

## **Panelist in plenary panel: Understanding soils in the nexus.**

### **What does “losing ground” imply for food, water and energy security?**

**Ania Grobicki, October 2013**

Thank you to the Global Soil Forum for organizing this dynamic conference. I come from South Africa, with a landscape of hillsides scarred with deep “dongas”. As I grew up, I learned that this soil erosion is not inevitable – I learned over time how this was linked to South Africa’s variable hydrology, to deforestation, to overgrazing and the poverty prevalent in the rural areas.

Fast forward to August 2013, when I travelled to Tajikistan and took a trip from the capital, Dushanbe, to the Nurek Dam which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> tallest dam in the world (300 metres). Although this was my first visit to Tajikistan, in many ways the views seemed familiar – a denuded landscape full of “dongas” and goat tracks, with dusty towns and villages clinging to the hillsides. Some major landslides had occurred in places. But behind the dam, some traces of indigenous forest and many bush-covered slopes could still be seen. The change is recent: it has happened over the last twenty years, since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is an environmental disaster in parallel with the Aral Sea disaster. Tajikistan is losing its soils – according to UNECE, 98% of the rain-fed agricultural land and 70% of the land under irrigation is now eroded. This again illustrates the “tragedy of the commons” and the causes and consequences of poverty. People are suffering food, water and energy insecurity as they run out of firewood for cooking, crop yields drop, and water simply rushes away downstream, carrying precious soil with it, rather than being retained where it is needed. In these situations people also become more vulnerable to extreme climate events, to dust storms and wind storms, to floods and drought.

GWP is a multi-stakeholder partnership created in 1996 to promote sustainability through the IWRM approach – the “co-ordinated management of water, land and related resources”. We believe that networks and partnerships on the ground are needed to be able to protect these resources and to build sustainability. We salute the establishment of the Global Soil Partnership in 2011 and the development of the Regional Soil Partnerships – we pledge our help for whatever support the GSP may need as it develops.

In closing, I would like to refer to the Sustainable Development Goals that are currently being developed, and the water-soil target that is proposed: “to reduce by 50% the amount of soil being eroded by wind and water”. We fully support such a target, and it is important to position this within the post-2015 development agenda. This needs political will. Building multi-stakeholder networks such as GWP and GSP help to develop this political will. Thank you.