

PRELIMINARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIAGNOSIS

Understand before acting — grounding every intervention in the sociocultural realities of the field
“Understanding a society before seeking to transform it”

Executive Summary

The EnfanceAfrique.org Network / AMAPISE offers an unprecedented positioning within the child protection ecosystem in West Africa: that of the methodological bridge between scientifically validated, published ethnographic research and the operational coordination, assistance, and advocacy mechanisms already at work in the field. This document presents the Preliminary Anthropological Diagnosis, an expert service intended for non-governmental organizations, donor agencies, and public or sub-regional institutions seeking to ground their interventions in a fine-grained, scientifically validated understanding of local community realities.

1. The Observation — A Persistent Blind Spot

In West Africa, child protection rests on two well-established families of actors. On one hand, large operational coordination networks organize case management at the regional level, with broad geographic coverage and solid institutional experience. On the other hand, international agencies produce normative frameworks and advocacy data at the continental level. Both families of actors play an indispensable role. But neither is structured, in its day-to-day operation, to produce — upstream of action — a fine anthropological reading of the social, customary, and religious logics that determine how a community receives, interprets, accepts, or resists an outside intervention.

This missing link exposes technically robust, well-funded programs to a recurring risk, rarely documented systematically: that of proposing responses that are sound on paper but poorly heard on the ground, for lack of grounding in the legitimate authorities and practices genuinely recognized by the community.

2. Our Positioning — The Bridge Between Research and Action

The EnfanceAfrique.org Network occupies a singular place within this ecosystem. Grounded in field ethnographic research published in indexed scientific journals (HAL) and relayed in international popular-science press (The Conversation, institutional reprints by Université Côte d'Azur), and subject to the critical review of its International Scientific Council, the Network does not seek to replace existing coordination mechanisms or advocacy agencies. It constitutes their methodological complement, translating a fine-grained understanding of community dynamics into a tool directly usable by practitioners and decision-makers.

It is this articulation — published, verifiable scientific rigor on one side; immediate operational usefulness on the other — that distinguishes the EnfanceAfrique.org Network from any other actor in the sector.

3. A Positioning With No Direct Equivalent

The table below summarizes, in deliberately simplified form, the position of the EnfanceAfrique.org Network relative to the two major families of actors presented above. This is not a ranking, but a way of highlighting the genuine complementarity between these approaches.

Dimension	Operational Coordination Networks	International Advocacy Agencies	EnfanceAfrique.org Network
Geographic scale	Regional, multi-country	Continental	Local and targeted, transposable
Published scientific output	No	Institutional reports	Yes — indexed journals, HAL
Anthropological field reading	Not structured	Not structured	Core expertise
Validation by a scientific committee	No	Variable	Yes — International Scientific Council
Actionable deliverable for a program	Yes, case-management oriented	Yes, policy oriented	Yes, program-design oriented
International academic affiliation	No	No, except occasional partnerships	Yes — international academic researchers

4. What Is the Preliminary Anthropological Diagnosis?

The Preliminary Anthropological Diagnosis is a short expert service, conducted ahead of or at the very start of a program's implementation, that produces a structured anthropological reading of the local intervention context. It does not replace a standard needs assessment: it sheds light on a dimension that assessment most often leaves in the shadows — that of the legitimate authorities recognized by the community, the traditional practices at play (fostering, child mobility, mediation), and the cultural logics and community-adherence patterns that must be taken into account for an otherwise well-designed intervention to achieve genuine local ownership.

5. Who This Diagnosis Is For

- Operational non-governmental organizations designing or deploying a child protection, social cohesion, or social action program in an area they know little about
- Institutional agencies and donors seeking to secure the local grounding of funding before it is deployed
- State and sub-regional institutions engaged in a reform or mechanism affecting traditional child-rearing practices
- Existing coordination networks wishing to strengthen the sociocultural dimension of their interventions without developing this expertise in-house

6. Methodology and Guarantees of Rigor

1. **Joint scoping** — precise definition, together with the commissioning party, of the territory, the actors, and the questions to be clarified.

2. **Targeted field inquiry** — interviews and direct observation conducted under an established research protocol, with systematic informed consent, in accordance with the Network's Child Image Use Policy and PSEA Policy.
3. **Scientific validation** — the diagnosis's conclusions are submitted to the review of the International Scientific Council prior to delivery, ensuring their methodological rigor.
4. **Operational delivery** — results are delivered in a form directly usable by field teams, not as a long, hard-to-action academic report.

7. What the Commissioning Party Gains, Concretely

- A diagnostic note identifying the authorities and traditional logics relevant to the area concerned
- Operational recommendations directly transposable into program adjustments
- An awareness-raising resource for field teams
- The possibility of ongoing support during implementation, upon request

8. A Complementary, Not Competing, Expertise

The EnfanceAfrique.org Network does not seek to replace the major coordination and assistance mechanisms already at work in West Africa, whose scale and regional grounding constitute a precious asset for child protection. Its ambition is to place the rigor of anthropological research at the service of their effectiveness, giving them access to a fine-grained reading of local realities that they do not, for the most part, have the mandate to produce themselves.

Understanding locally, to act more justly globally.

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