



ADULTHOOD IN HARARE

Survival talks in town #Living #Learning #Still
Hoping.

ABSTRACT

Adulthood in Harare is where dreams wear dusty boots and hustle wears a three-piece suit. This article serves a lyrical walk, through city life where airtime runs out before patience and adulthood hits harder than kombi brakes. With a sharp eye and a soft heart, it unravels the lived realities of navigating jobs, rent, relationships, responsibilities and the constant search for meaning to what will become of future off-springs. This isn't just a piece but rather a pulse - part reflection, part revelation and all truth. For every young adult who's ever starred at a bill like it's a plot twist... You are SEEN, HEARD and this is your story, finally in ink.

“FROM FIRST JOB TO FIRST BILLS: THE HARARE ADULTING BLUEPRINT”.

Chapter 1 “Dear 20s: We need to talk”

They told us, “Adulting is growth” but forgot to mention that it grows on you like rent due on the first.

Welcome to Harare:

Where dreams wear dust coats and goals dodge potholes!

They said **graduate, get a job, stack paper.**

Reality is:

“Econet bear with us...” and

“Ndokumbirawo dollar rekombi”.

Harare isn't just a city rather it's a syllabus: *Welcome to Module One – Real Life 101. No handbook, No soft life cheat codes. Just vibes... and invoices.*

Adulting in Harare is a mix of:

- *Midnight thoughts in power cuts*
- *Job applications swallowed by silence*
- *Hope, somehow still waking up with you at 5am.*

Adulthood in Harare is like:

- *finding healing in hustle,*
- *burning water while you are “learning how to cook”,*
- *“don’t worry, I’ll send it end of day” - with zero airtime.*

This series is a toast - not to perfection but to those of us holding it down with cracked screens, full hearts and half plans. We laugh. We fall. We send each other voice notes that start with “life yacho...”

Hey, if you’ve ever felt tired, wired, inspired or just confused, ***pull up a chair*** - this is ***your*** language. This is *Adulting in Harare!!!*

Chapter 2 “Survival Not Salary: The Real 9 to 5”

Entering adulthood in Harare is like being handed a backpack full of dreams, only to realize you’re hiking through tough terrain. For many young people in Zimbabwe’s capital, the transition from school to the working world is less about chasing ambitions and more about surviving economic reality. The job market, once seen as a gateway to independence and stability has become a maze of uncertainty where

formal jobs are scarce and competition is tough. In this space, adulthood doesn't always come with a salary rather it comes with hustle, adaptability and grit.

For a fact, Harare's job market tells a story of resilience in the face of limitation. Formal employment opportunities are few and far between and for most young adults having a degree no longer guarantees a job. This mismatch between qualifications and the labor market's demands leaves many graduates disillusioned, forced to either take up unrelated work or create opportunities for themselves. As a result, the informal sector has become the heartbeat of the city. From selling second-hand clothes downtown to running mobile salons or launching online businesses, many young adults are redefining what work looks like. It's not always glamorous but it's often creative, remorseful and driven by necessity.

The economic landscape plays a significant role in this shift. Years of inflation, currency instability and slow industrial growth have made it difficult for companies to expand or absorb new talent. Even internships and entry level positions are limited which pushes many into entrepreneurship or gig-based survival.

Amidst these challenges, there is a quiet revolution happening. More and more young people are turning to digital platforms, upskills through online courses, freelancing across borders and collaborating in co-working spaces that didn't exist a decade ago. NGOs and youth

empowerment groups are also stepping in, offering mentorship, business trainings and access to funding thus paving a fighting chance in an otherwise narrow job landscape.

