



INTERVIEW WITH THE FIRST PHD GRADUATE OF THE IMU-BGF PROGRAM

By *Olga Gil-Medrano**.

Abebe Regassa Tufa is born in 1982 in Ethiopia. He graduated with Bachelor Degree in Mathematics at Bahir Dar University in 2004, where due to his excellent academic track was hired immediately afterwards as Graduate Assistant. His university has sponsored his formation in Addis Ababa University to obtain the MSc in 2008. Afterwards, he has been teaching as Lecturer again at Bahir Dar University until he decided in January 2014 to begin a research career entering the PhD program of the Botswana University. In 2016 he has been awarded the IMU Breakout Graduate Fellowship and in June 2018 he has obtained the PhD degree with a work entitled *Approximating Solutions of Fixed Point, Variational Inequality and Hammerstein Type Equation Problems*. The thesis has been developed in the Department of Mathematics of the University of Botswana, Gaborone and supervised by Prof. Habtu Zegeye Hailu (Botswana International University of Science and Technology) and co-supervised by Dr. Mosalagae Thuto (University of Botswana). Now he is back at the University of Bahir Dar where he is working as Assistant Professor.

Abebe R. Tufa is the first PhD graduate of the IMU-BGF program and I was willing to know more about his experience.

Olga Gil-Medrano: After ten years of teaching at Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia, has it been difficult for you to take the decision of embark on a research career?

Abebe R. Tufa: *No, it was not difficult for me to embark on a research career. After I joined the University of Botswana for my PhD study in 2014, I immediately engaged in research activities. The only problem was finance, which forced me to take part in teaching activities in the University, and made my project very slow in the first two years.*

Why do you have chosen Botswana University for your PhD formation?

I have chosen University of Botswana because I wanted to do my PhD in fixed point theory under the supervision of Prof. Habtu Zegeye who I have known since 2003. He was my lecturer while I was undergraduate student at Bahir University and we were working together at the same University before he joined University of Botswana. Prof. Habtu is my role model and he is one of the prominent researchers in areas of fixed point theory in which I am very much interested. Moreover, University of Botswana is an international University, where researchers from the corners of the world are working together. These are the main reasons for me to choose University of Botswana.

During the two first years of PhD training it has been necessary for you to teach at the same time. After receiving the BGF you can work fulltime on research. Could you explain how this fact has influenced your results?

Yes, after I received the BGF, I was concentrating fully on my research work and able to finish my thesis project on time. From the thesis project, 5 papers were written after receiving the BGF



fund. It was not possible for me to publish all this papers and to finish my PhD thesis on time if the BGF fund was not given to me.

You have finished your PhD last June. Which is your professional situation now and how do you think your expertise will benefit the mathematical development in your university and in your country, in general?

I am already back to Bahir Dar University and started working for the University as an assistant professor in the department of mathematics. Besides teaching, I will utilize the skills and the experience I got from the study to train and guide future professionals in the field of mathematical sciences. I am planning to supervise master's students who are willing to pursue their study in my areas of specialization. Prof. Habtu Zegeye (my supervisor) and I are also planning to supervise PhD students in collaboration (Prof. Habtu as main supervisor and myself as co supervisor). Furthermore, I will work with research groups in mathematics and related fields to help my country through imparting the skills and the research experience that I have acquired during my PhD study. I will also organize workshops and conferences in different universities of the country in collaboration with research colleagues, so as to make the universities contribute to the scientific and technological development of the country.

How would you encourage Master students in developing countries to pursue a research path aiming for a PhD degree?

I think there are two main concerns for many Masters Students in developing countries to pursue a research path aiming for a PhD degree. The first one is the belief that PhD study is difficult. By the way, PhD study is a matter of having patience and commitment, besides identifying appropriate research area. Anyone can be successful in PhD study if she/he chooses the research project she/he is very much interested in and devoted to the study. To this end, students should believe that they can contribute to the scientific knowledge of the area they are interested in. The second concern is funding. This is a major concern for many students in developing countries. However, there are many types of funding available for graduate studies now days. So, students who are in need of funding for PhD study should look for and apply to many scholarships and fellowships to increase their chance of getting funds before they apply for admission to Universities.

The first cohort of BGF consists of two more students: Do Thai Duong student at the Institute of Mathematics of the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology and María Alejandra Rodríguez Luna student at Universidad del Valle, Colombia. By the beginning of 2019 IMU-CDC will open a new call to select the next awardees.

If you know an excellent student that you would like nominate for this fellowships you can find more information in <https://www.mathunion.org/cdc/scholarships/graduate-scholarships/imu-breakout-graduate-fellowship-program>

**O.G-M, retired Professor at the University of Valencia (Spain) is member of the Director's Board of FIMU and Secretary for Policy of the IMU-Committee for Developing Countries.*

