

# SDGs for Application of The Four Right Exertions (Sammappadhāna) for Improving Quality Ways of Life\*

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## Abstract

This academic article is to study SDGs for application of the four right exertions (sammappadhāna) for improving quality ways of life. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Sammappadhāna are two different concepts, but they share some commonalities. The SDGs are a set of 17 global goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the Planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 goals are interrelated and cover a range of social, economic, and environmental issues, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice, and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals.

On the other hand, Sammappadhāna is a Pali term from the Buddhist tradition, which means "right effort" or "right endeavor." Sammappadhana is one of the eight elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Buddha's prescription for the cessation of suffering and the attainment of enlightenment. Sammappadhana involves making the effort to cultivate wholesome qualities and abandon unwholesome ones, to maintain and enhance wholesome qualities, and to prevent unwholesome qualities from arising.

Despite their different origins and contexts, there are some commonalities between the SDGs and Sammappadhana. Both aim to create positive change and promote well-being, both require effort and commitment, and both recognize the interdependence and interconnectedness of different aspects of human experience. In this sense, both the SDGs

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and Sammappadhana can be seen as expressions of a fundamental human aspiration to create a better world, both for ourselves and for others.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals; Four Rights Exertions; Quality; and Ways of life

## Introduction

The SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action for ending up poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The Buddha delivered quite a lot of Dhamma discourses to different people in the several places for forty-five years; from the time of Buddha attained enlightenment until he entered into Mahaparinibbāna. The teachings of the Buddha are related to non-violence, equality and peace for improving quality way of life. Such as, to avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind - this is the teaching of the Buddhas (Achaya Buddharakkhita (trans.), 1985 : 51). In Buddhism, good or bad action (unwholesome Deeds or wholesome Deeds) depends on Kamma for human beings from daily activities, Kamma is one of the central of the Buddha's teachings. The researcher will find out the four rights exertions for improving quality ways of life.

Nowadays, people are stepping further into the digital age. The Internet is changing everything, including ways of thinking, ways of life, economy, society, and politics (Phramaha Nantakorn Piyabhani and Sanu Mahatthanadull, 2022: 5106). In Buddhism, there are the four right exertions (sammappadhāna) ways for improving quality ways of life. They are as followings, as in pali:Cattāro sammappadhā Uppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ pahānāya vāyāmo, anuppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ anuppādāya vāyāmo, anuppannānaṃ kusalānaṃ uppādāya vāyāmo, uppannānaṃ kusalānaṃ bhiṃyobhāvāya vāyāmo. The four exertions (padhāna) are: 1) the effort to discard evils or Unwholesome deeds (akusala) that have arisen, 2) the effort to prevent arising of unrisen of evils or Unwholesome deeds (akusala), 3) the effort to bring about the arising of unrisen good or wholesome deeds(kusala), and 4) the effort to further arisen good or wholesome deeds(kusala) (Mehm Tin Mon, 1995 : 265). The four right exertions (sammappadhāna) can be combined two things which are the unwholesome or unskillful (kusala) and wholesome or skilful (akusala).

Sammappadhāna is a Pali term that is commonly translated as "right effort" or "right exertion" in English. It is one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the path to enlightenment taught by the Buddha.

Sammappadhāna involves the cultivation of four aspects of effort or exertion, which are: 1) The effort to prevent unwholesome states from arising in one's mind. 2) The effort to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen. 3) The effort to cultivate wholesome states that have not yet arisen. 4) The effort to maintain and sustain wholesome states that have already arisen.

In essence, Sammappadhana involves actively working towards the eradication of unwholesome thoughts and behaviors while cultivating and nurturing wholesome thoughts and behaviors. According to Buddhist teachings, Sammappadhana is a necessary component of the path to enlightenment because it helps practitioners to develop the mental qualities and habits that lead to a calm, clear, and compassionate mind. Through consistent effort and practice, one can gradually transform their mind and ultimately reach a state of liberation from suffering.

### **Bodhipakkhiya - sangaha**

The four right exertions Sammappadhāna are one of the groups of 37 factors of Bodhipakkhiya-Sanghaha are thus regarded as the essence of Tipitaka. Bodhi means enlightenment. Pikkhiya means literally, 'on the side of'. Therefore, Bodhipakkhiya means the component or factors of enlightenment or on the side of the aspirant for enlightenment. There are 37 factors. Assuming that one can develop them fully will attain enlightenment.