The problem with unemployment now is it brings frustration, stress depression and hopelessness leading some to drugs as a coping mechanism. There are also perks that come with underemployment where one works for long hours for peanuts a month, it leaves the youths emotionally drained and mentally disconnected hence ripening the ground for substance abuse. Idle time and no purpose leads to boredom especially in high-density areas. In this event, drugs become a way to pass time or numb the feeling of worthlessness. Others take substances to boost confidence, work long hours or to just keep up. Without workplace structure, youth bond in the streets, base or bars – where drug use is normalized and even celebrated. Real job creation and skills programs can minimize this urge. Invention of more mental health hubs too.

Adulthood in Harare, therefore isn't just about getting a job - it's about finding your place in a constantly shifting economy. It's less about 9-to-5 and more about piecing together multiple income streams, navigating uncertainty and staying hopeful in a city that doesn't always offer easy answers.

Chapter 3

"The silent battle..."

We wear smiles like uniforms but some days, our minds riot.

Therapy costs more than groceries and 'zvichapera' doesn't pay rent.
We pray. We break. But still _

We rise, with anxiety under sleeves and depression in our airtime debt.

Adulthood in Harare is not just a race to earn a living, it's a marathon of mental endurance. Beneath the visible and feasible grind of job hunting, side hustles and economic survival lies an often-unspoken struggle: the state of one's mental health.

In a city that demands so much from its young adults, the emotional toll is heavy. Sleepless nights over unpaid bills, the weight of expectations from family and the quiet panic of an uncertain future all brew silently in the minds of many yet the pressure appears too strong, composed and "on track" barring most people from barely admitting they're holding it together.

Mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression and burnout are increasingly common but rarely talked about. In many circles,

admitting you are mentally exhausted is seen as weakness. Therapy is often misunderstood or dismissed and for many it remains financially out of reach.

Still, the tide is slowly turning. A growing number of young people in Harare are beginning to prioritize their emotional well-being. Whether it's through digital detoxes, prayer, meditation, honest conversations with friends or attending free support groups *_there's a quiet revolution of healing taking root.* Platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp groups are becoming informal therapy spaces, offering relief through shared experiences and mutual encouragement.

In the chaos of adulthood, mental health remains the part we're least taught to manage yet it is what carries us through every job interview, every long commute, every failed plan and every small win. The hustle is real but so is the need for rest, reflection and recovery.

Chapter 4 “Love in The Trenches: Surviving

Romance in The Real Harare”

In Harare, love lives in a strange place, somewhere between dreams and debit cards, between “how are you?” texts and whispered prayers for stability. For young adults, relationships are no longer just about

butterflies and stolen glances - they're about navigating real-life chaos while trying to hold on to something soft.

Modern love in this city comes with a fine print. A date isn't just a night out but it's a financial calculation. "Love on a budget" as the street call it, they say a broke relationship doesn't only mean no love but it makes the love hungry. A relationship isn't just a bond but has become an emotional investment in a world where the ground keeps shifting. With rent to pay, side hustles to run and CVs still unanswered, love has to compete for attention.

The dating scene is a mix of vibes and survival. Some chase the so called "soft life" while others just need someone who will understand their silence after a long day. Instagram romances glow in filtered light while real-life couples argue over data bundles and bus fare. Ghosting is common, commitment is rare and healing is a full-time job. Everyone is seeing someone but no one is committed, "bro" it's like dating in the clouds. Situationships are now normal. *Not friends. Not dating. Not sure. But always in each other's DMs. In this day, titles scare people but intimacy doesn't. Confusing right? Well, **Welcome to Harare**. On the contrary of intimacy, pregnancy now frightens a lot more than HIV/AIDS or STIs - "haichauraye" as they say.*

Culture also plays its part, you know. Between lobola expectations and modern independence, a couple relationships are left in the gaze. Tradition says settle down but reality says "not yet". "Marriage" once

a finish line, now feels more like a long-term goal postponed by either poverty or personal growth. Some guys do wish and want to pay lobola but are still hustling and others avoid it like how kombis avoid potholes.

