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Prefiguration is the practise of the ultimate goal of a campaign or revolution in the here-and-now; rather than waiting for the outcome of radical social change, activists practise the goal of that social change in the process of social change itself, within their groups and movements. So gender liberation, for example, isn't just an outcome to be achieved at some future point; it is a critical element of how a group goes about organising and structuring itself, ensuring people of all gender identities are empowered and welcomed, and traditional patriarchal power structures that benefit masculine approaches and override female voices are actively broken down. There are many other examples of how movements are internally practising the liberation they hope to see in wider society.

Similarly, consensus decision-making is one strategy that organisations have adopted, as a way of countering authoritarian, patriarchal or top-down decision making. Consensus decision-making is a process for incorporating everyone's views into a final decision that everyone has agreed to support, with systems for altering proposals and participants actively blocking (or vetoing) decisions. As well as being an effective and inclusive organising tool, its use in movements is a way of incorporating the hoped-for outcomes for a campaign or revolution - of equality, liberation, direct democracy. Indeed, the very nature of a campaign or movement has a direct and lasting impact on its outcome; James Guillaume, an anarchist writing at the start of the 20th century, summarised this, asking "[How could one want an egalitarian and free society to issue from authoritarian organisation? It is impossible.](#)"

Without careful reflection, it is easy for our actions and projects to end up replicating the structures that we aim to dismantle, especially, when it comes to how we choose to organise – it shouldn't be surprising that many violent revolutions led by authoritarian leaders have led to the imposition of violent, authoritarian regimes. However, many grassroots groups and organisations actively put such 'prefigurative' ideas into practice in their nonviolent campaigns and direct action, in an attempt to avoid replicating oppressive or violent power structures within their movements.

As an example of how such prefiguration can be built into a nonviolent campaign, WRI's Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns paid special attention to gender, identifying several areas where gender needed to be [concretely incorporated into a nonviolent campaign](#). These were:

- **in the analysis of an issue:** how are people of different genders effected differently by the violence you are opposing?
- **in the campaigns face to society:** who represents the campaign in the media? Who speaks at public events?
- **in relation to internal processes and structure:** are everyone's voices heard equally? Does everyone have equal access to resources?
- **in responding to violence from outside the group:** what will different peoples experience of the police be? Will different people be effected by the campaign or action differently?

An extended list of these formative questions can be found at <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/23269>.

Constructive programmes act as similar forms of prefiguration, they provide a very concrete illustration of what a new society could look like. Below are a series of questions to ferment discussion and visioning:

## **Wider society**

- Whose voices are heard most clearly in society?
  - How does this affect debate and discussion on a societal level, in mainstream politics and the media?
  - in closer, more personal relationships?
  - and in your movement, campaign, or community?
- In what ways are different groups or communities victims of cultural or structural violence?
  - What does this violence look like? How are the structures and cultures of oppression maintained;
  - via the media?
  - in popular culture?
  - in mainstream politics?
- How do these forms of violence overlap (or intersect)?
- What are mainstream attitudes towards wealth, resources, and power?
  - What are the cultural and structural causes of the serious environmental degradation and climate change we are facing?
  - Are there forms of resistance – directly, or culturally – to the causes of environmental destruction?

## **In wider social movements and activist communities**

- What are social movements and activist communities already doing to understand and challenge forms of oppression and violence?
- Where are the gaps?
  - Which groups are less heard?

- How do mainstream violent narratives pervade our movements?
- Are the voices of those most directly effected by violence and oppression represented and leading social movements?
  - If not, why not? How could this be challenged and changed?
  - How are more privileged people using their privilege to amplify the voices of others? In what ways do they maintain “status quo” power relationships?
- Do social movements your community identifies with have clear, palpable alternative visions of the future they are working towards?
  - Could these be the basis of your prefigurative work?

### **Internal to the group, community, or project**

- Is the group or community representative of the groups most likely to face oppression and violence?
  - If not, how does it remain open to their voices, and act in solidarity?
  - If so, how should the group respond?
- What forms of structural and cultural violence do members of the group experience in their day-to-day lives?
  - How are these reflected in the actions and work of the community?
- What concrete actions can the community take to prefigure the society they want to see?
  - How would decision-making processes reflect desires for more equitable and democratic decisions?
  - How could resources, wealth, and power be distributed more justly within the community?

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