The 37 Factors of Enlightenment are 4 Foundations of Mindfulness, 4 Right Exertions, 4 Foundations of Accomplishment, 5 Faculties, 5 Powers, 7 Constituents of Enlightenment and 8 Constituents of the Path. In this regarding, the researcher will focus on the four right exertions (sammappadhāna) for improving quality ways of life.

Cattāro sammappadhānā—uppannānaü pāpakānaṁ pahānāya vāyāmo, anuppannānaṁ pāpakānaṁ anuppādāya vāyāmo, anuppannānaṁ kusalānaṁ uppādāya vāyāmo, upannānaṁ kusalānaṁ bhiyyobhāvāya vāyāmo. (Narada Mahathera, 1979 : 380)

The Four Right Exertions, also known as the Four Right Efforts, are an essential teaching of Buddhism that are designed to help practitioners develop their mental faculties and overcome unwholesome mental states. These four exertions are:

- 1) The exertion to prevent unwholesome states from arising.

- 2) The exertion to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen.
- 3) The exertion to develop wholesome states that have not yet arisen.
- 4) The exertion to maintain and increase wholesome states that have already arisen.

These four exertions are considered "right" because they are part of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the path to liberation from suffering in Buddhism. By cultivating these four exertions, a practitioner can gradually purify their mind and overcome the causes of suffering.

## The Background of SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established by the United Nations in 2015 as a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were in place from 2000 to 2015. The MDGs focused primarily on poverty reduction and social development, and while they achieved some notable successes, they also had limitations in terms of their scope and implementation.

The SDGs were designed to build on the successes of the MDGs while addressing their limitations. They aim to provide a universal, integrated, and transformative agenda for sustainable development, with a particular focus on leaving no one behind. The goals are interconnected, with progress in one area likely to have positive impacts on others, and they recognize the need for an integrated approach to development that takes into account the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Overall, the SDGs represent a major step forward in international efforts to promote sustainable development and address some of the most pressing challenges facing the world today.

In contrast, the SDGs are a much more comprehensive framework, covering a broad range of economic, social, and environmental issues. They were developed through an extensive consultation process involving governments, civil society, and the private sector, and were adopted by all 193 member states of the United Nations in September 2015.

SDGs stands for Sustainable Development Goals. They are a set of 17 goals established by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The SDGs (United Nations, (New York: S-09 FWS, NY 10017, USA) : 40) are:

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-being

4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water
15. Life On Land
16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
17. Partnerships for the Goals

The SDGs are interconnected and aim to tackle the root causes of poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. They provide a framework for countries, organizations, and individuals to work towards a more sustainable and equitable world. All 193 member states of the United Nations have committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are working towards achieving them. This includes both developed and developing countries, as well as countries with diverse social, economic, and environmental contexts.

The SDGs are intended to be a universal framework for development, and therefore all countries are expected to make efforts to achieve them. However, given the varying levels of development and resources available to different countries, there is a recognition that some countries may face greater challenges than others in achieving the goals.

To support the implementation of the SDGs, countries are encouraged to develop their own national strategies and plans, which take into account their specific circumstances and priorities. The United Nations provides technical support and resources to help countries develop and implement these plans, and also works to facilitate collaboration and partnerships among countries, civil society, and the private sector to achieve the goals.

Overall, the success of the SDGs will depend on the collective efforts of all countries, as well as the engagement and participation of communities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. The SDGs are considered the gold standard for

sustainable development, as they provide a comprehensive framework for balancing economic, social, and environmental priorities. Governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and individuals are encouraged to work together to achieve these goals and ensure a sustainable future for all.

People everywhere need to be free of fear formal forms of violence and feel safe as they go about their lives whatever their ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. Conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice remain threats to sustainable development.

### **The Connection of the SDGs and the four Right Exertions (Sammappadhāna)**

The Sustainable Development Goals SDGs's number 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions are connected to the four right exertions (sammappadhāna). The more detail about SDGs number 8 promotes sustained, inclusive sustainable economic growth, full, productive employment, decent work for all. Decent employment and economic growth to achieve higher production goals and produce through technological innovations. Support measures to eliminate slavery and human trafficking Create employment and work that is suitable for all genders.

