YouAct is ready to welcome new members

YouAct conducted a recruitment round in May, looking for dedicated and active new members to strengthen our organization and our work for advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. In this newsletter you can find out more details about our new members!

You can also read more about all our current members from the album shared on the YouAct Facebook page

Meet the YouAct members: [http://tinyurl.com/pxcfagg](http://tinyurl.com/pxcfagg)

International advocacy updates

Following the Global CSO meeting Beyond 2014 and Post 2015 that took place in Istanbul in late January 2015, the Civil Society Platform to Promote SRHR’s Coordination Committee has taken the lead on an Action Campaign for SRHR and related issues in the post-2015 development agenda and YouAct is one of the organizations engaged in the campaign. With the support of UNFPA, Family Care International and partner organizations, YouAct members are closely following-up on the process and two of our members have attended Strategy Sessions and the UN Post-2015 Intergovernmental negotiations.

These were both a great chance to increase the capacity of some of our member as well as an important advocacy opportunity for YouAct members, as reflected in their blog posts in the following section.

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UN Post-2015 Intergovernmental negotiations, March Session

YouAct attended the UN Post-2015 negotiations on developing new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from September 2015. YouAct was in New York for this round of intergovernmental negotiations with our newest member: Frederik Felding from Denmark. Along with his studies, Frederik has been following the negotiations on the SDGs for a year and sees the new goals and targets as one of the most transformative agendas coming out of the UN in years.

YouAct was involved in this round of the negotiations working with UNFPA, different national missions to the UN and a range of other civil society organizations. The Action Campaign for sexual and reproductive health rights was kicked off just before the negotiations, with YouAct taking part in the strategy session on the campaign.

The biggest news coming out of this round of negotiations running from March 23rd to the 27th – the certainty that the proposed 17 Goals and 169 Targets will be the new SDGs. Negotiators from the Global South have in particular been constantly emphasizing that nothing can be changed and the Global North have to a large degree been agreeing with the exception of a few technical improvements.

Sexual and reproductive health is covered directly and indirectly in the new framework. Goal 3: Ensure Healthy Lives specify in target 3.7 the importance of universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services. Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality specify in target 5.6 the importance of reproductive health rights linking the target to the agreements of the Beijing Platform of Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development - two very different and important targets on the lack of health care services in relation to reproductive health and the importance of protecting the rights of especially women and girls.

The main discussion of the March negotiations was on indicators and targets. Global indicators, to measure each target, will be developed by United Nations Statistical Commission as countries agreed it’s a technical process. This will go on throughout the next year in a member-state led expert committee. The opportunities for countries to participate are still unsure and YouAct has asked after this on several occasions. The development of both global and later national indicators is an opportunity to bring youth back into the post-2015 agenda. Youth have to a large extent been left out of the proposal on goals and targets.

Countries at the negotiations agree that all indicators need to be disaggregated on sex and age. However YouAct think we should go further and in particular address vulnerable groups of youth in the indicators. Youth should be part of developing the indicators with national statistical offices as well as being a central actor in data gathering. It is crucial that we have indicators measuring qualitative aspects of progress such as youth perception of education and the fulfilment of their basic rights.

At the negotiations in March, countries have been occupied with debating minor improvements of targets instead of making real progress on the agenda. It’s been unfortunate to see but encouraging that all goals and targets from the Open Working Group are still on the table. YouAct will continue to work on keeping these in the document.

YouAct looks forward to engaging further over the upcoming month and hopefully to see the European countries draft national action plans for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Frederik Felding, Denmark

New kid in town aka the UN Post-2015 Intergovernmental negotiations, May Session

Being a rather new representative at the UN took me back to first day in a school. When I was 16, I moved to the US for a year to live with a host family, learn English and to get familiar with another school system. I remember how I walked around with a map on my first day in my new school. There were so many people, so many groups to get to know as well as a new language and institutional terminology to get used to; AP-courses, NSL, JV...

At the age of 26 I was suddenly taken back 10 years ago and could feel the same mix of excitement and confusion I had back then. Entering the UN building on a New York Monday morning, enthusiastically trying to find the room where our first strategic session was and at the same time look self-confident was just like being back in 2005.