Despite the struggles, there's still beauty in the mess. Some couples are building from scratch, sharing everything and anything. They argue, laugh, cry, hustle but they hold each other down. Well, that's not just love, now that's loyalty in a survival economy. Love in the trenches isn't a fairy tale but they're real, raw and rooted in something deeper than fantasy.

Everyone's been hurt, so now everyone is guarded. Credentials are private and if not for them, most relationships wouldn't thrive therefore loyalty is questioned. People now date with plan B, C to Z just in case plan A fumbles. Nowadays, there's a scenario where you both live in Harare but traffic, work, side hustle and zero airtime make it feel like a long-distant relationship. To think of it, dates are "let's link soon" and that never happens. Young love in Harare is fragile but it's also fierce as it is shaped by resilience, humor and the quiet hope that maybe, just maybe, you can build something solid in a city that doesn't give anything easily.

Not only do "we" young adults indulge in young love, some are already in marriage and these marriages have surfaced due to various factors. Being in your late 20s (ranging from 26 to 29) and not

married is considered a cultural violation, you live by the question “when are you getting married? Your peers are already gone”. The pressure to settle down is toxic to be honest, most especially when it comes from family – where you are compared to your siblings or cousins. You find out that these marriages aren’t bound by love but pressure and nothing can sustain it therefore adding to the toll of divorces.

Backgrounds differ and do survival strategies. I’ve got a relative who got married in her teens – not for love but as an escape plan from a house where shouting and scolding were louder than gospel music on a Sunday. It did work for a while... until life showed her that escaping fire sometimes lands you straight in the lion’s mouth. Look, I’m only in my early 20s but I’ve seen things. Girls disappearing for the weekend and coming back with a new surname, all because “ndingamutswe nechiropa” or “vabereki vanotsamwa” and just like that – boom - married. You know, the thing with marrying out of pressure or panic is, it’s like downloading an app without reading the terms and conditions. The outside adornment, gives soft life vibes but deep inside? Buffering. Now, the problem here is people think dating reveals a person, well, “news flash” marriage does and by the time reality slaps, you’ll be already two lobola receipts away and one council wedding in. On the other hand, some do survive it whilst others stay because undoing the mess feels heavier than the mess itself and some? Some marry for love though love alone doesn’t cater for bills, some marry because “tava nemakore tese” and now the WhatsApp family group is already calling them Mr and Mrs even

before the ring. Then there comes some who marry because one pregnancy and a missed period felt like God whispering “Settle down”.

The part that no one wants to admit is:

“What if all this rushing, all this settling... is just another form of running?”

“Two incomes are better than one”, mentioned an interviewee, in another statement they mentioned that the term “He who finds a wife finds a good thing” is Biblical but has landed wrong marriages to a number of young men because they believe that having a wife comes with blessings which is actually true at some point. Young or early marriages come with their own perks - the likes of role confusion, adjusting from just a partner to a parent and breadwinner.

If we are to be real, open communication isn’t just a cute couple goal; it’s actually the Wi-Fi holding your relationship together. Without it, you’re just two people guessing, assuming and silently catching feelings over who finished the last slice of bread and budgeting? Ha! That one sounds noble on paper until the both of you are broke, looking at each other like “So... what’s for supper?” – and the fridge is echoing.

Choose your person wisely, not just the one who looks good in selfies but someone understands that vibes don't pay bills. Talk to older couples – not the ones who say “takamirira Mwari” but the ones who ‘ll tell you how they survived 3 months without talking and still showed up for family dinners like nothing happened. These young marriages suffer emotional strain because trying to build a life while you're still figuring out your own identity is no walk in the Africa Unit Square. Rent, groceries, diapers... on unstable hustles can be very challenging. The early 20s are for enjoying youthhood as well as figuring life out, instead, all that is taken away.

Whether you're cuffed, confused, committed or soft-launching situationships – one thing's certain:

“Love in Harare doesn't come in rose petals. It comes wrapped in unread messages, low airtime, broken trust and a prayer whispered between power cuts”.