The Sustainable Development Goals SDGs's number 16: promote peaceful and inclusive society for inclusion as all levels. Peace and Justice Strong Institutions are a peaceful, just, non-discriminatory society that means reducing all forms of violence in society, resolving internal and international conflicts, murder, reducing the use of illegal weapons, promoting human rights and to support the participation of developing countries in the institutions of governance around the world. The targets of the number sixteen SDGs are as following.

1. Significantly reduce all forms of violence and violence-related mortality everywhere.
2. End all forms of abuse and exploitation, human trafficking, violence and torture against children.
3. Promote the rule of law both nationally and internationally, and ensuring equal access to justice.
4. Reduce corruption in positions and all forms of bribery.

### **Peace is When?**

Everyone lives in safety, without fear or threat of violence, and no form of violence is tolerated in law or in practice. Everyone is equal before the law, the systems for justice are

trusted, and fair and effective laws protect people's rights. Everyone is able to participate in shaping political decisions and the government is accountable to the people. Everyone has fair and equal access to the basic needs for their wellbeing - such as food, clean water, shelter, education, healthcare and a decent living environment. Everyone has an equal opportunity to work and make a living, regardless of gender, ethnicity or any other aspect of identity.

The teachings of the Buddha are mostly mentioned to make conclusion of all: *Sabbapāpassa akaraṇam kusalassa upasampadā sacitta pariyo dāpanam etam buddhāna sāsanam* (Hinuber, O. von; Norman, K.R. (eds.), 1995 : 52). The non-doing of any evil, the performance of what's skillful, and the cleansing of one's own mind. This is the of Awakened (Dhammapada, Ven. Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.), 1997 : 72).

### **The Four Right Exertions (Sammappadhāna) in Theravada Buddhism**

In this part, without researching about the unwholesome and wholesome (akusala and kusala) which are connected to the four right exertions (sammappadhāna) will not be completed in this dissertation, the researcher will be focused on research works, namely:- (1) The Meaning and Concept of the four right exertions sammappadhāna in Theravada Buddhism, (2) The Root of Akusala (Unwholesome or Unskillful) and Kusala (Wholesome or Skillful), (3) The Types of Kammapatha and (4) The Benefits of Sammappadhāna. The details are as followings.

Sammappadhāna is the right exertions that one should cultivate in order to develop wholesome states of mind and overcome unwholesome tendencies. There are or four exertions four supreme efforts (sammappadhāna): (1) the effort to abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen; (2) the effort to prevent unrisen unwholesome mental states from arising; (3) the effort to develop wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen; and (4) the effort to maintain and perfect wholesome mental states that have already arisen (Ācariya Anuruddha, 2007 : 240). Sammappadhāna is the effort to cultivate wholesome states of mind and abandon unwholesome ones on the path to liberation in Theravāda Buddhism.

### **The Meaning and the Concept of Sammappadhāna in Theravada Buddhism**

In Theravāda Buddhism, Sammappadhāna (Pali) is a term that refers to the mental factor of "right effort" or "right exertion" on the path to liberation. The Four Right Exertions, which are part of the Noble Eightfold Path, are:

1. The effort to prevent unwholesome states of mind from arising;
2. The effort to abandon unwholesome states of mind that have already arisen;

3. The effort to cultivate wholesome states of mind that have not yet arisen;
4. The effort to maintain and develop wholesome states of mind that have already arisen.

Sammappadhāna is an essential factor in the path to liberation as it involves the cultivation of mental discipline, mindfulness, and concentration. Through the practice of right effort, one develops the ability to recognize unwholesome states of mind, abandon them, and cultivate wholesome ones. This practice leads to the development of wisdom and the eventual cessation of suffering. Sammappadhāna is combined by two words, they are sammā and padhāna. Sammā means thoroughly, properly, rightly; in the right way, as it ought to be, best, perfectly (T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), 1921 : 154). Padhāna means exertion, energetic effort, striving, concentration of mind and making effort or putting pressure onto somethings by using a lot of physical or mental energy and power in order to make something happen. Sammappadhāna means making exertion or effort in the right way. Some of the Buddhist scholar translated as supreme effort.