I had gotten the chance to represent YouAct at the Post-2015 Intergovernmental Negotiations (Follow-up and review). I have been to several UN-meetings before, mainly about the ICPD Programme of Action so speaking the UN-language is not entirely new for me, although it still seems like a foreign language from time to time. Luckily I was greeted by the Major Group for Children and Youth, who immediately took me in and guided me to the first meeting. It has always made me happy and feel reassured that most of the youth delegates at high level conferences, regardless of their level of experience, invite you to an open space where no questions are stupid.

It was like a jungle throughout the week to try and figure out how and where to make the most of your time. Before, during and after the main sessions there would be side events, strategic meetings with different groups and meetings with country delegations. In short, the meeting was about the follow up and review of the post 2015 development agenda, so language and arguments were a bit different than what I’m use to in the SRHR community. The negotiations were getting more and more technical, while unfortunately the mentions of young people were becoming less and less. What the talk was about was basically “accountability” of the SDGs - some countries find it to be very problematic to give countries more processes to report on and want to make it voluntarily for member states if they want to report or not. Hopefully
if this were to happen there will be a kind of peer-pressure (like with Universal Periodic Review -UPR) so that all member states would be required to report on progress and challenges.

Luckily countries were also mentioning the involvement of civil society and vulnerable groups in all levels of the review (on national, regional, global and thematic level) - and in this group we can argue is where young people belong and have a right to a fair space.

At the meeting I overcame my high school insecurity. I met with both the Norwegian and Danish mission in the beginning of the week, and by the end of the week I had also talked with the Icelandic and German mission, all with positive outcomes. An advocacy-lesson learned was that brining the same positive attitude that we had in the youth group with me was a great way to approach the missions. I thanked the German representative for hosting a youth conference earlier that month, I thanked the Icelandic representative for focussing on the involvemnt of civil society in the post-2015 development agenda and I thanked the Danish and Norwegian mission for their statements which involved a focus on gender equality. After the positive approach I asked them all to keep their strong focus and I let them know that many young people are following these processes, who will help keep the states accountable for what they promise.

Cecilie Morville, Denmark

YouAct supports the EU resolution on gender equality

The resolution on progress on equality between women and men in the EU in 2013 was voted at the plenary sitting on Tuesday, the 10th of March.

The report analyses the progress on gender equality and underscores the need for policies improving women's position in decision-making processes as well as work/life balance; highlighting the influence of the economic crisis on women as well as paying attention to the improvement of child care systems, maternity and paternity leaves.

It also calls for the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including access to contraception and abortion as well as noting that the sexual and reproductive health of young people should be ensured.

[The Commission] 'Maintains that women must have control over their sexual and reproductive health and rights, not least by having ready access to contraception and abortion; supports, accordingly, measures and actions to improve women's access to sexual and reproductive health services and inform them more fully about their rights and the services available; calls on the Member States and the Commission to implement measures and actions to make men aware of their responsibilities for sexual and reproductive matters'

[The Commission] 'Emphasizes the importance of active prevention, education and information policies aimed at teenagers, young people and adults to ensure that sexual and reproductive health among the public is good, thereby preventing sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies'

YouAct members from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, Poland and Romania have written letters to their MEPs asking for a vote in favour of the resolution and confirming their support to the resolution, which clearly calls for the realization of women's SRHR.

Altogether YouAct sent 101 letters:

- Bulgaria - 17 MEPs
- Cyprus - 6 MEPs
- Denmark - 23 MEPs
- Ireland - 11 MEPs
- Poland - 22 MEPs
- Romania - 32 MEPs

The advocacy action undertaken by YouAct contributed to the positive result of voting: the resolution passed by 441 votes to 205 with 52 abstentions on Tuesday. YouAct members have reached out to MEPs who have supported the resolution, thanking them for expressing their support for gender equality and SRHR. Some MEPs have already responded, confirming their support and expressing their will for future cooperation.