So maybe the question isn't ***“are we ready to love?”*** maybe it's... ***“will we still choose love when it stops looking like a fairytale and starts sounding like real life?”***

Chapter 5 “Still Standing, Still Hustling, Still

Winning – Somehow”

*You're still dreaming? Well, that's the biggest **win**.* In a city that makes you want to give up every Monday, the fact that you're still dreaming of a better life, a soft life, a life where 2-minute noodles aren't a dinner plan - that's powerful because hope in Harare is a rebellious act.

You know what? You are doing just fine actually. Adulthood in Harare isn't glamorous. It's full of cracked screens, backup plans and kombi conversations that make you question your entire life but still... ***We rise. We laugh. We create. We pay bills. We stretch \$10 across five days like magicians.*** So, if you are reading this and thinking "I haven't achieved much", just pause! ***You've done more than enough. You're still here. Still strong. Still dreaming. Still growing. In this city, that's a big beautiful win.*** "Harare may harden you but it also teaches you to shine even when the power's out." When your hustle buys you data or groceries, that's your soft launch to entrepreneurship. Even if it's just selling perfumes from a WhatsApp catalogue, if Econet got paid from your grind, you're in business "boss."

You left a group chat peacefully? Now, that's emotional growth and kudos to you. Adulting comes with unnecessary group chats: family drama, old schoolmates, church updates from 2017. If you left

one without announcing or fighting _that's called boundaries sweetheart and trust me! Healing looks good on you.

You said "No" and didn't explain yourself? Now, that's elite behavior. Saying "no" in Harare is like saying "ndine mari", I mean it doesn't come easy hey but that one time you declined a hangout, a loan request or a situationship with peace in your chest - mark the date because that's maturity unlocked.

You made it through the month without borrowing? Bet you deserve a cake because regardless of it being a survival mode, I mean the peanut butter and rice combos, the skipping kombis to save 50c... you still made and I'm proud of you. Think of it, no loan sharks, no awkward Ecocash requests, just pure resilience baby, not for anyone but for YOU.

Your clothes match and you smell nice? You're winning. If you look put-together while battling Wi-Fi blackouts, surprise price hikes and fuel queues, I call it style under pressure.

You paid rent and still had change to buy bread? You're a hero baddy. If you've ever transferred money to your landlord and didn't

cry immediately after - Congratulations man, you're doing great. Whether you're in a shared room say in Warren Park or a tiny flat in Hatfield, paying rent in this economy is a form of spiritual strength.

Adulthood in Harare doesn't hand out medals neither does it give you free will, it's actually funny how we keep stacking wins *quietly, consistently and somehow and sometimes with vibes only*. In a city that will humble you before breakfast, the fact that you're still standing (and even smiling) is worth clapping for.

#WINS ARE WINS - *Even if it's just tomatoes without asking for change.*

Chapter 6 "Dear Loving Parents..."

“
What they need is just but a voice that speaks for them,
an ear that is ready to listen and not judge. Implications
may be, tough roads may be but judgement kills efforts,
to an extent that they succumb to death if not pain...
they feel unseen, they feel unheard, they feel unloved,
the streets bust them off and they're tired. They cry out
for change, their minds have thought outside the box
and now!!! Not even the inside exists... they go by the
name **young adults**”

Adulthood in Harare | © 2025 Shamel Masaraure

They're not children anymore but they aren't quite fully launched adults. They eat, drink, use your Wi-Fi and argue like lawyers – but still call you when their pockets run out.

