MAPPING MEXICO

Three-quarters of Mexico's geographic data is out of date. And, because of the lack of cadastral data, property taxes go largely uncollected.

Since the late 1980s, Mexico has been engaged in a sweeping endeavour to establish a market economy, modernize its industries and equip its producers to compete in global markets. The rebuilding of the nation's outdated infrastructure is a major part of this effort. Although a good deal has already been accomplished, progress has been severely hampered by a lack of geographic, demographic and cadastral information.

Cadastral surveys are those that identify every discrete plot of land by owner. They are used primarily for land-use zoning and property taxation purposes. A cadastre is a public register of real property. The lack of adequate municipal cadastral data means that only a very small proportion of property taxes in Mexico are ever collected.

To compound the problem, almost 80 percent of the geographic information held by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI)*, National Institute for Statistics, Geography and Informatics, is considered out of date. This creates major problems for the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social (SEDESOL)*, Secretariat of Social Development, which is the largest user of geographic, demographic and cadastral information. *SEDESOL* is responsible for regional development planning, including the allocation of financial assistance to state and local governments. To fill the information gap, it has embarked on a massive program to completely re-map all of the cities included in the *Programa de las 100 Ciudades*, the 100 Medium Cities Program. Under that program alone, approximately US $200 million will be spent by states and municipalities on cadastral projects by 1997.

The Mexican geomatics industry is underdeveloped, and lacks the capability and capacity to undertake all of this work. While the number of companies in the industry has grown, only a handful of them have the expertise and technology to bid on government tenders for integrated projects. In particular, only the largest firms have a capability for aerial mapping and surveying. These services are prerequisites for many projects, and the companies that provide them have a strong influence in the selection of geomatics technologies.

Canadian firms have the advantage that *INEGI* has agreed to adopt Canadian industry standards for cartographic services. This means that Canadian companies can operate in a familiar technical environment when they go to Mexico. Only about half of the municipalities involved in the regional development plan have digitized data of any kind, thus there is a substantial opportunity for Canadian firms.