#WorkweWant Consultation in Northern America and Europe

YouAct and YouthMovements.org gathered youth opinions about the world of work, the demographic dividend and youth employment patterns in Europe and Northern America. The consultation was organized as an online chat room discussion and also received input via email and social media comments on Facebook and twitter which were using the #workwewant hash tag.

The input has been fed into the UN High Level Event on the demographic dividend and youth employment in June.
YouAct members at the “Young Leaders for Population and Development” conference

More than 50 young parliamentarians, representatives of governments, private sector representatives, journalists and civil society activists attended the ‘Young Leaders for Population and Development’ conference, which took place on 11-12 May in Chisinau, Moldova. The conference aimed to gather young leaders from diverse sectors to discuss the progress made since the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) and identify the remaining gaps that need to be addressed. The two-day debates focused on population issues namely, migration, population ageing, fertility, sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and gender equality.

Day one of the conference was concentrated on assessing of progress in population dynamics in the last 20 years. Participants discussed innovative solutions for burning issues in the area of population dynamics, SRHR, gender equality and meaningful youth participation while broken up into working groups. The regional focus was also raised during the overview of ICPD for Eastern Europe and Central Asia and debates on controversies around issues of population and development also characterized discussions. The conference participants also had the opportunity to visit institutions working on population and development in Moldova such as the youth friendly clinic Neovita, HIV/SRH centre ‘Positive Initiative’ and Gender Equality centre. On the second day the sociological review of population dynamics was presented, which drew attention to the reasons for low fertility rates. Following panel discussions reflected on the contribution of media, private sector and young leaders to the advancement of ICPD programme.

YouAct was represented by 3 members: Cecilie (Denmark), Anna (Sweden) and Gosia (Poland), who actively participated in all the discussions and group work. Cecilie and Gosia presented the results of the working groups’ session on gender equality and changes in population and development. YouAct members were also engaged in discussions during the plenary panel sessions and actively participated in study visits. Find out more on YouAct members’ impressions from the meeting:

“The conference was build up by different parts throughout the two days; panel discussions, group-work and study trips. We in YouAct tried to spread out so we could cover the different groups. Here, as I have experienced in other youth meetings as well, I found some dynamics that are so unique for young people. Everyone had such a passion about what they talked about, but at the same time a sense of humbleness around what they were learning from each other. I think this aspect is especially important when the discussions are about SRHR, a topic that in some cultures can be sensitive and a form of politics that is reflected in everyone’s everyday life. I enjoyed that the setting of the meeting encouraged to debates and discussions, and I think that it was carried out successfully by the young people present at the conference in a both progressive, but still sensitive way. More of that!” (Cecilie, Denmark)

“During the conference, there were many interesting debates in small groups – and I would like to share my thoughts that emerged from the group discussion on gender based violence, when representatives from all over the region addressed the issue of sex selective abortions. Among the opinions shared, some included legal frameworks against sex selective abortions. I would like to share my view on this matter, as I do not think that another law decreasing the right to abortion would help equality between genders in longer terms. A more crucial approach that I see is the one addressing the value of girls and women to become equal to the boys and men. For that to happen, girls and women need their right to SRHR so they can plan if and when they want to start a family, so they can educate themselves and work if they choose to do so. The right to free abortion would provide equality in a much wider range because then a women can choose to have a family when she wants, and get a good education and work when she wants, sometimes this being before she starts a family. As I am living in Sweden, a country with one of the most liberal laws on the right to abortion in the world, the discussion stroke me. For me, not having the right to free abortion means taking away a person’s right to decide over her own life and this is something no one should have to experience.” (Anna Dahl, Sweden)

