



SNAPSHOT

Let's Talk Rights in Thailand

A USAID-sponsored television show provides a unique nationwide forum for open debate.



Let's Talk Rights is the only mainstream talk show that convenes government officials and complainants on the same stage and provides citizens with a platform to voice their grievances.

Photo: The Asia Foundation

“Record viewer participation levels generated by Let's Talk Rights are up to 20 times higher than average, affirming that the show hits the mark in giving audiences an opportunity to discuss current events and complex issues affecting Thai citizens across the country.”

- Thepchai Yong, Thai PBS Director

The extraordinary degree of polarization in Thai politics has been well-documented, and local media have undoubtedly played a role in perpetuating ongoing political tension. In Thailand, quality debate programs where two sides of an important public issue are represented have disappeared.

To foster constructive dialogue on important issues facing the country, USAID supported the launch of *Let's Talk Rights*, a television broadcast which began on November 2009. Recently celebrating 175 years of friendly relations, Thailand and the U.S have been partners in addressing many of the region's social and security issues. *Let's Talk Rights* represents a collaborative effort to raise public awareness about human rights and issues in Thailand through candid debates between policymakers, top government officials, academics, activists, and marginalized individuals. *Let's Talk Rights* is the only TV talk show in the Thai mainstream media today that convenes government officials and complainants on the same stage.

In May 2010, the show aired “Applying Lessons from the Deep South to Bangkok,” a few days after the military crackdown on a demonstration by the so-called “Red Shirts,” supporters of the former prime minister. The show attracted a record number of 138,000 viewers and calls voicing very strong opinions; some criticized the government crackdown, while others expressed concern that the crisis would escalate into future violence.

Now in its fourth season, the show has an enthusiastic following with a growing number of viewers, averaging nearly 100,000 viewers per episode. Though Thai audiences tend to be reluctant to air their views in public, *Let's Talk Rights* is attracting a far higher number of phone calls from viewers than other talk show programs.

Thai PBS Director Thepchai Yong noted that similar Thai talk shows receive an average of ten calls. *Let's Talk Rights* is up to 20 times higher than average, affirming that the show hits the mark in giving audiences an opportunity to discuss current events and complex issues affecting Thai citizens across the country. Through USAID assistance, *Let's Talk Rights* has carved out a crucial space for exchanging ideas and increasing public awareness on a national scale.