

You might find yourself in a group that shares a common language, or similar political analysis. You might be in your affinity group, or a group based on which neighbourhood you're camping in, for example.

To work effectively in a spokescouncil you need to respect the role of your spoke. Your group can choose to use the spoke as a voice – feeding back to the group your collective, agreed thoughts. Or you might empower your spoke to make certain decisions based on their knowledge of your small group. Being the spoke is not easy – it carries significant responsibility. You might like to rotate the role from meeting to meeting, or agenda item to agenda item.

## Consensus resources for the G8 and beyond...

- for workshops in consensus at the G8 look out for the G8 Action Trainers at the convergence spaces – to find them look for yellow signs at all major information points
- ◆ [www.eco-action.org/blinc](http://www.eco-action.org/blinc) ◆ [www.seedsforchange.org.uk](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk)
  - ◆ [www.nonviolence-scotland.org.uk](http://www.nonviolence-scotland.org.uk) ◆ [www.skillsharing.org.uk](http://www.skillsharing.org.uk)
  - ◆ [www.rantcollective.org](http://www.rantcollective.org) ◆ [www.turning-the-tide.org](http://www.turning-the-tide.org)
  - ◆ [www.uhc-collective.org.uk/knowledge/toolbox/toolbox.htm](http://www.uhc-collective.org.uk/knowledge/toolbox/toolbox.htm)

## Why use Consensus?

Consensus decision making will be used widely throughout the G8 mobilisation. For example, Dissent! organised convergence spaces will make decisions by consensus. Many affinity groups will also choose consensus. Why?

- In contrast to majority voting, consensus is about finding solutions that are acceptable to everyone. It **brings together the best from everyone's ideas**. This ensures that all opinions, ideas and concerns are taken into account. Decisions are reached in a **dialogue between equals**, who take each other seriously and who recognise each other's equal rights.
- Because, in consensus, we all actively agree to the final decision we're much more **committed** to turning it into reality.

**Consensus is not an adversarial system. In consensus we co-operate with each other to find a 'win-win' solution**

## Conditions for Effective Consensus

There are a few conditions that have to be met for real consensus building to be possible:

**Active participation:** If we want a decision we can all agree on, we all need to play an active role in the decision making.

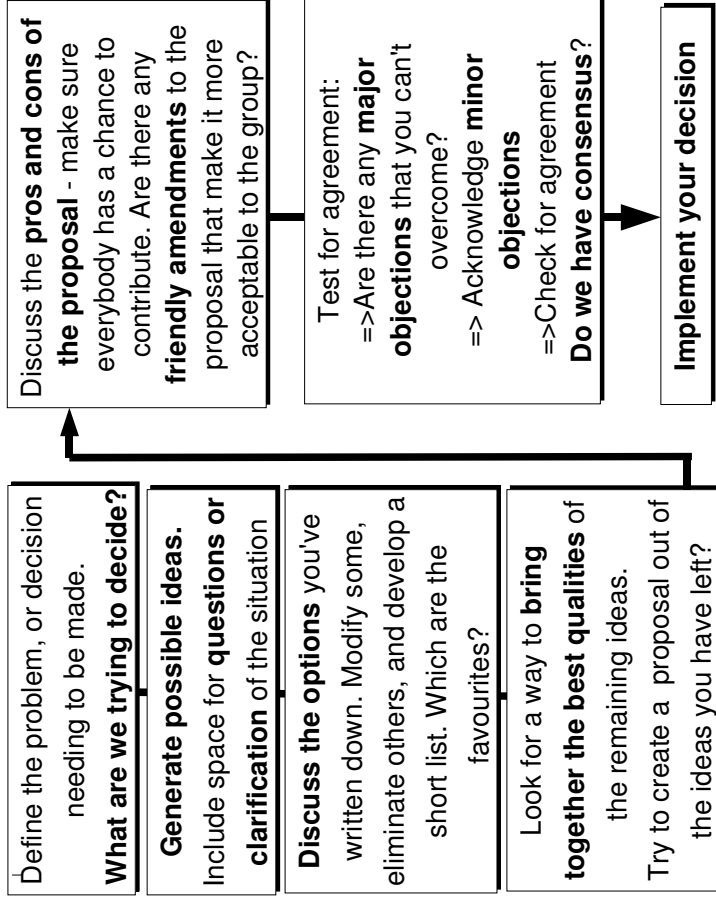
**Commitment to reaching consensus on all decisions:** It can be damaging if individuals secretly want to return to majority voting, just waiting for the chance to say "I told you it wouldn't work".

**Trust and Respect:** We all need to trust that everyone shares our commitment, and respects our opinions and our equal rights.

**Clear process:** Everyone needs to *share an understanding* of how consensus is being used. In most meetings there will be one or more *facilitators* to guide the group through the process.

**Common Goal:** Everyone at the meeting needs to be united in a *clear common goal*

## The Stages of the Consensus Process



## Guidelines for taking part in

### Consensus

- ◆ Be respectful and trust each other. Don't be afraid to express your ideas and opinions.
- ◆ This is not a competition - don't assume that someone must win and someone must lose. Instead look for the most acceptable solution for everyone.
- ◆ Think before you speak, listen before you object. You have 2 ears and 1 mouth – think about using them in those proportions! When you do speak, explain your own position clearly and briefly. Listen to others' reactions and consider them carefully before pressing your point.
- ◆ Consensus require a willingness to put the group first. Be flexible and be willing to give something up to be able reach a group agreement.
- ◆ Get your concerns out early in the discussion so that they can be incorporated into a proposal – this can prevent you having to object to a proposal later.
- ◆ Remember that the ideal behind consensus is empowering versus overpowering, agreement versus majorities/minorities. Consensus is what you put into it as an individual and a part of the group.

## Consensus in Large Groups

Many of the decisions made at the G8 will be made in large group meetings – sometimes thousands of people will need to be included in the decision making process. This will often be done using a **spokescouncil**.

In a spokescouncil, smaller groups come together to make shared decisions. Each group is represented by their '*spoke*' – they communicate to the meeting through her or him, allowing hundreds or thousands of people to be represented by fewer voices. Often you will sit in a cluster behind your spoke.

## The minor objection (stand aside):

There will be times when you want to object but not to veto. In those situations you can 'stand aside'. Standing aside registers your dissent. It shows that you won't help implement the proposal but that you're willing for the group to go ahead with it.

## The major objection (block or veto):

In consensus we all have the right to veto every proposal. Using your veto will stop the proposal going ahead, so think carefully before doing it. But don't be afraid to veto when it's relevant. The veto is normally used to stop the group splintering. If a proposal threatens to pull the group apart, veto it.