

Research Paper



Health, socio-technical, and economic constraints of beekeeping in Bamboutos, western highlands of Cameroon

William F. Tchuenbou¹, Gertrude Lemobeng², Marc K. Kouam^{3*}

¹Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences, P.O. Box 188, Dschang, Cameroon.

²Center for Research on Filariases and other Tropical Diseases (CRFilMT), P.O. Box 5797, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

³PO Box 188, Dschang, Cameroon.

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 27 August 2024

Revised: 05 November 2024

Accepted: 12 November 2024

Published: 01 January 2025

Keywords:

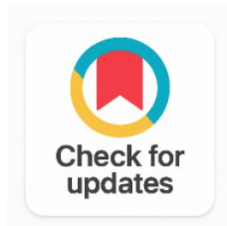
Apiculture

Bee Diseases

Beekeeping Challenges

Bee Pests

Honeybee



ABSTRACT

Beekeeping is important as a source of food, employment, and rural poverty alleviation. Honeybees are also important as the main pollinator of agricultural and forestry crops. However, there is a decrease in honeybee population worldwide, hence the objective of this study who was to investigate some of the challenges of beekeeping in Cameroon. Thus, a total of 56 beekeepers were investigated in Bamboutos in western Cameroon, using a questionnaire. Pests, predators and diseases were diagnosed retrospectively using a plate which was shown to beekeepers during the questionnaire administration. Signs of diseases reported by beekeepers included diarrhea (17.9%), chalkbrood (28.6 %), black bee (50%), and deformed wings (3.6%). The only parasite reported was Varroa (3.6%). Common insect pests were wax moth (87.5%), small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*) (91.1%), large African hive beetle (*Oplostomus fuliginus*) (39.3%) and African death's-head hawkmoth (*Acherontia atropos*) (51.8%). Other pests noticed by beekeepers were ants (96.4%), spiders (78.4%), lizards (69.6%), wasps (66.1%), termites (64.3%), squirrels (60.7%), flies (8.9%), snakes (5.4%), and cockroaches (5.4%). The socioeconomic constraints cited were: lack of funding (87.5%), robbery and vandalism (71.4%), shortage of apiarian lands (60.7%), and proliferation of adulterated honey (48. 2%). The technical challenges were: presence of pests, predators and diseases (100%), lack of technical knowledge (41.1%), pesticides issues (26.8%), and low hive stocking rate (12.5%). The environmental challenges encountered were: strong winds (60.7%), bush fires (64.3 %), and remoteness of apiaries (44.6%). Problems encountered by beekeepers can be addressed through collective efforts from governmental authorities, NGOs and beekeepers.

Corresponding Author:

Marc K. Kouam

PO Box 188, Dschang, Cameroon.

Email: kouam@crfilmt.org

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1. INTRODUCTION

Beekeeping is one of the oldest agricultural practice worldwide and especially in Africa [1]. Unlike the predominant conventional livestock keeping (pig keeping, fowl keeping, ruminant keeping, and fish culture), beekeeping requires little financial inputs while providing products with highly nutritive and commercial value. For this reason, beekeeping is known to be helpful and accessible to vulnerable populations, providing them incomes and food supply. Another important service honeybees render to mankind is pollination of agricultural and forestry crops.

The top five countries honey producers are China (457,203 tons), Turkey (114,113 tons), Argentina (79,468), Iran (77,567), and Ukraine (71, 279) [2]. According to FAO (2020), the whole Africa continent yield of honey and wax in 2020 was 150,911 tons and 16,186 tons respectively, which is equal to 8.52% and 26.05% of the world production (1, 770 and 62,116 tons respectively). The top 5 countries honey producers in 2020 in Africa in increasing order are Ethiopia (50,000 tons), Tanzania (130,584 tons), Angola (23,411 tons), Kenya (20,525 tons), and Central African Republic (CAR) (16,200 tons). Cameroon ranks 10th with only 4500 tons of honey produced [2], and the Cameroon honey production had been estimated to be about 2% of the Africa production (Founadoudou, 2007).

Given that Cameroon is known as Africa in miniature having the same climatic and environmental conditions as the greatest countries honey producers in Africa (Central African Republic, Angola, Kenya...), Cameroon is expected to be among the first African countries honey producers and to produce a very high amount of hive products. Several hindrances limiting the production level of hive products in Cameroon have been reported in several instances.

