

# My nine year stay at FABI

*Prepared by Dr Mesfin Bogale Azene*



I joined the University of Pretoria in January 2000 as a PhD student in the Department of Genetics. I did my PhD under the supervision of Prof Brenda Wingfield, Prof Michael Wingfield and Dr Emma Steenkamp, and was based in the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI).

Initially I received financial support from the Agricultural Research and Training Project (ARTP) of the then Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organization (EARO) for my PhD. The project was supported by the World Bank, and had a limited life time and budget, which ran out before I had finished my studies. I completed my studies in February 2006 with bursary support from the National Research Foundation (NRF). Research costs for the full period were covered by the Tree Protection Cooperative Programme (TPCP) at FABI. I was able to publish three of the chapters of my PhD thesis in peer-reviewed journals. A fourth one has been submitted for publication. I presented two of these papers at the 75<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Mycological Society of America which was held at the Louisiana State University, USA, in 2007. My participation at this meeting was made possible through financial support of the TPCP.

On completion of my PhD studies, I was awarded a post-doctoral research fellowship through a programme directed by Prof Mike Wingfield, the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB). This research project focuses on the sequencing and annotating of the mitochondrial genomes of four species of *Fusarium*, which are of significance to tree health in South Africa and the world at large. The sequencing part of the work has been completed and the analysis of these sequences and drafting of a manuscript are currently in progress.

As a CTHB-funded postdoctoral student, I also had a chance to co-supervise and mentor students. This was quite an experience for me since I had never been involved with teaching/mentoring previously. I learned through this experience that patience is an important virtue not only for learning new skills, but also for teaching them.

My PhD was the only degree that I studied for outside my country Ethiopia, and I had no prior experience of life as a foreigner. During my nine year stay in South Africa, I have witnessed that South Africa is well developed, and that

its citizens are very friendly. This has made my stay comfortable as well as profitable. The University of Pretoria has many students from different countries around the world, and FABI is a showcase for this. FABI is also a showcase for much state-of-the-art equipment, facilities, and an excellent research environment that one can only dream of. I have gained a great deal by being a FABian both academically and socially. I have made friends with many fellow students from South Africa and other countries; and these friendships, I believe will be long-lasting.

I also believe that the knowledge and skills that I have gained as a student and post-doctoral fellow at FABI will stand me in good stead to face the exciting challenge of my new position as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Brandon, Canada from September 2008.

We wish you all the best Mesfin and will miss you. Remember Mike's slogan "Once a FABian, always a FABian". So keep in touch.