“What I particularly liked in this conference was the intersectionality of institutions of public and private sector, which representatives attended the meeting. The conference gathered young people, as well as politicians, researchers, journalists and civil society activists, who debated for two days on how to act for SRHR. I regard intersectionality as crucial, as only with cooperation of diverse sectors we can really forward changes important for enhancing one’s potential, particularly in enabling to exercise one’s sexual and reproductive rights. Participants discussed SRHR issues and related to own experiences, achievements and challenges they find when underscoring the importance of realization of SRHR through various means: media publications, lobbying at parliaments, conducting studies or acting in a local community. The second aspect of the conference with which I was very much impressed, were study visits. I had an opportunity to visit a youth-friendly clinic Neovita, which provides sexual and reproductive health counselling for young people in Chisinau. I was amazed with the passion of people working there, who daily provide support and knowledge for young people, who are in the huge need of obtaining comprehensive, non-biased information and help on their SRH. This visit strengthened my belief that real changes happen at the local level, which is so often invisible in the world of high-level politics. Where someone helps one young person to make responsible choice on her/his sexuality - this is where real enhancement of SRHR takes place.” (Gosia Kot, Poland)
UN High Level Event on the demographic dividend and youth employment

On the 1st of June, a High Level Event was held at the UN on the demographic dividend and youth employment. As one of the youth experts on young people’s rights and bringing youth SRHR perspectives, Anna Johansson Dahl was invited to attend the High Level Event as a YouAct representative.

The High Level Event started with a plenary where the countries explained how they are reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend. Most of the countries shared how they provided programs for empowering young girls and women and how they provide access to education for every young person. The countries giving speeches acknowledged the right to reproductive health and family planning and the right of the demographic dividend to be fulfilled. They recognized the right to comprehensive sexuality education especially for young girls and women.

Companies from the private sector also attended the High Level Event in both the interactive breakfast and lunch, addressing high technology as one of the growing most important sectors. Young people also attended these meetings and have seen similar ideas when they collected inputs from their peers around the globe in the e-consultations that had taken place before this meeting.

During the breakfast meeting, our YouAct member - Anna from Sweden talked about young people’s rights to qualitative education, as an important factor that equips young people with the knowledge and skills that will translate into realizing their full potential.

During the High Level meeting there were two interactive panels, the first on how to harness the demographic dividend and the second on what policies need to be introduced in order to create opportunities for youth employment. Having a youth delegation that hosted online consultations and collected opinions on the topics discussed during the event, led to a deeper understanding of the topics. Anna felt that young people attending the interactive discussions and contributing with their speech in the plenary was a good indication that for the member states, the private sector and the other NGOs, young people’s input is valuable and valued. With this participation, young people showed how they can be involved in the process and work to attain the benefits of the demographic dividend. For YouAct, being an organization that works for the realization of sexual and reproductive rights, attending this event was of the highest importance. Anna brought youth perspectives on SRHR and highlighted the importance of youth involvement in such processes and of investments in human capital as key elements for harnessing the benefits of the demographic dividend.

Anna Johansson Dahl, Sweden

Working in coalitions - Joining forces to make youth voices heard

The Youth Voice Regional Campaign aims to place young people at the centre of the future development agenda, by mobilizing young people from Eastern Europe and Central Asia to bring their voice and advocate for their priorities in the ongoing discussion around the Post-2015 agenda and by supporting them to reach out to the decision makers in their country.

YouAct is part of the Regional Youth Leadership Group and along with ASTRA Youth, PETRI Centre Sofia, Y-SAFE, Y-PEER, YouAct, Youth Coalition – and the group is engaged in the overall design and implementation of the campaign by defining, planning and coordinating various youth-led communication and advocacy actions in the region and support in reaching out to youth networks and members from the region. The implementation of the campaign is done in coordination and with the support of the UNFPA EECA Regional Office and UNFPA Country Offices.

The Youth Voice Regional Campaign was launched in October 2014 and gathered 80 organizations from 23 countries from the region of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Across the 17 countries, more than 7,500 young people have been engaged in the consultation process and contributed to shaping the youth vision for the future they want. In all countries, young people voiced their needs and recommendations and agreed on the priorities they would like to present to their national stakeholders and further advocate for their inclusion within the post-2015 development agenda. Though there are variations in the youth priorities identified by the youth organizations or networks in each country, the overarching ones mentioned in all 17 country reports are related to investments in young people’s education, health and employment, while ensuring meaningful youth participation, including youth-adult partnership and equal opportunities for all.