[3] Poor technical knowledge and high cost of apiculture equipment were the main reasons for the low production observed. Pests and predators, diseases, poor harvesting techniques, drought, use of fertilizers and pesticides by farmers in controlling crop pests, and poor hives handling have been documented as the cause of either empty hives, absconding, brood destruction or decrease in colony size [4] which led to low production of honey and other hive products. Low honey production has also been attributed to forest degradation which led to decreasing availability of melliferous species such as *Prunus Africana* [5].

While the Adamawa and Centre regions of Cameroon appeared as the highest honey producers regions with 2018. 9 and 3682.1 tons respectively in 2021, the production of none of the remaining eight regions never reached 1125 tons that same year (INS, 2021).

Thus, the very low amount of honey produced by Cameroon is a cause of concern. Hence the objective of this study which was to determine the health, technical and economic challenges jeopardizing the expansion of beekeeping in the western highlands of Cameroon.

2. RELATED WORK

[6] In Uganda reported some health impediments to beekeeping including honeybee pests and predators. The important pests causing economic losses they recorded were black ants, small hive beetles, wax moths and bee hornets.

In Ethiopia, constraints to beekeeping have been extensively documented and include: low quality products, unpleasant behaviors of bees (aggressiveness, swarming tendency, and absconding behaviors), lack of skilled manpower and training institutions, low level of technology used, high price of improved beekeeping technologies, lack of initial capital, drought and deforestation of natural vegetation, misuse of agro-chemicals, shortage of bee colonies, shortage of modern bee hives, honeybee diseases, pests and predators, poor extension services, poor society awareness, absence of coordination between research, extension and farmers, lack of policy application in apiculture, lack of enough space, lack of beekeeping equipment (like modern beehives, wax molds, honey extractors, queen excluders) and accessories, shortage of records and up-to-date information, lack of information on pests and predators of honeybees, lack of training on beekeeping technology and inadequate research institutions to address the problems [7].

In Rwanda, the reported challenges and limitations of beekeeping included lack of education, gender bias, pests and diseases, absconding and swarming of bees, and lack of modern apicultural equipment [8]. Hindrances, challenges, and limitation have been recorded in other countries outside Africa. In Nepal for instance, the high demand for local honey, the distance to the market, the scarcity of bee colonies, disease outbreaks were documented as the most frequent challenges in managing honey bee practices [9]. In Malaysia, poor society awareness, pests, predators and diseases, lack of training of beekeepers and extension workers in business and beekeeping related activities were documented as the main challenges to beekeeping [10].

In Cameroon, technical constrains faced by beekeepers previously reported included lack of training and colony absconding in Adamawa grasslands in Cameroon [11], and lack of adequate information for managing the pests. Vandalism towards hives, bush fires, lack of funding, pests and diseases among others were also reported as constraints for sustainable beekeeping in the West region of Cameroon [12]. Reported that lack of training, bee's enemies and theft were the main constraints to beekeeping in the western highlands of Cameroon. A recent study [13] documented some constraints some of which were climate change and deforestation, poor hive management practices, pests and predators, poor market system, absconding, application of toxic agro-chemicals, poor hive management, poor harvesting techniques, and existence of poisonous flowering plants.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Area and Period

The study was carried out from March to May 2022 in Bamboutos Division (5° 37' 34" N and 10°15'17"E, mean altitude=1376 m) in the West region of Cameroon [Figure 1](#). Subdivisions within Bamboutos includes Mbouda, Batcham, Galim and Babadjou. Bamboutos is characterized by a long rainy season running from mid-March to mid-November but interrupted by short drought periods between June and July; the dry season stretches from mid-November to mid-March with frequent annual

given orally. Volunteer beekeepers were then submitted to the study questionnaire. Questions were asked about the constraints of beekeeping in their area.

3.3. Health Challenges

Pests, predators and diseases were diagnosed retrospectively using a mounted plate which was shown to beekeeper during the questionnaire administration. Beekeepers were asked to identify from the plate the picture of pests, predators or clinical signs of a disease they ever noticed in their apiary. The plate was used as a memory guide. Before collecting the data, beekeepers were first capacitated to identify the pests, predators and clinical signs of diseases using the plate and photographs. They were also asked to provide in local language or in French the name of any pest, predator or clinical sign of the disease they ever saw but which was not showed them [15].