Welcome to middle zone: *parenting young adults in the same house. If you have one or more, bear with me for despite being a young adult myself, I truly understand what you are going through.*

Now here's how you can go about the phase:

- *Understand their growth even if they're still broke – being 20s doesn't make them CEOs but it also doesn't make them look any younger. Allow them to stretch into adulthood even if they fall, just be there for them.*
- *Please, In the Mighty Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, dearly stop comparing generations – You made it out at 25, 26 or 27, fair and fine, those were your times and now, times moved and things have changed. Not that I support ill behaviors but things are no longer the same. “We” are here with you trying to survive a broken economy yet you want us to live like when things were cool? I mean, re-think on that. We live in an era of surviving not thriving and survival calls for nurturing your child's strengths. I remember the girl next door who fell victim to shuttered talents – a talented actress, singer and sportsman who's never been heard... okay, not totally but its little or no simply because those who raised her believed strongly in thriving through academics. To some point she couldn't have been an aspiring Software Engineer today if she hadn't stood her ground because “they” had her life programmed and what was left for her is a no/yes. If Anna or Davis who live 2 blocks away made it out*

early and even got married, that's not your own child's lane - our struggles are different after all for them to make it they get full support from their own parents. "Vezera rako vavane vana vatatu vatatu iwe uchingori pano, basa kudya nekurara", Dear parents, this statement cuts deep, we are trying out there but we can't do it alone, **we need you**.

- Create space for real-life conversations, not commands – Young adults in this day yearn to be heard. If your only sentence is "My house, my rules" you'll raise silence and fear, not trust and respect... it's only a matter of time where you'll raise that sentence again and they leave for sure, then what?
- Do not weaponize shelter – Yes, they still live under your roof but blowing it into their faces every now and then turns the home into a prison. In case you haven't heard, "A home without peace is just piled bricks"
- Consider it winning if your child finds a hustle and never miss any step of that journey, be there – that "small business" might be their big break. The girl doing nail tech today can run an empire of salons tomorrow, the girl doing beauty therapy today will be a dermatologist tomorrow, the guy selling doughnuts today will be the **future** Bakers Inn **tomorrow** and the guy selling second-hand clothes today will be a CEO of a big clothing brand tomorrow. Speak life as it is.
- Talk mental health, not just hardness – Tough love isn't always the answer. Sometimes they need comfort **and** soft listening, not strong lectures. Zimbabwean life is already loud just be the quiet comfort they need. Seat your young adults down, talk of relationships, ask how they are making it, what they do in times

of a breakdown, because if we are to be honest, one day they'll speak out loud to themselves as they stroll down the street(s).

“Note: These young adults are not lazy, they’re just trying to find their way in a system that wasn’t solely built for them. If love doesn’t grow at home, I tell you, the streets will adopt them – with less kindness”.

You find that, this chapter isn’t just for struggling parents. It’s actually for the young adults as well – the fortunate, the fed and the funded because sometimes, the hardest lesson is realizing you’re not left behind... you’re just soft (as wool) for that matter. Parents, we see you - the worry, the prayers and the quiet fear that your child is physically present but emotionally unemployed. You’re hosting adults who eat like grown-ups but behave like guests – lost in their phones, allergic to chores and one “I’m still figuring it out” away from becoming tenants you never planned for.

You obviously want to help but you somehow fear crippling. Yes, you love them but to a point, you’re tired. You ask yourself: ***“Are they stuck... just stalling?”*** but as I mentioned earlier on, parents are not to blame. Some of “us” were raised with warmth, wi-fi and full lunchboxes. We were cushioned and not crushed yet we treat adulthood like an optional subscription. Trust me, that’s not because life is unfair but because we never really learned to stretch out without snapping. We got used to comfort and mistook it for achievement yet utterly neglecting the fact that “theirs and ours” are

not mine. To my fellow young adults: ***“At some point, the free ride ends and when it does, may you have more than just data and excuses to offer the world. Above all may the dear Lord bless your adulthood.”***

About the author

Masaraure Shamel is a Harare-based observer and upcoming writer whose pen dances between satire and sincerity. With a voice rooted in lived experiences and an eye for detail, she captures the raw beauty, chaos and quiet triumphs of urban adulthood. When she's not writing, she's navigating kombi queues, chasing college deadlines or sipping tea whilst questioning her life choices, identity and aspirations _like any well-adjusted adult.

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