

From volunteer to founder of social projects in Tanzania



Marla Silvas, a medical student at the Monterrey campus, is developing social projects aimed at helping communities in Tanzania.

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Marla Silvas

A trip to the African country of Tanzania in early 2023 defined Marla Silvas' future: dedicating her life to helping those communities through **social entrepreneurship** and **volunteering**.

*"The first time I visited Tanzania, I had no idea what I was going to encounter. The only thing I was certain of was that I wanted to **help** people."*

*"That experience turned into my **life project**, because what I saw and experienced made me realize I could do more for those communities," she explained.*

A year and a half after that visit, the [Monterrey campus](#) **medical** student created her own volunteer agency called [Hakuna Rise](#).

What's more, she wants to **help girls and women**, primarily in the Arusha area, who have suffered from female genital mutilation.



Marla Silvas has volunteered in various communities in Tanzania. Photo: Courtesy of Marla Silvas

During her travels to Tanzania as part of her agency's activities, Marla has heard various **testimonies from women and girls** who have been subjected to this **banned** practice.

***"Female genital mutilation** is a practice that unfortunately continues to happen in various communities throughout Africa. When I learned about several cases, I decided to start researching the topic further.*

*"For the past **eight months**, my classmate Hannah Rodríguez and I have been conducting research to develop a community program that will help us to eradicate it," she shared.*

This research led Marla to join the **Global Learning Partnership** program, run by the [**U21 Health Sciences**](#) network, which took place in March in Nepal.

There, she took classes at Kathmandu University, located in the town of Dhulikhel, and completed an internship in a rural area of Salambu.

“My main job is to be a tool facilitator.”

Experiencing networking

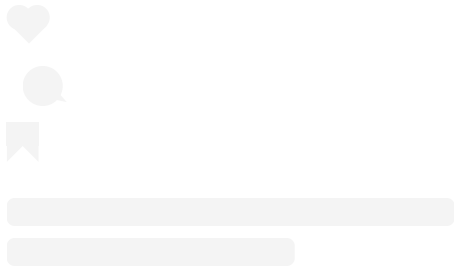
At the Global Learning Partnership, this student had the opportunity to participate in various exercises related to **current health issues**.

*“One of our main activities was working hand-in-hand with local students to carry out small **health interventions** around three main themes.*

The first was focused on pediatric care, the second on geriatric care, and finally, chronic diseases; we also focused on general women’s health issues,” she explained.



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Marla participated in disseminating information about **dignified menstruation**.

*“Our work sharing knowledge about menstruation focused on **local people** in Nepal.*

*“So, working closely with native students from that country was **key** to all our networking efforts,” she acknowledged.*

Working for women and girls in Tanzania

The student said that being part of the Global Learning Partnership gave her the **tools** to continue working on her genital mutilation research.

*“Our research isn’t just aimed at revealing the **numbers and cases** of women and girls who have undergone genital mutilation.*

*“We want this to be the first step towards creating **psychological support centers** and **safe houses** for women and girls who have already experienced this practice or who are at risk of being subjected to it,” she said.*



Hannah Rodriguez (left) and Marla Silvas (right) working together to learn more about genital mutilation in communities in Tanzania. Photo: Courtesy of Marla Silvas

To make this possible, Marla and her team are in the process of registering this project as a Non-Governmental Organization in Tanzania, under the name of **Malaika**.

The project is currently in the **fundraising phase**, with which they hope to build the first *safe house*.

*"We know that through prevention, we can reach out to women and girls, and we're designing this project specifically for them, so we can provide **support** and, as a result of these actions, promote the eradication of this practice," she said.*

"When I learned about several cases involving female genital mutilation, I decided to start researching the topic further."

Social entrepreneurship

Marla acknowledged that the research project wouldn't have been possible without her *Hakuna Rise* startup, as these trips to Africa have allowed her to open herself up to **new realities**.

Marla has made **five visits to Tanzania**, impacting the lives of **327 children** in various locations across the country.

"This project formally launched in 2024, but I've been working closely with various NGOs since 2023 to bring a better quality of life to these children.

*"My main job is to be a tool **facilitator**," she shared.*



Marla has impacted the lives of more than 300 children through her volunteer work and collaborating with her business partner Miriam Joseph.

Photo: Courtesy of Marla Silvas

This student has managed to **collect** uniforms, sports equipment, school supplies, and computers for several schools through donations.

Through this startup, she also provides a **volunteer-mentoring** service for those seeking to travel from Mexico to Tanzania.

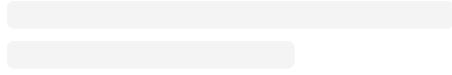
In addition to seeing the country, they have the opportunity to **help** various communities.

*“This startup wouldn’t have been possible without my business partner **Miriam Joseph**, a Tanzanian who has become my right-hand woman throughout this journey.*

Through her, I’ve been able to understand people’s needs,”.



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Marla Silvas emphasized that adapting to the culture and **understanding the communities' needs** has been a key part of her journey.

*"You have to deconstruct yourself along the way to understand what people need and, most importantly, remain open to **adaptation**."*

*"The way I've found to make a social impact has become **my life project**, and ultimately, that's the message I'd like to share with other young people," she said.*

LEE MÁS:

