion and economic autonomy vision, Roma Sahoo.
15 min	Walk-through of the Rourkela guideline, Bewin Tom.
12 min	Questions and answers from the audience.
3 min	Closing and conclusions by the moderator.

Organized by UNDP in the framework of its work with cities and local governments, this series of webinars generates a conversation between cities to highlight local solutions to implement Agenda 2030. The lessons learnt will be shared globally through UNDP's SDG Local Action networks, webpage https://sdglocalaction.org, and YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/@sdglocalaction8192