## The Roots of Akusala (Unwholesome or Unskillful) and Kusala (Wholesome or Skillful)

### The Roots of Akusala (Unwholesome or Unskillful)

"Akusala" is a Pali term that is commonly translated as "unwholesome" or "unskillful." In Buddhist teachings, akusala refers to thoughts, words, and actions that are detrimental to one's own well-being and the well-being of the others. 'Akusala' refers to unwholesome or unskillful mental and physical states or actions that lead to suffering and dissatisfaction. There are three kinds of the roots of akusala (Unwholesome) according to *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, it is explained by the Buddha “*Tiṇī’ imāni bhikkave akusalamūlāni. Katamāni tiṇī?*” (Morris, Richard, The Rev. (ed.), 1961 : 201)

1. Lobho akusalamūlaṁ,
2. Doso akusalamūlaṁ,
3. Moho akusalamūlaṁ.”

There are three roots of the Unwholesome, in according with the Numerical discourses of the Buddha in *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. What are they? (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012 : 291) They are as followings.

1. The Unwholesome root, greed;

2. The Unwholesome root, hatred;
3. The Unwholesome root, delusion.

These three kinds of ‘roots of akusala’ are commonly identified as: greed, hatred and delusion. These three roots are considered the fundamental causes of all unwholesome thoughts, speech, and actions. The roots of the unwholesome are Destroying life, taking what is not given (stealing), engaging in misconduct with respect to sensual pleasures (sexual misconduct), telling lies, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle chatter, intense desire, malice, and wrong view (Most Venerable Phra Brahmapundit (chief ed.) and Peter Harvey (ed.), 2017 : 305). These roots give rise to unwholesome thoughts, speech, and actions that cause suffering for oneself and others. The cultivation of their opposite qualities - generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom is considered essential for the development of a wholesome and compassionate mind.

### **The Roots of Kusala (Wholesome or Skillful)**

The word of ‘Kusala’: clever in finding out what is good or profitable (T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (eds.), 1921 : 24). "Kusala" is a Pali term that is commonly translated as "wholesome" or "skillful." It is a central aspect of Buddhist practice and refers to thoughts, words, and actions that are beneficial to oneself and the others. The Buddha mentioned about the roots of Kusala (Wholesome or Skillful) in *Āṅguttara-Nikāya* as followings, “*Tiṇī’ imāni bhikkave kusalamūlāni. Katamāni tiṇī?*” (Morris, Richard, The Rev. (ed.), 1961 : 203)

1. Alobho kusalamūlaṁ,
2. Adoso kusalamūlaṁ,
3. Amoho kusalamūlaṁ.”

Bhikkhu, there are three roots of the Wholesome, in according with the Numerical discourses of the Buddha in *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*. What are they? (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012 : 292)

1. The Wholesome root, non-greed;
2. The Wholesome root, non-hatred;
3. The Wholesome root, non-delusion.

These three roots mentioned as above are considered the fundamental causes of all wholesome thoughts, speech, and actions. When one is not greedy, hatred and delusion do not arise from the absence of greed, hatred and delusion such as abstaining from destroying life, from taking what is not given, from engaging in misconduct with respect to sensual pleasures, from telling lies, from divisive speech, from harsh speech, and from idle chatter,

absence of intense desire, absence of maliciousness and right view. The Non-greed, non-hatred and delusion are the roots of wholesome.

The cultivation of the non-greed, non-hatred and delusion are considered essential for the development of a peaceful and compassionate mind. These roots give rise to wholesome thoughts, speech, and actions that promote well-being for oneself and others. The cultivation of these wholesome roots is considered essential for the attainment of Nirvana, the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice.

### **The Types of Kammapatha**

In Buddhism, Kamma is the central concept of the Buddha's teaching, it refers to the intentional actions of individuals and the concept of cause and effect. The word "kamma" literally means "action or deed", it is believed that our actions have consequences that will affect us in this life and in future lives, according to the law of cause and effect.

The Buddhist concept of karma is seen as a crucial factor in the process of rebirth and the cycle of existence known as samsara. The quality of one's karma determines the nature of one's rebirth, and the accumulation of positive karma is believed to lead to a better rebirth and ultimately to liberation from samsara. There are two kinds of Kammapatha or Action: Akusala-kamma (Unwholesome Action) and Kusala-kamma (Wholesome Action).

According to the Somdet Phra Bodhaghosacariya (P.A. Payutto), he has shown the types of kammapatha in his book of Buddhadamma (Bhikkhu. P.A. Payutto, Robin Philip Moore (trans.), 2017 : 320).

