

"PREVENTING FEMICIDE IN CAMEROON: MOVING FROM RESPONSE TO EARLY INTERVENTION"

PLENARY REFLECTIONS FROM THE 2026 CENTRAL AFRICA THINK TANK FORUM

Anthony Antem

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Executive Summary

Femicide in Cameroon is increasingly demanding attention as a critical gender-based violence and public policy concern. Behind the reported cases are often patterns of domestic violence, threats, coercion, stalking and escalating abuse that may provide opportunities for intervention before violence becomes fatal. The central challenge is therefore not only how Cameroon responds after a woman is killed, but whether its institutions and communities are equipped to recognise and act on the warning signs beforehand. This policy brief argues that Cameroon must move from a predominantly reactive approach towards a stronger prevention-oriented response. This requires better documentation of femicide, structured assessment of high-risk cases, stronger capacity among frontline institutions, accessible emergency protection, and better coordination between police, health services, justice institutions, social services and civil society. At the

same time, prevention cannot be left to the State alone. Families, religious and traditional leaders, schools, youth and women's organisations, the media, and men and boys all have a role in challenging the normalisation of violence and acting when warning signs emerge. The effectiveness of Cameroon's response should not be measured only by the number of perpetrators prosecuted after a woman has been killed. It should also be measured by how many women at risk are identified, how many threats are acted upon, how many survivors receive protection, and how many potentially fatal situations are interrupted before they become headlines. Cameroon must therefore make prevention, not simply prosecution, the frontline of its response to femicide.

Key Highlights

- Over 50 femicide cases have been recorded in Cameroon since January 2026 with officials recognizing that figures could be more.

- Weak risk-identification, protection and monitoring mechanisms reduce opportunities for early intervention.
- Coordination of institutional mechanisms, official recognition of femicide as a policy problem, review and effective implementation of policy frameworks can reasonably mitigate cases.

Introduction

The [killing of Bronhilda Nofendo](#), a 37-year-old mother of three, in August 2026 is more than another tragic crime story. Her death, allegedly at the hands of her husband, is part of a disturbing pattern of lethal violence against women in Cameroon. The [Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family](#) reported that 50 femicide cases had already been recorded between January and April 2026, while acknowledging that official figures may represent only a fraction of the problem because many cases go unreported. Femicide should not be understood simply as another homicide. It can be the fatal culmination of a longer trajectory of gender-based violence including physical abuse, threats, coercion, intimidation, stalking and other forms of control. Cameroon's own [2025 situational analysis](#) on gender-based violence documented cases in which women were killed by intimate partners and cases where sexual violence preceded killing, describing the recurrence as a societal alert requiring stronger prevention, protection and justice mechanisms. This raises an uncomfortable but necessary question:

why does intervention so often come after a woman has already been killed? If violence, threats and other warning signs frequently precede lethal attacks, then the policy challenge cannot simply be to investigate and prosecute perpetrators after the crime. It must also be to identify women at heightened risk, provide them with meaningful protection, and intervene before violence reaches its fatal point. Cameroon therefore faces a critical policy choice: continue responding to femicide primarily as a criminal event after death, or treat it as a preventable public policy and human-security challenge before death occurs. The policy brief will provide conceptual clarification on the notion of femicide, patterns and signs (I), before examining institutional responses and gaps (II) and finally conclude with policy recommendations (III).



I - Beyond the Headlines: Understanding Femicide in Cameroon

Femicide is not simply the killing of a woman; it draws attention to the gendered nature of the killing where a woman is murdered because of, or in circumstances fundamentally connected to, her gender. Cameroon's Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family

(MINPROFF), in its 2025 situational analysis of gender-based violence, defines femicide as “the killing or murder of a woman because she is a woman”, while noting that the concept can also encompass gender-related deaths arising from discriminatory practices and systemic domestic violence. This distinction matters because it shifts the discussion from an isolated criminal act to the power relations, discrimination and patterns of violence that may precede it. In Cameroon, the available evidence points particularly to killings occurring within relationships and family settings. MINPROFF notes that many femicides are committed by current or former intimate partners, often following prolonged domestic abuse, threats, intimidation or sexual violence. Government reporting also indicates that perpetrators are frequently people close to victims, including spouses, relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances. This makes femicide especially difficult to understand as simply a question of stranger violence: in many cases, the danger may emerge from relationships and environments where women are expected to find protection.

a. The patterns extend beyond intimate-partner killings. Femicide can occur alongside sexual violence, family-related violence and other forms of gender-based violence, including killings associated with discriminatory practices. This broader understanding is important because it reveals femicide as the possible endpoint of multiple forms of violence; physical,

psychological, sexual and coercive that can remain hidden for long periods before becoming fatal.

b. The Warning Signs: Femicide rarely emerges from a single, isolated act of violence. In many cases, it can follow a pattern of escalating abuse, repeated physical violence, intimidation, death threats, stalking, harassment, controlling behavior or previous sexual assault. The warning signs can become particularly serious when a woman attempts to leave or separate from an abusive relationship. Threats linked to separation or divorce, increased surveillance, possessiveness, coercive control and escalating physical violence can signal a deteriorating situation. These behaviors are sometimes dismissed as private family disputes or relationship problems until they culminate in serious injury or death. The policy challenge, therefore, is to recognize that what may initially appear to be a domestic dispute can sometimes represent a serious and escalating protection risk. The presence of these indicators does not mean that a woman will necessarily become a victim of femicide, but they can provide important information for risk assessment and early intervention. Recognizing the warning signs does not guarantee prevention, but failing to recognize them makes prevention considerably more difficult. Cameroon’s challenge is to turn these warning signs into actionable early-warning indicators,

with clear pathways for protection and intervention before violence becomes fatal.