3.4. Statistical Analysis

The Chi squared test was used to assess any association between the sampled subdivisions and different parameters. The significance level was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Health Constraints

A total of 56 beekeepers were investigated. Health challenges were due to diseases, parasites and pests. Signs of diseases reported by beekeepers included diarrhea (17.9%), chalkbrood (28.6%), black bee (50%), and deformed wings (3.6%) Table 1.

Table 1. Disease Constraints Met by Apiarists in Bamboutos, Western Highlands of Cameroon

Clinical signs of honeybee diseases	Subdivision				Total (N = 56)	p value
	Babadjou (N = 20)	Batcham (N = 10)	Galim (N = 6)	Mbouda (N = 20)		
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	
Diarrhea						
Yes	8.9 (5)	5.4 (3)	1.8 (1)	1.8 (1)	17.9 (10)	0.266
No	26.8 (15)	12.5 (7)	8.9 (5)	33.9 (19)	82.1 (46)	
Chalkbrood						
Yes	143 (8)	5.4 (3)	1.8 (1)	7.1 (4)	28.6 (16)	0.489
No	214 (12)	12.5 (7)	8.9 (5)	28.6 (16)	71.4 (40)	
Black bee						
Yes	19.6 (11)	8.9 (5)	7.1 (4)	14.3 (8)	50.0 (28)	0.644
No	16.1 (9)	8.9 (5)	3.6 (2)	21.4 (12)	50.0 (28)	
Deformed winds						
Yes	0.0 (0)	1.8 (1)	0.0 (0)	1.8 (1)	3.6 (2)	0.516
No	35.7 (20)	16.1 (9)	10.7 (6)	33.9 (19)	96.4 (54)	

(N): Number of interviewed apiarists; n= number of interviewed apiarists per category; %: Percentage of interviewed apiarists per category.

The only parasite reported was *Varroa* (3.6%). The pests affecting the brood and encountered by beekeepers were wax moth (87.5%), small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*) (91.1%), large African hive

beetle (*Oplostomus fuligineus*) (39.3%) and African death's-head hawkmoth (*Acherontia atropos*) (51.8%). Other pests causing troubles in and outside the hive were ants (96.4%); spiders (78.4%); lizards (69.6%); wasps (66.1%); termites (64.3%); squirrels (60.7%); flies (8.9%); snakes (5.4%); cockroaches (5.4%) [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Pest and Predator Constraints Met by Apiarists in Bamboutos, Western Highlands of Cameroon

Bee pests and predators	Subdivisions				Total (N = 56)	p value
	Babadjou (N = 20)	Batcham (N = 10)	Galim (N = 6)	Mbouda (N = 20)		
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	
Ants						
Yes	35.7 (20)	17.9 (10)	10.7 (6)	32.1 (18)	96.4 (20)	0.292
No	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	3.6 (2)	3.6 (2)	
Termites						
Yes	25.0 (14)	12.5 (7)	5.4 (3)	21.4 (12)	64.3 (36)	0.772
No	10.7 (0)	5.4 (3)	5.4 (3)	14.3 (8)	35.7 (20)	
Wasp						
Yes	23.2 (13)	10.7 (6)	8.9 (5)	23.2 (13)	66.1 (37)	0.805
No	12.5 (7)	7.1 (4)	1.8 (1)	12.5 (7)	33.9 (19)	
Squirrel						
Yes	23.2 (13)	8.9 (5)	7.1 (4)	21.4 (12)	60.7 (34)	0.866
No	12.5 (7)	12.5 (7)	3.6 (2)	14.3 (8)	39.3 (22)	
Lizard						
Yes	28.6 (16)	14.3 (8)	7.1 (4)	19.6 (11)	69.6 (39)	0.311
No	7.1 (4)	3.6 (2)	3.6 (2)	16.1 (9)	30.4 (17)	
Snake						
Yes	1.8 (1)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	3.6 (2)	5.4 (3)	0.623
No	33.9 (19)	17.9 (10)	10.7 (6)	32.1 (18)	94.6 (53)	
Spider						
Yes	28.6 (16)	14.3 (8)	8.9 (5)	26.8 (15)	78.6 (44)	0.966
No	7.1 (4)	3.6 (2)	1.8 (1)	8.9 (5)	21.4 (12)	
Cockroach						
Yes	5.4 (3)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	5.4 (3)	0.127
No	30.4 (17)	17.9 (10)	10.7 (6)	35.7 (20)	94.6 (53)	
Wax moth						
Yes	32.1 (18)	14.3 (8)	10.7 (6)	30.4 (17)	87.5 (49)	0.659
No	3.6 (2)	3.6 (2)	0.0 (0)	5.4 (3)	12.5 (7)	
Small hive beetle						
Yes	32.1 (18)	17.9 (10)	10.7 (6)	30.4 (17)	91.1 (56)	0.475
No	3.6 (2)	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	5.4 (3)	8.9 (5)	
Large African hive beetle						
Yes	16.1 (9)	3.6 (2)	3.6 (2)	16.1 (9)	39.3 (22)	0.533
No	19.6 (11)	14.3 (8)	7.1 (4)	19.6 (11)	60.7 (34)	
African death's-head hawkmoth						
Yes	14.3 (8)	10.7 (6)	7.1 (4)	19.6 (11)	51.8 (29)	0.573

