PASCAL Declaration on Learning Neighbourhoods on the occasion of the 19th PASCAL Observatory International conference hosted by NIT Calicut and in collaboration with ASEM LLL Hub South Asia, 10-12 November 2025

Learning Neighbourhoods refer to local communities or geographic areas that are intentionally structured to foster lifelong learning opportunities for all residents. This concept recognizes the neighbourhood as a key unit for promoting inclusive, accessible, and diverse forms of learning, both formal and informal, within everyday community life.

A *Learning Neighbourhood* is characterized by active collaboration among educational institutions, local authorities, civil society organizations, businesses, and residents, who work together to co-create learning opportunities that respond to the unique needs and assets of the community. The approach emphasizes the integration of learning into daily life, the promotion of social cohesion, digital and social inclusion, and the empowerment of individuals as active, engaged citizens.

Learning Neighbourhoods are often supported by local or municipal policy frameworks and may form part of broader initiatives such as PASCAL's Learning Cities Network and UNESCO's Global Network of Learning Cities, which both aim to promote sustainable development through community-based education and lifelong learning. The concept was articulated and widely promoted by Peter Kearns through the PASCAL International Observatory's learning cities work, particularly the PASCAL International Exchanges, its Learning Cities Network and in particular the EcCoWell programmes. Drawing on experiences in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Cork and Taipei, Kearns positioned *Learning Neighbourhoods* as a practical mechanism for implementing learning-city strategies "from the ground up," through local partnerships, community-led initiatives and place-based planning.

More recently as a result of work with the Centre for Sustainable, Healthy, Learning Cities and Neighbourhoods, PASCAL Director Asia-Pacific, Mario de los Reyes and others have summarised, in PASCAL Briefing Paper 31, the key importance of neighbourhoods to educational access and outcomes as follows.

- Neighbourhood characteristics help to predict educational access and outcomes - disadvantages at the neighbourhood and school level may place students at risk

- Neighbourhoods have an enormous effect on students' futures as they affect their socioeconomic careers
- When someone grows up in a deprived neighbourhood, their chances to end up in deprived neighbourhoods increase, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage
- Unequal distribution of schools results in relative advantage in educational opportunities for children residing in well-served neighbourhoods over children living in more poorly served areas
- Strong residential segregation where the default is for children to attend their local school leads to a narrowing of the social mix in individual schools, which ultimately reproduces broader socio-economic inequalities and disadvantage
- Neighbourhoods with the highest educational level of the adult population increase the probability of children finishing the upper levels of secondary school

Learning Neighbourhoods offer significant promise for the Developing South, where rapid urbanization, persistent inequality, and limited access to quality education challenge sustainable development. By situating learning within local communities, *Learning Neighbourhoods* address critical barriers to education, such as affordability, accessibility, and cultural relevance by leveraging existing social networks and local assets. This approach enhances inclusion, particularly for marginalized groups including women, youth, and the urban poor, thereby supporting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education for all.

PASCAL commits to supporting the development of learning neighbourhoods by offering concrete tools to map challenges in neighbourhoods and develop strategies to meet their challenges in collaboration with communities. Specifically, these tools are as follows:

- A *Learning Neighbourhood Toolkit* developed by Mario delos Reyes (University of Philippines), Shilpi Roy (University of Khulna), and many members of the PASCAL Learning Network
- A *Community Needs Auditing Tool* developed by Radha Jagannathan, Director PASCAL Americas, Rutgers University as part of the Georges Road Neighborhood Development Project

Mario delos Reyos, Radha Jagannathan and Michael Osborne, Roberta Piazza and Marius Venter, 12 November 2025