**1. Akusala-kamma (Unwholesome Action):** Unskillful actions; bad actions. It refers to unwholesome actions that lead to negative consequences and hinder spiritual progress. These actions arise from unwholesome roots and negative mental states such as greed, hatred, and delusion (lobha, dosa, and moha).

**2. Kusala-kamma (Wholesome Action):** Skillful actions; good actions. It refers to wholesome actions that lead to positive consequences and support spiritual progress. These actions arise from wholesome roots and positive mental states such as non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion (alobha, adosa, and amoha).

There are three kinds of kamma or action: 1) Physical action (kāya-kamma): actions by way of the body, 2) Verval action (vacī-kamma): actions by way of speech, and 3) Mental action (mano-kamma): actions by way of mind.

### **The Courses of Ten Akusala-kammapatha (Unwholesome Actions)**

There are ten *akusala-kamma* (J.Estlin Carpenter, D.Litt. ed., 1976 : 269), or unwholesome actions, that are considered harmful and lead to negative consequences for oneself and others. These ten actions (T.W. Rhys Davids and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (Tr.), 1921 : 247) are divided into three categories: bodily, verbal, and mental. Which are:

Three Categories	<i>Dasa Akusala-kammopatha</i>	Ten Bad Channels of Actions
Kāya-kamma Physical action	<i>Pāṇātipāto</i>	Taking life: This refers to the intentional killing of a living being, including humans and animals.
	<i>Adinnādānam</i>	Theft: This refers to the act of taking someone else's property without their permission.
	<i>Kāmesu micchācāro</i>	Inchastity: This refers to any sexual activity that is harmful, exploitative, or outside the bounds of consensual relationships.
Vacī-kamma Verbal action	<i>Mucā-vādo</i>	Lying: This refers to intentional falsehood or deception, including exaggeration, distortion, and withholding of the truth.
	<i>Pisuṇā vāsā</i>	Abuse: This refers to any speech that is intended to harm or defame another person.
	<i>Pharusā vāsā</i>	Slander: This refers to any speech that is hurtful, abusive, or offensive.
	<i>Samphappalāpo</i>	Idle talk: This refers to any speech that is frivolous, meaningless, or lacking in substance.
Mano-kamma Mental action	<i>Abhijjhā</i>	Covetousness: This refers to the desire to possess or acquire what belongs to others.

	<i>Vyāpādo</i>	Malevolence: This refers to any thought or emotion that is motivated by hatred, anger, or malice.
	<i>Micchādhiṭṭhi</i>	Wrong View: This refers to any belief or attitude that is contrary to the teachings of the Buddha, including denying the law of karma or rejecting the existence of the Noble Eightfold Path.

*Kāya-kamma* refers to physical or bodily action, which is one of the three types of actions (*kamma*). The quality of one's bodily actions can have significant effects on one's karma.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the SDGs and the four right exertions (sammappadhāna) for improving quality ways of life in Theravada Buddhism. It is that a long way to go to achieve peaceful and inclusive societies and effective institutions. Conflict, violence, corruption, and injustice remain significant challenges in many parts of the world, and marginalized and vulnerable groups often face discrimination and exclusion. However, progress has been made in some areas, with countries taking steps to strengthen institutions, increase transparency and accountability, and promote human rights and the rule of law. The SDG 16 targets have also raised awareness of the importance of peaceful and inclusive societies and effective institutions, and have provided a framework for action.

To achieve SDG 16 by 2030, it will be important to continue efforts to strengthen institutions, promote human rights and the rule of law, and address the root causes of conflict and violence. This will require political will, leadership, and international cooperation, as well as the involvement of civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders. It will also require addressing systemic issues such as inequality and discrimination, and empowering marginalized and vulnerable groups to participate in decision-making processes.

The benefit of Sammappadhāna, or right effort, in Theravāda Buddhism has several benefits that can lead to the attainment of liberation. Here are some of the benefits of Sammappadhāna with references to the Buddhist scriptures: 1). Cultivation of wholesome

states of mind: One of the benefits of Samppadadhāna is the cultivation of wholesome states of mind, such as love, compassion, and equanimity. The Buddha states that the development of wholesome states of mind leads to happiness and peace: "The person who cultivates loving-kindness...has a mind of loving-kindness, and with a mind of loving-kindness he regards all living beings...Thus this person is one who dwells in happiness and is a delight to others".

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