

UN goals to focus on quality education for children: Unicef

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United Nations: With more than 200 million children unable to read and write globally, the UN's new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will focus on access to quality education, the executive director of Unicef has said.

"There are 250 million children around the world of fourth and fifth grade age who can not read, write or do numbers," Xinhua news agency quoted Anthony Lake as saying on Monday.

The new SDGs -- a set of 17 economic, social and environmental goals expected to be adopted by world leaders here on Friday -- go beyond the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -- because they are about the quality of education and not just whether or not kids are in school, said Lake.

MDGs are a set of eight anti-poverty targets to be reached by the end of 2015.

"Just measuring the kids in or out of school does not measure attendance, it does not measure learning, and one of the advances in the SDGs now is quality education not simply education," he said.

"The shocking figure is that there are 130 million kids who have reached the fourth grade around the world and still are not learning their numbers or how to read or write," Lake said.

Another 120 million children do not even complete four years of schooling, according to Unicef figures, meaning that in total 250 million of the world's 650 million primary school age children are not learning even basic literacy and numeracy.

Lake said health and education, as well as hope, are important for children if the world is to achieve its sustainable development aims.

"If we do not give today's children the health and the education -- and then I would emphasise -- the hope, the belief that they can make the world better, then the SDGs will fail," he said.

Unicef has plans to scale up its activities to help refugees in European countries, while continuing to provide much needed support to refugees in countries surrounding Syria, he added.

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