II- Institutional, Policy Responses and Gaps

Cameroon has established several institutional and policy mechanisms to address gender-based violence, including the [National Gender Policy 2022–2030](#) and the [National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence](#), with MINPROFF responsible for coordinating government action on women's rights and protection. Further to these, Cameroon is also signatory to major international and regional legal instruments, including the Convention on the [Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) and the [Maputo Protocol](#) on the African Charter on Human and People's Rights relating to the rights of Women in Africa. In spite of these, significant implementation gaps remain. A statement from [Human Rights Watch](#), identified under-reporting of femicide, fragmented data and weak coordination among institutions, while also pointing to gaps in the legal framework and the need for stronger judicial and institutional capacity. A policy framework can provide direction, but without institutional capacity, reliable data, coordination and resources, prevention risks remaining a commitment on paper rather than protection in practice. The challenge is therefore less about the absence of policy commitments than about translating them into consistent, coordinated and adequately resourced

action.

Despite the existence of these frameworks, important operational challenges remain. Cases of domestic violence and threats often go unreported due to stigma, fear of retaliation or limited confidence in protection mechanisms. In addition, coordination between police, health services, social workers and judicial institutions remains uneven, reducing opportunities for early intervention. As a result, warning signs that may indicate escalating risk are not always identified, documented or acted upon before violence becomes fatal.

III - From Reaction to Prevention: What Should Cameroon Do? Policy recommendations

Building on [reflections from the 2026 Central Africa Think Tank Forum](#), Cameroon does not need to begin from zero. The country already has a National Strategy to Fight Gender-Based Violence 2022–2026 and a National Gender Policy 2022–2030, both of which provide a framework for prevention, survivor protection and multi-sectoral responses to gender-based violence. The challenge is to translate these frameworks into a more systematic femicide-prevention architecture, with measurable responsibilities, resources and accountability.

- First, Parliament should accelerate the adoption of the bill recognizing femicide as an explicit case of GBV which needs a national femicide monitoring mechanism. The monitoring mechanism should include

standardized data collection across police, health and judicial institutions. Better data would allow policymakers to identify patterns, high-risk contexts and geographic concentrations, while providing a stronger evidence base for prevention policies.

- Second, families, religious institutions, traditional leaders, youth and women's organizations, schools, universities and the media, are often the first to witness abuse and can form a front line of response. They must challenge attitudes that normalize violence, identifying warning signs and directing victims towards available support. Men and boys, in particular, must be engaged as partners in prevention by challenging harmful notions of control, entitlement and violence.
- Third, MINPROFF needs to move from periodic awareness campaigns towards a measurable national prevention strategy on femicide. Prevention should have clear targets, designated institutional responsibilities, dedicated resources and indicators that can be publicly monitored. Such a framework could measure not only the number of cases recorded and prosecuted, but also the number of high-risk cases identified, survivors receiving emergency protection, referrals successfully completed, frontline personnel trained and repeat cases appropriately managed.
- Fourth, Cameroon must strengthen coordination of its institutional

responses. If institutions operate in isolation, important information and opportunities for intervention can be lost. Strengthening mechanisms could ensure that a complaint does not simply end with a report, but becomes the entry point into a coordinated protection pathway. Clear referral protocols should define how cases move between police, health facilities, social services and justice institutions.

- Fifth, frontline institutions must be equipped to recognize and respond to these risks. Police officers, prosecutors, health workers, social workers and other frontline personnel are often among the first people to encounter women experiencing violence. Training should therefore go beyond general awareness to include recognizing patterns of escalating violence, documenting threats, assessing immediate safety needs and connecting survivors to appropriate services.
- Finally, Cameroon needs stronger emergency protection mechanisms for women facing credible threats. Emergency accommodation, psychosocial support, medical assistance, legal assistance and other safety measures need to be accessible to women at immediate risk. The National Gender Policy already envisages temporary accommodation centers and psychosocial support units for GBV survivors; the policy challenge is to ensure that such mechanisms are

sufficiently available, accessible and responsive when danger is imminent.

Conclusion

Cameroon cannot afford to wait for another death before recognizing the warning signs that came before it. Every threat ignored, every repeated assault dismissed and every plea for protection that goes unanswered represents a missed opportunity for intervention. If femicide is the final point of an escalating cycle of violence, then prevention must begin long before the final act. The real test of Cameroon's response to femicide will not be how effectively it prosecutes women's killers after the fact, but how effectively it prevents the next woman from becoming a victim. The real

measure of progress will be reflected in the number of women whose lives are protected through timely intervention and support. The transition from reaction to prevention will require government institutions, law enforcement, health services, communities and civil society to treat warning signs not as isolated incidents, but as opportunities for intervention.



ANTHONY ANTEM

Head, Conflict Prevention and
Analysis Unit

aantem@foretiafoundation.org

Layout: [NDZE Alfred Steve](#)