With four fruitful endeavors under her belt, Philomène Tia is the archetype of a successful business leader and serial entrepreneur. Here’s her story of how she transformed industries, communities and herself.

Becoming an entrepreneur was not the plan for Philomène Tia. But shaped by the upbringing in a big family with 42 siblings, she quickly learnt how to make it on her own. Philomène Tia has grown multiple businesses from a startup stage to major players in the Ivory Coast. Nowadays, her story is told on local TV and radio stations, and she’s been invited to meet with Alassane Ouattara, the President of Ivory Coast, who acknowledged her as a true entrepreneur and role model to women of the Ivory Coast.

Q: You own a transportation company with 90 busses, a hotel complex, a chain of 24 beverage stores and you’re involved in a cattle breeding operation with over 1200 oxen. How did you manage to create such a diverse business portfolio?
A: I’d say activity and creativity. I know it’s not the most concrete tip, but trying to think ahead is what has made me succeed. Be in it for the long run, not for short gains.

Q: What is the biggest challenge your business has faced?
A: I lost all my properties due to the civil war that started in 2002. I fled to Guinea and only returned home in 2007. Back home, I had to start over with nothing but my previous experience, but I was determined to make it work. After a while, I got a loan that made it possible to re-start my businesses in selling fish and breeding cattle. By saving my money, I was able to invest in two minibusses to start a taxi service which grew into the first bus transportation company in West Ivory Coast. Today, we operate about 90 buses.
Q: There's a lot happening in the transportation sector across the world and it keeps redefining itself. How do you keep up with new challenges?
A: Recently, I started bringing people together in associations and cooperatives. I enjoy sharing my experiences with others, especially women, and to hear their ideas. I often tell other women that it is the force inside you and your brains that will bring you wherever you want to go. I mean, I started with nothing and I don't even speak proper French, but look at me now.

Q: So what's next for your business group?
A: I really like to explore new types of business and combining them, otherwise it would have been impossible to keep the energy and to keep growing. Regarding exactly what's next, your guess is as good as mine.