Check out the Youth Voice website: http://eecayouthvoice.org/
Cecilie Morville has been representing YouAct in the Youth Working Group, and each member of the working group has been looking through about 200 applications. Although it was a lot of work, reading passionate stories truly gave an impression of engagement at local levels. So many ideas on how to improve SRHR around the world based on people’s personal experience, work experience and education. It was reassuring to read that many of the applications and ideas were based in social entrepreneurship, where solutions would be both sustainable and good for the people in and around the projects. That is the innovation we need!

The 200 Young Leaders come from 94 countries and work on a variety of issues all represented in YouAct work already; family planning, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and youth leadership and participation. Now that the 200 young leaders have been chosen, the work for their e-courses and activities for the Women Deliver conference will start.

“Living in Copenhagen, Denmark where the conference will take place - I am happy to note that it seems like both the civil society and private sector has a buzz around May next year - it will be a whole month on discussing gender equality and innovative partnerships.”

Cecilie Morville, Denmark

“In January 2015, around 40 organizations from all over the globe met in Oslo to develop a campaign, aimed to raise awareness on youth rights to sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the post-2015 agenda. The meeting was convened by International Women’s Health Coalition (IWHC), UNAIDS, UNFPA, the PACT (and ACT!2015, an initiative of the PACT) and Restless Development. The meeting lasted three days, from the 27th until the 29th of January and YouAct was represented by Anna Johansson Dahl, our member from Sweden.

The campaign builds on ACT!2015, a movement that is supporting ten key countries to ensure their commitment to SRHR, harm reduction services and ending the AIDS epidemic. The campaign founded in Oslo is trying to broaden the initiative to a global movement, making member states commit to young people’s SRHR and youth friendly HIV responses in the post-2015 agenda.

In the opening speech, Malayah Harper, Chief of Gender and Diversity Division at UNAIDS underlined what Ban Ki Moon wrote in the synthesis report: "Young people will be the torch bearers of the next sustainable development agenda through 2030. We must ensure that this transition, while protecting the planet, leaves no one behind."

So, with the thought that young people are the torch bearers for the post-2015 agenda, the meeting started with a positive attitude! During the three days, participants learnt more about the post-2015 process, its key milestones and how to advocate and make their voice heard. Experts from UNAIDS, International Women’s Health Coalition and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs shared their view on how to advocate for advancing SRHR in the final phase of the post-2015 process. From that starting point the group discussed how to build a campaign, emphasizing on civil society’s role in achieving SRHR priorities. The meeting offered an opportunity to get a better understanding of how to influence the process taking place until September, when the post-2015 agenda will be adopted.

In the work for young people’s rights, it is of high importance to build the capacity and meaningfully involve young people, as Ban Ki Moon said - we are the torch bearers and we should contribute in all stages, from planning to implementation and monitoring and evaluation. To be able to do that we need this kind of coalitions and campaigns, we need to be joining our 1.8 billion voices, sharing information about our rights. In the post-2015 process, we need to work on different levels, global, regional and national, being well connected in order to make a real change and secure the outcome of the post-2015 process.

Anna Johansson Dahl, Sweden

May 28 - International Day of Action for Women’s Health

YouAct joined the International Day of Action for Women’s Health Campaign with a series of micro blogging posts reflecting on institutional violence against women’s rights and health in European countries, coordinated by Luciana, from Romania.

Institutional violence is not only about conflict, extreme poverty or religious extremism, but also about corruption, indifference, bureaucracy, and inequality. These gaps affect member states and often hide behind economic welfare or technological progress. We know that Europe is not free from human rights abuse and we would like to highlight the fact that women in many European countries are still ignored, neglected or not listened to. Each YouAct member contributes to the campaign through a one-phase personal reflection highlighting the situation in his/her country of origin. We hope that this is just the beginning of a longer and deeper conversation about gender equality and sexual and reproductive health rights in Europe and beyond.

Read the blog at: http://youact.org/news-article.php?show=m&id=72
Meet the YouAct members!

As of June 2015, YouAct has welcomed 5 new members from Spain, Cyprus, Sweden and Romania!