No	21.4 (12)	7.1 (4)	3.6 (2)	16.1 (9)	48.2 (27)	
Flies						
Yes	1.8 (1)	5.4 (3)	0.0 (0)	1.8 (1)	8.9 (5)	0.078
No	33.9 (19)	12.5 (7)	10.7 (6)	33.9 (19)	91.1 (51)	
Varroa						
Yes	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	1.8 (1)	1.8 (1)	3.6 (2)	0.123
No	35.7 (20)	17.9 (10)	8.9 (5)	33.9 (19)	96.4 (54)	

(N): Number of interviewed apiarists; n= number of interviewed apiarists per category; %: Percentage of interviewed apiarists per category

4.2. Socioeconomic and Technical Constraints

Socioeconomic constraints to sustainable apiculture mostly noticed by beekeepers were: lack of funding (87.5%), robbery and vandalism (71.4%), and shortage of apiarian lands (60.7%). A considerable proportion of apiarists (48.2%) reported that proliferation of adulterated honey was an obstacle through its modulation effect on market price.

Concerning technical challenges, the following were mentioned: presence of pests, predators and diseases (100%), lack of technical knowledge (41.1%) in some aspects of apiculture and product processing, pesticides issues (26.8%), low hive stocking rate (12.5%). Environmental challenges reported were: strong winds (60.7%), bush fire (64.3%), and remoteness of apiaries (44.6%). Enclosed roads were also accounted as a challenge by some beekeepers (28.6%), and the number of beekeepers complaining for enclosed roads was significantly higher in Babajou Subdivision compared with other Subdivisions of Bamboutos Division [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Sociotechnical and Economical Constraints Met by Apiarists in Bamboutos, Western Highlands of Cameroon

Constraints	Subdivisions				Total (N = 56)	p-value
	Babadjou (N = 20)	Batcham (N = 10)	Galim (N = 6)	Mbouda (N = 20)		
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	
Socio-economic Lack of funding						
Yes	33.9 (19)	16.1 (9)	10.7 (6)	26.8 (15)	87.5 (49)	0.187
No	1.8 (1)	1.8 (1)	0.0 (0)	8.9 (5)	12.5 (7)	
Market instability						
Yes	5.4 (3)	5.4 (3)	0.0 (0)	5.4 (3)	16.1 (9)	0.454
No	30.4 (17)	12.5 (7)	10.7 (6)	30.4 (17)	83.9 (47)	
Shortage of apiarian land						
Yes	19.6 (11)	12.5 (7)	7.1 (4)	21.4 (12)	60.7 (34)	0.866
No	16.1 (9)	5.4 (3)	3.6 (2)	14.3 (8)	39.3 (22)	
Apiarian equipment costly						
Yes	14.3 (8)	10.7 (6)	7.1 (4)	12.5 (7)	44.6 (25)	0.383
No	21.4 (12)	7.1 (4)	3.6 (2)	23.2 (13)	55.4 (31)	
Strong winds						
Yes	26.8 (15)	7.1 (4)	7.1 (4)	19.6 (11)	60.7 (34)	0.275
No	8.9 (5)	10.7 (6)	3.6 (2)	16.1 (9)	39.3 (22)	
Heavy precipitations and atmospheric humidity						

