

# First 365 Days: Winnie Nganga on Cultivating Expertise: From Healthcare to Agriculture

*Driven by curiosity and a hunger for broader impact, Winnie Nganga left a decade of pharma advocacy to tackle the world of agriculture. As Director of Government Relations and Public Affairs for Africa at Yara, she's leveraged her healthcare-honed toolkit to read between the lines of policy debates, forge coalitions and deliver tangible wins.*

## Choosing a wider arena

Winnie Nganga's first role was anything but corporate: she managed an HIV paediatric clinic in a Kenyan hospital, where every decision had the potential to save lives. Yet she craved wider systemic change. A move to GSK let her shape healthcare policy across East Africa, first as regulatory manager and then leading government and regulatory affairs for 26 markets.

Her tenure as Chair of the Kenya Association of Pharmaceutical Industry cemented her passion for advocacy, partnership and policy. "Regulatory work alone can be very technical," she says. "But with the addition of government affairs and my position leading the industry from a pharmaceutical perspective, I increasingly saw my career as focused on driving change through partnerships."

## Proving transferability in four stages

Curiosity and a desire to expand her breadth of knowledge and experience into another industry drove Winnie to apply for the new role of Director, Government Relations and Public Affairs at Yara. "I wanted to test if my healthcare advocacy could work in agriculture," she says. The interview process spanned four stages, with the team at Andrews Partnership keeping her prepared and informed at every step.

First came a screening call to explore her capabilities and ambitions. Next, panels with Yara's government relations team assessed her sector insight. Third, senior management tested strategic fit.

Finally, the regional commercial EVP and HR asked her to work through a live case study: redesigning a subsidy programme. "When they described the challenge," Winnie recalls, "I saw parallels with issues in pharma. I knew exactly how to map stakeholders and build coalitions to drive change."

## Switching sectors and tackling political nuances

The live case study demonstrated her transferable skills, but the real test lay in navigating agriculture's political complexity. Transitioning from healthcare to agriculture brought new lessons. The dynamics were different – yet the essence of impact remained the same.

"In healthcare, decisions are data-driven and mission-critical. In agriculture, outcomes depend on collaboration – between public and private sectors, farmers, and technology partners," Winnie reflects.



Understanding these nuances became central to her work. She applied her healthcare-honed advocacy approach: rigorous stakeholder mapping, clear communication, and strong coalitions, to navigate agricultural policy and development frameworks.

Working closely with Yara colleagues across Africa, Winnie ensured every engagement was grounded in practical, farmer-focused outcomes.

"Agriculture, not unlike healthcare, depends on strong government engagement and co-creation to increase productivity and sustainability," she says. "It's about aligning purpose and policy to enable prosperity for both farmers and the private sector."

### **Early wins driving commercial strategy**

That foundation in policy and partnership translated into tangible results. Aligned to Yara's *Africa 2030* growth agenda – focused on expanding business opportunities, forging strategic partnerships and unlocking new markets – Winnie delivered measurable impact in her first year.

By convening private-sector peers, development agencies and policymakers, she steered fertiliser distribution debates toward a shared vision for access and rural livelihoods. She also elevated Yara's profile as a thought leader by engaging directly with government stakeholders in six priority markets. In Rwanda, her efforts helped conclude a long-standing regulatory process, opening the door for new Yara solutions to reach farmers and expand choice in the market.

### **Preparing for year two: Deepening partnerships and advocacy**

Looking ahead, Winnie's focus remains on amplifying the private sector's voice and forging new alliances. "The development and funding landscape has shifted," she explains. "This calls for innovative partnerships that bridge business goals and development outcomes."

Her priorities include strengthening dialogue with governments and partners to promote shared initiatives in soil health, regenerative agriculture, and digital innovation – key enablers for Africa's farming transformation.

"These are emerging spaces," she says. "Our role is to help shape them – to ensure policies and practices are designed for long-term farmer resilience and sustainability."

Winnie's successful industry shift – from healthcare to agriculture – offers a blueprint for professionals seeking to apply core advocacy skills in new contexts. Her journey shows that with curiosity, rigorous preparation and a willingness to decode unfamiliar landscapes, it's possible to drive impact and grow your influence, no matter the sector.

### **Key strategies for rising leaders**

Aspiring government relations and public affairs professionals can draw on Winnie's experience to accelerate their own impact. Her top recommendations are:

- **Leverage your core advocacy skills.** When moving between industries, stakeholder mapping, coalition building and consistent messaging remain your most transferable assets.
- **Anchor interviews in reality.** Use case study assessments to prove you can solve real-world challenges and help you get a deeper insight into the company's challenges.
- **Design a structured onboarding.** Map key contacts, schedule regular alignment with sponsors and set clear goals to maintain focus and credibility.
- **Link to commercial priorities.** Ensure your priorities are grounded in local commercial KPIs and also align holistically to global strategy.