



# Failure a setback for Africa's poor, say agencies

PAMELA NEWENHAM

AFRICAN COMMUNITIES can ill-afford a protracted delay to the reform of world trade, Irish development agencies said yesterday.

Ray Jordan, chief executive of Self Help Africa, said the collapse of the Doha round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks came as a significant setback for organisations working to improve the lives of Africa's rural poor.

Mr Jordan said that although middle-income countries such as Argentina and Brazil stood to gain the most from the WTO discussions, "a trade agreement that brought poorer countries within an international system with rules would have been of benefit to African farmers".

Trócaire director Justin Kilcullen said the collapse of the talks demonstrated weaknesses within the WTO, but this did not come as a huge surprise. He said the failure

by the WTO to live up to its ambition for development was disappointing.

"While the objective for poor countries was to reach an agreement that allowed them greater access to global markets and fairer trade rules, the interests of rich countries gained the upper hand."

Tom Arnold, chief executive of Concern Worldwide, said the breakdown of the talks was regrettable, "especially considering they were supposed to be a development round".

He said the collapse demonstrated that there were too many players who felt that further concessions were necessary for a deal and that it was not entirely the fault of the developed nations.

Mr Arnold echoed Mr Kilcullen's views regarding the importance of talks resuming, but said: "We have to be realistic in that they won't resume any time soon due to political uncertainties and

an election looming in the US".

Colin Roche, policy and advocacy co-ordinator for Oxfam Ireland, said the failure of the WTO talks was a disappointment and "a failure by the richer countries to deliver on their promise of a development round of trade talks".

He added that poorer countries were asked to give too much with too little in return.

Alan Matthews, professor of European agricultural policy at Trinity College Dublin, said the least developed countries had lost the opportunity to gain extended duty-free and quota-free access to the markets of developed countries which had been agreed as part of the final package.

He added: "The view of those who argue that no deal was better than the deal likely to emerge from the Geneva talks is profoundly misguided, and the failure of the talks is a setback for poor countries as well as developed ones."