Yes	23.2 (13)	8.9 (5)	7.1 (4)	21.4 (12)	60.7 (34)	0.866
No	12.5 (7)	8.9 (5)	3.6 (2)	14.3 (8)	39.3 (22)	
Bush fire						
Yes	26.8 (15)	8.9 (5)	10.7 (6)	17.9 (10)	64.3 (36)	0.072
No	8.9 (5)	8.9 (5)	0.0 (0)	17.9 (10)	35.7 (20)	
Apiary very far						
Yes	16.1 (9)	7.1 (4)	7.1 (4)	14.3 (8)	44.6 (25)	0.696
No	19.6 (11)	10.7 (6)	3.6 (2)	21.4 (12)	55.4 (31)	
Enclosed roads						
Yes	17.9 (10)	1.8 (1)	3.6 (2)	3.6 (2)	26.8 (15)	0.019*
No	17.9 (10)	16.1 (9)	7.1 (4)	32.1 (18)	73.2 (41)	

(N): Number of interviewed apiarists; n= number of interviewed apiarists per category; %: Percentage of interviewed apiarists per category; *: significant p value.

The health challenges reported by beekeepers had to do with pests, parasites and diseases. At least 50% of beekeepers reported to have noticed the occurrence in their hive of the small hive beetle (91.1%), wax moth (87.5%) and African death's-head hawkmoth (51.8%) while only 39.3% mentioned the presence of large African hive beetle. These are large insects which are easily identified with naked eyes and may explain why the large number of beekeepers were able to identify them.

Some of these pests have been documented in Cameroon. Indeed *Aethina tumida*, *Oplostomus fuliginosus*, *Acherontia atropos*, the Greater Wax moth (*Galleria mellonella*), and the Lesser Wax moth (*Achroia grisella*) were found across four agroecological zones of Cameroon, comprising the west region of Cameroon [16], [17]. *Galleria mellonella* seems to be the most important wax moth pest in apiculture in the West region of Cameroon as it has been found infesting hives in the Menoua Division where half or three quarters of the surface of infested hives were found to be invaded by this pest [18].

This is unfortunate since the greater wax moth is known to cause more destruction than the lesser wax moth [19], [20]. The higher number of beekeepers reporting these pests in their apiaries suggest that these pests are widespread and should be diligently looked after to slow down the drop in honey bee population.

Similarly the retrospective prevalence of ants (96.4%), spiders (78.4%), lizards (69.6%), wasps (66.1%), termites (64.3%), and squirrels (60.7%) was high, suggesting that these pests are common in bee hives in the region. Cham (2017) documented the occurrence in Cameroon of 8 ant species infesting honeybee colonies.

The damage caused by them in beekeeping are well known. The Greater Wax moth larvae feed on wax, on deposits of pollen, and cause galleriiasis which is a condition in which the newly developed adult bees will become trapped by the silken threads on eclosure and be unable to emerge [21]. African death's-head hawkmoth only consume honey/nectar and do not cause any obvious damage in the colony [22]. Wasps attack the guard bees and rob honey and nectar from the hives. Depending on the species of ant present they may eat dead bees and brood, eat nectar and honey stores, and make nests within hives and stored equipment while large hive beetles cause significant damage to a hive by consuming the brood and destroying the comb [23].

Adults and larvae small hive beetle feed on honey, pollen and bee brood during which the wax comb is destroyed and honey gets fermented, likely due to the presence of particular yeasts associated with small hive beetles [24]. Squirrels can do considerable damage to hive body, making bees more reluctant to use, as observed on the field. Presence of flies and snakes were less cited as constraints (8.9% and 5.4 % respectively) but there are several predatory flies that eat bees [23]. Without a knowledge of

the identity of the observed flies by beekeepers, it is difficult to discuss their importance on beekeeping in the study area. However, the phorid fly *Megaselia scalaris* has been described in the North West region of Cameroon [25].

Snakes are not known as hive or bee pest but their presence around the hive is probably associated with the search of mice looking for a safe corner to make a nest. The presence of a snake inside traditional hives may cause the bee colony to abscond. Termites were cited as a challenge by 64.3% of beekeepers probably because of the damage they cause on wooden hives, given that termites feed upon and live in wood. Spiders and cockroaches have been reported to have little to no impact on the health or productivity of the colony and consequently, do not cause economically significant damage [23]. The continued presence and disturbance of these pests can cause colonies to abscond. The very devastating *Varroa* sp. was cited by a few beekeeper (3.6%). Because of their small size (1.5–2 mm wide, and only 1–1.8mm long) the infestation may be unnoticed in case of low infestation. In addition, *V. destructor* has already been documented across four regions of Cameroon including North West, South West, Adamaoua and East [26].

