Not too long ago, Mrs Wangari Wakalenju, was unable to participate effectively in the affairs of her Commercial Village where she is also a member of the Social Welfare Committee. She is a member of Githathimwa Commercial Village, Kamukombiini location, located in Kiambu County nearly 65 kilometres west of Nairobi, Kenya.

Things were no different for her colleague and fellow commercial village member, Mrs Muthoni Wainaina, who is also a grandmother of three young children. On the day of the interview both women were accompanied by their infants aged 12 months and eight months respectively. In Muthoni’s case, her daughter had left the baby in her care as she attended to her business, leaving Muthoni no choice but to carry along the infant to vegetable-planting field demonstration. With no access to affordable, reliable childcare, they know only too well how frustrating it is to juggle their productive and reproductive roles within the structures of the Commercial Village. Theirs is the story of millions of women across Africa.

In analysing the gender division of labour, three distinct roles of women are recognisable:

- Their productive role, referring to market production as well as home and subsistence production undertaken by women for incomes
- Their reproductive role, referring to the child-bearing and child-rearing responsibilities borne by women which are also essential for perpetuating the workforce
- Their community management role, referring to activities undertaken by women to ensure the provision of resources at the community level, as an extension of their reproductive role.

The newly designed Toto Care units currently being tested in Kiambu County are a practical intervention...
especially for rural women and the lesson is in seeking to create a better understanding about the differential impact of programmes and projects on women and men. *Toto* is a derivative of the word *Mtoto*, meaning a child in the Kiswahili language.

They consist of CV Toto Care Baby beds; CV Toto Day Care Play pen to take care of the needs of babies between age 6 - 12 months and a secure enclosure/toddlers play area.

Wangari attests: “I have thoroughly enjoyed participating fully in the technical demonstrations organised between Farm Concern International and Githathimwa Commercial Village. If it were not for the mobile day care unit, I would have had to hold the baby myself which can also be very tiring,” she adds. “I will speak for my baby, who seemed to enjoy abundance of bright toys and the company of other toddlers accompanying their mothers to the meeting.”

Wangari noted that the babies (and mothers) were calmer, giving room for the women to concentrate on the instructions and activities during village meetings.

In the words of Muthoni: “The mattress ‘play ground’ is so ideal for crawling babies but the best feature is the plastic cover which makes for ease of cleaning. Actually I thought it would be a great companion to have at home. It is neat, child and mother-friendly and portable,” she beamed.

The good news for Muthoni is that the three variations of the mobile day care units are easy to replicate using affordable and locally available materials. They have the potential to totally revolutionise the rural child-rearing scene across Africa.

Elsewhere at Nyenji Commercial Village in Ngecha Location, also in Kiambu County, Mrs Nancy Nyakio Thotho said, “Sometimes it is difficult for me to go for meetings because of the three grand children that am left with, one belongs to my daughter who is in college and two are my son’s children whose wife has a salon business. With the Toto Care units, I no longer have to worry about missing out on meetings when there is no one to leave the children with. I can come along with them instead!