Destructor is the vector of DWV, so the presence of bees with deformed wings is suggestive of the fact that both varroasis and deformed wing disease are underestimated [27].

Diarrhea was noticed by 17.9% of beekeepers. It could be due either to *Nosema apis* infection or stress, induced by weather conditions in temperate regions (Hummel and Feltin, 2014). *Nosema* disease has not yet been documented in Cameroon but *Nosema* spores were found in bee colonies in Nigeria, a neighboring country. Chalkbrood and black bee diseases were cited by 28.6 % and 50% of beekeepers respectively. While chalkbrood has been reported in Nigeria, black bee disease due to chronic bee paralysis virus (CBPV) has been documented in Uganda. Given the higher number of beekeepers reporting black disease, further studies to confirm the identity of CBPV are required.

Most of the sociotechnical and economical constraints cited by beekeepers in the western highlands of Cameroon are the same as those reported in Adamaoua region of Cameroon. The common challenges are lack of funding, robbery, pests; diseases, and vandalism. Thus, these constraints appear to be widespread all over Cameroon and deserve the full attention of the ruling authorities. Action against robbery and vandalism which concern 71.4% of beekeepers in the western area of Cameroon, can easily be taken through strict regulations. All beekeepers complained for pests and predators, showing that these challenges should be looked into for a better solution.

In this respect, conventional and ethnoveterinary solutions would certainly be appreciated. Reported that beekeepers in the Adamawa region of Cameroon were helpless towards diseases and pests. Bush fires and strong winds have already been documented as a threat to beekeeping in Cameroon, as well as lack of technical knowledge. Low hive stocking rate and storms issues can be addressed by planting melliferous tree species to both slow down the wind speed and provide food (pollen and nectar) for the bees. Forest lands must be preserved not only for the environment sake, but for the sake of honeybee too.

Establishing apiaries in forests instead of agricultural lands will keep the bees from pesticides. At the same time, given that bush fire is very often of human origin, the villagers (hunters, herders, farmers) around the forest should first be sensitized on the damaging effects of bush fire, and then strict regulations against those using fire in the forest must follow.

5. CONCLUSION

The challenges faced by beekeepers in the western highlands of Cameroon are many, and are similar to the same challenges encountered in other apiarian areas of Cameroon. These threats to

beekeeping which are mostly of human and environmental origin can be addressed through training, strict regulations and strong action from NGOs and the governmental authorities.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all beekeepers of Bamboutos who participated in the study.

Funding Information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
William F. Tchienbou	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Gertrude Lemobeng		✓			✓	✓				✓			✓	
Marc K. Kouam					✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	

C: Conceptualization

M: Methodology

So: Software

Va: Validation

Fo: Formal analysis

I: Investigation

R: Resources

D: Data Curation

O: Writing - Original Draft

E: Writing - Review & Editing

Vi: Visualization

Su: Supervision

P: Project administration

Fu: Funding acquisition

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no competing interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individuals who participated in this study. Participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Ethical Approval

This research complied with all relevant institutional policies and national regulations regarding human subjects. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Wallaga University and adheres to the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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How to Cite: William F. Tchuembou, Gertrude Lemobeng, Marc K. Kouam. (2025). Health, socio-technical, and economic constraints of beekeeping in Bamboutos, western highlands of Cameroon. *International Journal of Agriculture and Animal Production (IJAAP)*, 5(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.55529/ijaap.51.1.13>

BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHOR

	<p>William F. Tchuembou, is a researcher in the Department of Animal Science, Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences, University of Dschang, Cameroon. His work focuses on animal production, nutrition, and sustainable agricultural practices aimed at improving livestock productivity and food security in Sub-Saharan Africa.</p>
	<p>Gertrude Lemobeng, is a researcher at the Center for Research on Filariases and Other Tropical Diseases (CRFilMT) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. Her research interests focus on parasitic and vector-borne diseases, particularly filariasis, contributing to public health advancements and disease control strategies in tropical regions.</p>



Marc K. Kouam, is a researcher based in Dschang, Cameroon, with expertise in veterinary sciences and animal health. His work emphasizes disease surveillance, livestock management, and improving animal production systems to enhance food security and rural livelihoods in Cameroon and across Sub-Saharan Africa.